

## **Symposium Honouring Marianne Debouzy Thirty Years of Social History**

Donna Kesselman, Alan Dawley, Bruno Ramirez, Dirk Hoerder, Michael Cordillot et James Green

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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# Symposium Honouring Marianne Debouzy

## Thirty Years of Social History

Donna Kesselman

SCHOLARS FROM NORTH AMERICA and Europe met on 6 and 7 November 1998 in Paris to honour Marianne Debouzy, retiring professor of History, and a member of *Labour/Le Travail*'s International Advisory Board. Organized by historian Jacques Portes at Paris University 8 and Catherine Collomp at Paris University 7, the event was memorable for its conviviality as well as its uncompromising intellectual exchange and dialogue, a most fitting tribute to Marianne's scholarship.

In an essay appearing below, Alan Dawley reflects upon Marianne's work and its influence among scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. Dawley's piece is followed by the publication of some selected papers in full. The preceeding summary aims to relate the concerns of researchers present from Québec, the US and Europe (France, Italy, Germany), whose debt to Debouzy and international concerns are perhaps not well enough known due to barriers of geography and language. Contributions have been regrouped into broad categories of labour and social history: *The Working Class: Struggles, Employer Relations, Representations* (Bruno Cartosio, Ferdinando Fasce, Annick Fouquier, Pierre Gervais); *Immigration* (Catherine Collomp, Michel Cordillot, Bruno Groppo, Dirk Hoerder); *Workers and the State* (David Brody, Alan Dawley, Donna Kesselman); *Other Contributions* (Ronald Creagh, Nelcy Delanoë, Michèle Gibault, James Green, Hubert Perrier, Bruno Ramirez, Sylvia Ullmo). The categories are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, as James Green notes in his concluding paper below, what characterizes the maturation of our field of social history is its very complication, its attempt to weave the multiple threads of human interaction into a more complete historical fabric, a central strand of which is class relations in all of their complexity.



Marianne Debouzy

*Working Class: Struggles, Employer Relations, Representations*

In "From Workshop to Factory: Managing Workers during the First Industrial Revolution", Pierre Gervais (Paris University 8) probed the nature of working-class struggles at the time of early capitalist exploitation. The advent of newly integrated production facilities, says Gervais, did not in itself overturn former management practices. The Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mill was one example of transition, a "mechanized workshop" where artisans produced at a single location as a layer of sub-contractors, selling their goods at a negotiated price to factory owners who then resold them to merchants. "Profits" were split between producers and factory owners, not reinvested to improve productivity, and merchants were the system's greatest beneficiaries. Social conflict, then, did not yet pit wage-earners against employers but vented resistance to declining prices in a modernizing market which was squeezing out the less productive craftsman-based mode. Industrial rationalization implied shopfloor relations based on reduced production costs, a tough step to take for both artisan-producers and managers. In early 19th-century America, then, differentiated forms of struggle cohabitated as industrial management techniques were introduced at varying rates.

The "1917 San Francisco Strike of French Laundry Workers" studied by Annick Foucrier (Paris University 13 at CNRS) shows how workers' struggle sparked new dynamics among the city's French immigrants. Workfloor tensions had already led to separate professional and workers' associations – preceded by "French" to denote their specific heritage – while paternalist relations between dry cleaning employers and employees during off-time helped sustain community ties. The strike marked the growing class mindset of these former rural peasants from the French Bearn region, all the more cogent as homeland nostalgia might logically have deepened the sentimental appeal of wartime cross-class alliances. The *Syndicat d'Ouvriers blanchisseurs français*, the French Laundry Workers Union's informal links with the IWW, accented a militant, workers' internationalist stand, while at the same time, strike demands reflected those of all American workers for better working conditions and shorter hours.

In his paper about 19th century Mexicanos' attempt to control their land in New Mexico, Bruno Cartosio (Bergame University) developed the theme of working-class representation: how myths are formed and carried on in relation to struggle, and how social groups – especially when structured along ethnic lines – use myths differently. ("Robin Hoods in the Southwest: Reality and Myth of Resistance to Capitalist Transformation in Territorial New Mexico.") A dangerous outlaw in American Wild West folklore, Billy the Kid, became a Robinhood-style legend for the Mexican community. The fight of the Mexicanos' *Gorras Blancas* (White Caps) movement, engaging in direct action to cut fences placed on their land, was comparable to the mythification of Billy, perceived as fighting against the common enemy of Anglo expropriators (land speculators, cattle growers, railroads) and the courts promoting such interests. Fundamentally, like in Lowell, Mexicanos were struggling against emerging capitalist property relations, here regarding land ownership. Billy symbolized the Mexicanos themselves, the *little guys* fighting against an unjust social order of Anglo tyranny based on wealth. Myths and their representation can have multiple functions, interpreted differently according to class interests.

Popular culture is therefore marked by struggle and, further still, is an object of conquest by class actors manoeuvring for ideological space. Stakes were raised with the advent of radio in 1930s America, explained Ferdinando Fasce (Genoa University) in "Corporate Democracy on the Airwaves: Radio, Big Business and Public Discourse in the New Deal Era." The National Association of Manufacturers' sponsoring of the radio-soap opera "The American Family Robinson," from Centerville, USA, illuminates how Big Business helped to shape the now stereotyped representation of middle-American small-town life, of individual freedoms and family values as euphemisms for free enterprise. Implicit as well was the idealization of local business and a cult of democracy rooted in commonsense wisdom, a means of discrediting the distant, bureaucratic and interventionist state. Corporate America was thereby hoping to reassert a pro-business ideology while

contesting the New Deal's popular discourse and appeal. Fasce's broader work on big business public relations depicts how such communication strategies turned away from abstract polemics, preferring to promote a classless model of society to wider publics. While carried out in the name of public relations, corporate communication strategies were also aimed at modeling popular culture.

### *Immigration*

Themes dealing with working-class struggle are not at odds with those presented here under the heading of "immigration." Questions of ethnicity and assimilation were part of both Annick Fouquier's look at French immigrant workers' struggles and Bruno Cartosio's depiction of Mexicano resistance to advancing Anglo-capitalist society.

In contributions published below, Michel Cordillot (Paris University 8) and Dirk Hoerder (University of Bremen) situate individual immigrant lives within our conceptualization of historical trends. For them micro, multifaceted studies must relate to the broader problematics of immigration producing a scholarship of constant back-and-forth interaction between individual and collective experience.

Hoerder ponders the multiple identities of immigrants, the various dimensions of their "life courses" as breadwinners, women and men of their times, members of families and localities. When working through new kinds of sources (diaries, letters, autobiographies, fiction, *etc.*), Hoerder is constantly searching for new problematics. The piece published below, "In the Shadow of the Big House — The Little People in History," compares two immigrant families with concerns of the complexities of social relations in mind: at the centre of his analysis are Félix Albert — marginal farmer, casual labourer, small businessman — whose family migrated from the St. Lawrence River Valley in Québec to New England in 1881, and Josef Jodlbauer, an Austrian journeyman baker, member of the Austrian labour movement and advocate of social democracy, whose private life was the determinant factor in his immigrant flight to the US in 1910. To correctly reflect these workers' *bona fide* itinerary, says Hoerder, labour historians must relinquish their rigid categories rooted in production relations.

Michel Cordillot proposes a method to do so when presenting the soon to be published dictionary of immigrant labour activists, *Les Ouvriers Francophones aux États-Unis: de l'Approche biographique à la prosopographie* (Biographical Dictionary of French-speaking Radicals in America). Cordillot explains how a comparative perspective of individual itineraries — presented as a coherent corpus — may help to account for immigrant choices and commitments while detecting yet unidentified logics.

Bruno Groppo (CNRS) and Catherine Collomp presented their new research on the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), based on the recently opened Tamiment Library archives. The project sheds new light on the internationalist campaigns of American labour within the US and relations with the European labour movement in the

pre-Cold War years. Jewish unionists organized labour and broader public resistance to nazism and anti-semitism, while carrying out concrete solidarity actions for victims of fascist regimes. The degree of commitment was at least partially cooled by support for the Roosevelt administrations' war effort. CIO leaders including Sidney Hillman, avid JLC activist during the 1930s, trailed far behind AFL unionists, who relentlessly pursued this internationalist cause for democratic and trade union liberties throughout the war. David Dubinsky and the *Jewish Daily Forward's* B.C. Vladek pulled the AFL's strings in Washington, lobbying the Roosevelt administration to loosen its strict application of immigrant quota policies and grant visas to Jewish labour activists, personalities of the arts, and others victimized by European nazism.

Internal politics may also explain CIO reticence, given the JLC's clear break with Communist movements. Groppo and Collomp are currently exploring networks of contacts around the JLC made between sectors of the US and European trade union movements, especially in Germany, France, Austria, Italy, and Russia. Most were made through European Social Democrats, often in circles linked to Bund and Menshevik exiles. The JLC thus helped to structure a broad, non-communist current of the international workers' movement.

### *Workers and the State*

The symposium placed the role of the state in both historical and international perspective. Examples taken from World War I, the New Deal, and today's global market showed the state's facility to develop institutions and ideologies, to renew its authority in the face of workers' struggle.

David Brody attributed labour's current woes to the fundamental ambiguity of workers' institutionalized gains. In his contribution, "The Uses of History: Explaining the Failure of New Deal Labor Law," Brody claimed that labour law was grounded in public policy, rather than inalienable rights. By translating the 1935 Wagner Act's call for representation through "workers' own choosing" into NLRB-supervised voting, the New Deal state actually reinvoked the judicial "individual rights" doctrine which historically allowed courts to expand the boundaries of private property in workplace relations. In a significant distinction, Brody claims that workers' organizations remained a freedom or *liberty* of individuals rather than a state-sanctioned, *collective right*. This shortfall allowed successive governments to politicize and distort state-run certification processes. Brody proposes restoring workers' collective right to freely determine their own forms of representation, reforming certification elections and union recognition procedures.

Alan Dawley addressed the public/private sphere from another angle in his piece "Enforced Consent: Progressives and the Public Sphere." Dawley started by looking at a social conflict which took place on 6 October 1919, in Gary, Indiana, and its crackdown by federal troops. How should history analyze such conflicts? Cultural historians might look at workers' identities and representations, while

communication theory has raised the important issue of public vs private spheres, as through the nature of property or the participants involved. For Dawley, defining the public sphere must also include the extent to which government can impose social discipline through the use of force or allow consent. The boundary inevitably reflects the interplay of national and international forces, with war and revolution playing pivotal roles. The Progressive Era's expanding public sphere was marked by broad citizen participation; inversely, the World War I years' constraining consent boundaries were embodied in the White War Plan, secret contingency plans for combating revolution in the US. Though never put into effect, the degree of state coercion implied was being displayed in the unprecedented use of the American government to stifle workers' conflict at home and engage military-driven expansion abroad. The White Plan also showed how the government drew wartime boundaries of "Americanism" along political, ethnic and class lines in order to favor establishment-based structures of power.

In a paper published below, "Workers and Justice in the Global Market," Donna Kesselman (Paris University 10) describes how legalistic ethics, especially the crusade against alleged union corruption, are components of American capital's current discourse of global domination. US courts are part of an emerging institutional configuration which tends to undermine trade union legitimacy.

#### *Other Contributions*

Sylvia Ullmo's (Tours University) paper, "The Shattered Dream of GI Children," falls into another category. It deals with devising a satisfactory legal statute for the thousands of children of American Vietnam vets (and often their mothers) who attempted to obtain the right of entry into the United States. Neither immigrants nor refugees, foreigners or US citizens, and finally, after years of legal battles a bit of each at the same time, the experience of such "in between" peoples places the identity debate at the most concrete and vital level. Based on original research carried out by a trilingual colleague — French, English, Vietnamese — the paper traces the unglorious odyssey of children who for the large part (98 per cent) have not been recognized by their fathers. Victims of anti-Anglo and anti-African-American racism at home, subjected to an obstacle course of often prohibitive bureaucratic and monetary entanglements, destined for the most part to lead tragic lives of marginalization in American society, these children mark the failure of the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act, the last of a string of broken American promises to the Vietnam people. For Ullmo, the failed repatriation of GI children mirrors the mixed and ambiguous feelings of America for the GI's themselves, and the guilty conscience which gestured ineffectively to redeem their offspring.

The problem of formulating appropriate categories raised by Ullmo makes the link with one of the symposium's central discussions, the need to review our frames of reference and conceptualization in view of societal transformations, a topic addressed by a Round Table Discussion involving John Atherton, Nelcy Delanoë,

Michèle Gibault, and Marie-Christine Granjon. Central to this concern is the issue of social and working-class history's accessibility to various publics. Bruno Ramirez gave us one concrete example of accessibility by projecting his film about Italian immigrants to Québec, *La Sarrasine*. Bruno explained at greater length why a labour historian became a filmmaker, and offers further reflections below.

In a concluding paper James Green suggests that social historians have met the combined challenges of academic rigour and accessibility. Their ability to reach wider reading publics, notably the popular audience of the labour movement, is a sign of the coming-of-age of what he calls "our collective project." Social history has managed to portray workers as living and feeling beings in a "real" world of power-driven, institutionally structured battles. Such problematics have led to a richer historical composite, thereby legitimizing the break from an older traditionalist historiography, embedded in its élitist and institutional biases. Contrary to criticisms of their supposed subjectivity, the intellectual integrity displayed by social and labour historians willing to express their own militant convictions has led to what Green calls "Movement History."

The meeting of researchers from different countries was thus not merely a sign of friendship. Marianne Debozy's work has provided pioneering suggestions and answers to questions many are beginning to ask, especially regarding international comparative studies. Such productive provocation does not just mean expanding the corpus one reads. It implies developing conceptual tools of commonality and difference, not renouncing but relativizing one's own intellectual culture, be it national or political. Armed with such tools of conceptual insight we can hope to move on towards another 30 years of labour and social history.



## In Appreciation of Marianne Debouzy

Alan Dawley

MARIANNE DEBOUZY has made a career out of punctuating myths and blasting orthodoxies, left and right, in pursuit of an understanding of modern capitalism and its social injustices. A humanist without sentimentality and a rebel without romanticism, she might be a fit hero for an existentialist novel, except that she has no inclination to play the role. Still, her running battle against the establishment's self-serving ideologies on one side and the dogmatism and myth-making of its opponents on the other remind one of the embattled Dr. Rieux in Camus' *La Peste*, urging the inhabitants of Oran to "*prendre conscience*" against the evil in their midst.

Starting with her doctoral *thèse* in the late 1950s, she rejected the conventional wisdom of America as a land of consensus and chose to write a study of *L'homme révolté* in American social protest novels. (See bibliography for references.) Four decades later, she was still in revolt, donning the symbolic garb of *Marianne* to defend *La national française* and its popular folklore against the Mickey Mouse mercenaries of EuroDisney and the invasion of the Barbie Doll.

Whether delving into elite literature or mass culture, her central preoccupation is modern capitalism, especially its social and cultural manifestations. Like a left-wing de Tocqueville, she studies capitalist society in America in order to understand both America and the wider world, and, like de Tocqueville, she recognizes that America is both an unusual case and a model of a general phenomenon. What is unusual about the United States is its extreme degree of free market liberalism. That is the theme of her 1972 book on *Le capitalisme sauvage*, which examines America's *classe dirigeante*, the late 19th-century captains of industry. At the same time, the United States has been a model in Europe since the 1950s. Many were attracted to the land of modernity, high productivity, and consumerism, though in France, especially, the model has been a bone of contention. While some

sectors of the French right were favourably disposed, the entire left rejected American-style capitalism as the model from hell.

For her part, Debouzy has mixed feelings. In work on American influences in French higher education, she shows that when French educators tried to import such American methods as high tuition, they were met with protests from university students shouting "*Non aux Facs coca-cola.*" And yet, unlike many on the left, Debouzy refuses to dismiss America *tout court*. Rejecting simple-minded notions of American exceptionalism, she insists that Americans are caught up in the same world-historical processes as everybody else, which is what makes worker struggles in the United States directly relevant to the French scene. In a series of articles on the spectacular 1877 strikes in the United States, she held up these sprawling protests as an example of working-class resistance worthy of close study and emulation by European workers who might seek to break free of ossified traditions of orthodox communism in the wake of the revolt of 1968. A 1984 book on *Travail et travailleurs aux États-Unis* brought this investigation into the post-World War II era. Given the infamous role of the AFL-CIO in joining forces with the CIA to put down left-wing unionism in postwar France (a topic to which she has recently returned), it took a fair amount of courage to suggest the French labour movement had something to learn from the American.

Sympathy with American-style social protest, however, does not lead to uncritical admiration. The French vogue for the American New Left came under withering criticism in the early 1970s. She took French *gauchistes* to task for romanticizing the Black Panthers and their violent white imitators such as the Weathermen. Contemptuous of all forms of myth-making, whether of the right or the left, she punctured the myth of revolutionary America by showing how cultural politics was a poor substitute for political organizing, the counter culture was easily absorbed into consumer capitalism, and the myth of cultural revolution was not a revolt against the system but one of its illusions.

Her attack on radical myth-making points to a fundamental characteristic of her work which might be described as social realism. Against the poststructuralist assertion of the cultural construction of reality, Debouzy assumes that social life has a reality apart from what we think about it. At the very least, she comes to rest on a Pascal's wager—that it is wise to behave *as if* society really exists. Her methods are those of international social history with its affinity for experience, agency and social practice. Although she uses many standard categories of social theory — class, ideology, social structure — she always treats them as the actual social practices of real human beings in specific historical settings, never as reified abstractions.

While insisting on the autonomy of cultural practices from economic interests, she treats myth, memory and political ideas as ideological features embedded in a particular social landscape. This puts her at odds with the linguistic determinations of French structuralism and with the relativism of poststructuralism. Putting her

methods where her mouth is, she rebuts poststructuralist approaches to *mémoire ouvrière* with concrete demonstrations of the ways different memories and meanings were produced by social actors embedded in different social/historical settings. American workers were subject to high rates of migration and turnover, which tended to shatter collective memory into individual shards, in contrast to their French counterparts who lived in a more homogenous society and whose class consciousness was more intact.

Perhaps her most significant contributions have come in transnational history. In the 1970s and 1980s when most social historians were doing local or national studies, Debouzy was hard at work exploring transatlantic interactions within the frame of transnational capitalism. Sometimes the transnational approach is explicit, as in studies of labour migration, Americanization of French universities, and American influences in the French New Left. At other times, the method is more conventionally comparative, as in the study of French and American worker delegations to world's fairs in Philadelphia (1876) and Paris (1889), which reveal contrasting national versions of labour republicanism; while French workers in the late 19th-century identified with the workers of the world, Americans identified more with their own national experience. (It is worth noting that the same pattern of nation-over-class reappeared in organized labour's support for US foreign policy after World War II.) Even where transnational perspectives are only implicit, as in previously noted studies of the Robber Barons and labour protests, there is always an underlying effort to understand North American and European societies as parts of a larger whole.

The exemplary internationalism of Debouzy's work is not only a bridge across the Atlantic but also an alternative to reigning ideas of globalization. Internationalism has taken many forms in the past half century. At the end of World War II, the spirit of cooperation embodied in the wartime Grand Alliance and the newly-founded United Nations looked toward a world free from war and fascism where colonial independence and global economic development for all seemed more than just pipe dreams. It was not long before this "one world" vision was torn asunder and competing internationalisms came to the fore — free market capitalism, Soviet communism, and social democracy, the "third way" of that era. Although internationalist ideals persisted during the Cold War, the choice for many in eastern Europe and the Third World came down to whether their goose would be cooked in the sauce of American capitalism or Soviet communism. By the 1990s, only one sauce remained, and it appeared that the only internationalism available was the kind that issues from the International Monetary Fund under the auspices of American global hegemony.

Yet unlike the endings of novels, existentialist or otherwise, history's endings always turn out to be the beginning of another round of unpredictable events. In the present era of globalization, as new forms of opposition to now-triumphant free market capitalism are emerging, Debouzy's stubborn independence from party or

sectarian ties marks out her work as particularly useful for building new kinds of internationalism. Her repudiation of all kinds of orthodoxy and self-serving mythology, her social-history examination of international capitalism, and her pioneering forays in transnational history take on real pertinence to the task of creating a new kind of internationalism from below to counter the internationalism from above that dominates the world today. That is enough to win her a place of honour among postwar *engagé* intellectuals, making her an existentialist hero in spite of herself.

## Variations on a Theme

Bruno Ramirez

YOU WILL CERTAINLY remember, Marianne, that what brought us together was labour history. I had found out through a colleague that you were in Montréal, invited by the UQAM to teach a course on working-class America. We were both familiar with each other's work in the field, and probably curious to discover the person behind those writings. But we discovered much more once we realized that we both belonged to the same international tribe of labour-history practitioners, some of us working in the comfort of safe jobs, others struggling to move out of an academic limbo, still others runaways pursued by a repressive state.

And many of those people were now in Paris, during those gray and chilly November days, to express to you our gratitude not just for having been "one of us," but also for having remained an unmovable milestone through years of intellectual and political confusion.

Yet, it was not merely labour history that nourished our relationship. In the mostly social encounters we had since we first met in Montréal, our discussions dealt with literature, occasionally with "Barbie" (the doll as well as the guy), and most often with movies. I soon discovered that you were as assiduous a frequenter of movie theaters as you were of libraries and bookstores. I remember the excitement with which one day you talked to me about a little-known film you had just seen, *Little Odessa*; and your almost teacher-like stance when you urged me to go and see it (I did see it and liked it a lot).

Bruno Ramirez, "Variations on a Theme," *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 227-30.

This is why when news arrived from Paris about a conference to be held in your honour, I proposed that a movie be included in the program — a movie narrating an episode in Montréal's immigrant and working-class past. Clearly, the organizers knew you well enough to find the idea a good one. And I am glad that the screening served as more than a mere entertainment break from intense scholarly dialogue. Thanks primarily to Alan Dawley, several of the film's themes were in fact integrated into broader discussions of working-class history, particularly the importance of a gendered approach for our understanding of the past.

The occasion could not have been a better one; for, beside procuring your esthetic and dramaturgical pleasure, the film was meant also to reflect on another practice of doing working-class history — although obviously this had not been the primary reason why we wrote and produced *La Sarrasine*.<sup>1</sup> I can still hear your voice as you stretched your vowels and raised your tone to underline your curiosity and consternation. And I regret that the time was too limited to allow you to complete the brain-picking you had set out to do. So now I'll take it from where we left off in Paris.

If in watching *La Sarrasine* you were expecting to see strikes, shop-floors, tyrannical employers and militant workers, you were probably disappointed before the last scene faded away and the projector was turned off. The closest we came to showing a workplace was Giuseppe Moschella's tailor shop — a room in a downtown Montréal house where he lived with his wife Ninetta, for whom the house was a workplace as she had to look after four boarders, two of them day labourers, one an apprentice, and the fourth a middle-aged organ grinder.

Once we created those characters, it was impossible to tell our story without entering a working-class universe not unlike that of numerous households throughout much of early 20th-century urban North America. However small and culturally circumscribed, this setting demanded a detailed exploration of daily life, language, manners, traditions and symbols if that particular past was to speak to us and to the viewers with as much authenticity as possible. And as with most universes that are filled with social relations, this one too had a prismatic character reflecting situations, circumstances and dynamics that reached far beyond the walls of the house. That universe was of course part of a wider French Canadian context.

Very few working scenes, then, were undertaken, but there were lots of sequences showing these men during their leisure hours — now watching a Sicilian puppet show, later playing cards or sipping some home-made liquor. Those leisure hours — often working hours for Ninetta — were as much part of their daily experience as the time spent loading coal on a steamer or playing music at a Montréal street corner. It was not narrative convenience that led us to focus on them; rather, we believed that those men's fears, hopes, and sense of humour were more likely to be expressed in those moments of solidarity and intimacy.

<sup>1</sup>*La Sarrasine*, dir. Paul Tana (ACPAV, 1992); Bruno Ramirez and Paul Tana, *Sarrasine, a Screenplay* (Toronto, 1996).

One thing that distinguished these workers from the majority of workers in Montréal was their immigrant status. Their exploitation at the workplace (at least for those who worked for wages) was compounded by a sense of insecurity and alienation for working and living in a society that was not their own and for being reminded of it whenever the situation arose. And a society like early 20th French Canada that was so fearful about its own cultural survival, was rarely inclined to tolerate foreign intruders in its midst unless they kept to their place.

At one basic level, then, *La Sarrasine* is a story of borders that develops when the otherness carried by an alien culture threatens established conventions, traditions, and social norms. The ways in which we wrote and shot the sequences at Alphonse Lamoureux's wedding, at Labbé's tavern, at the St. Zénon cemetery, and the fatal brawl in front of Moschella's home, were designed to give viewers a sense of "territory"; for it is the constant trespassing of those territories that drives the story from misunderstanding to tragedy, and on to Ninetta's struggle as she faces an uncertain future.

But borders could also rise in that terrain of feelings and emotions that united Giuseppe and Ninetta, a husband and a wife. For she too was expected to keep to her place. And her place was obedience to her jailed husband, and resumption of a life under moral protection back in her Sicilian village. Much that Ninetta did was out of love, yet ultimately the consequences of her actions proved devastating.

*La Sarrasine* allowed us also to explore the realm of emotions of an immigrant couple confronted by tragedy, thus pushing us into a terrain that is as real and as meaningful a dimension of working-class history as it is of the history of any other social class or milieu.

Week after week, in the Fall of 1904, the Montréal daily papers were filled with articles on Giuseppe Giaccone (Moschella's real name) as he faced trial, and then as he and Montréal awaited his execution. The Giaccone affair afforded me an entry into a material, cultural and emotional universe that I felt deserved to be narrated because it was so much a part of Montréal's urban past (it was also part of immigration history and of women's history). It helped us to ground OUR story on real historical characters and social dynamics. But we chose to tell it as fiction because we wanted to narrate it through the language of film.<sup>2</sup> We did not want to explain and argue, but rather to confront the viewers' sensitivity and engage their understanding. We also wanted to tell the story from the point of view of Ninetta – the woman who moved from witness to participant, ultimately carrying the whole weight of the tragedy and experiencing its transforming power.

It also meant that once the historical research was done, I had to get out of my historian's frame of mind, for now there was a story to be told in a language with its own visual and dramaturgical rules.

<sup>2</sup>For a lengthy discussion of the relations between facts and fiction in filmmaking, see Bruno Ramirez, "Clio in Words and in Motion: Practices of Narrating the Past," *The Journal of American History*, 86 (December 1999), 1-24.

I am glad we were able to tell that story through film because *La Sarrasine* was the first feature production in the history of Québec cinema in which the leading characters are immigrants, and who are allowed to speak in their own language. However reluctant film funding agencies and TV network executives are when assessing a project they label as "ethnic," *La Sarrasine* has shown that Canadian cinema can and must make room for historical protagonists whose voices are seldom heard except in subways and crowded city buses. If, as some commentators have said, this was a case of contamination, I hope it will go on; for in the realm of culture, contamination is not only auspicious, but necessary.

What probably counts most for me, however, is that after the experience of *La Sarrasine*, I can no longer approach working-class history — any kind of history — the way I did before.

I can hear your laughter, Marianne. I am not sure what it means, but I love it.

## In the Shadow of the Big House — the Little People in History

Dirk Hoerder

MY WAY OF MEETING Marianne was different, not being born in France — 30 years ago, 30 years of social history. Before the student rebellion, 1968, I had left Germany to do research in the US and learnt that social history and open discussions were encouraged. When I returned to Germany the development of social history was finally beginning with the Bielefeld school of H.U. Wehler and J. Kocka. But it was distant, even exclusionist. And in retrospect our main models, the social historians W. Conze and W. Schieder, as young historians in the 1930s, had masterminded the plan to expel much of the Polish population to the East and resettle the areas by Germans.

By travelling to Paris I entered a third, different national discourse. In Germany, in the early 1970s our new ideas were quickly marginalized; in France it was possible to be a social historian without being marginalized, even if this approach was only one of several schools in French historiography. To me Marianne

Dirk Hoerder, "In the Shadow of the Big House — the Little People in History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 230-3.

Debouzy and the group around her — of which Catherine Collomp and Michel Cordillot are present — represented this openness. They provided a stimulating forum for discussion.

My interest focused early on the little people in history. I had realized that in the Third Reich resistance had been possible. But I was not looking for the few army officers of 20 July 1944 whose resistance has been constructed in the Federal Republic of Germany into a usable past. I was interested in the people in the trade unions, in the Communist Party. At the University I transposed these questions, influenced by George Rudé's work on the French Revolution, to the American Revolution: instead of Founding Fathers and political theory (B. Bailyn), the struggle for improved living conditions by the little people. From this starting point my research moved to crowd action in the early republic and to labour history. At that time, organizational history was still dominant and it was the achievement of our generation to develop the cultural history of the working class. We peopled the big house of organizational structures with human actors and their class culture and inserted migration and ethnicity into the frame. Much was achieved in international collaborative projects. For me, personally, one highpoint was a conference near Bremen where Marianne Debouzy and Catherine Collomp demonstrated the influence of European culture and class consciousness on the American labour movement, Bruno Ramirez and Donald Avery did so for the Canadian one, and Jim Barrett presented his important contribution on Americanization from the bottom up.

But even in the new radical approaches something was still missing. To continue the image of the history of plantations and slavery, our focus had brought us into a new big house. The small hidden quarters of private lives were missing: emotions, spirituality, everyday lives of women. If we add up enough private lives we have a complex whole, a society. Though I was a devoted practitioner of social history and supported demands for rigorous methodology, I realized that Vilhelm Moberg's novels on Swedish immigrants or Joris Ivens's film "Salt of the Earth" by using literary and visual approaches could recreate what we were missing in our historiography: real human beings rather than analytical components of them which go only as far as our sources. Influenced by Joan Scott and Louise Tilly's book on family economies, I turned to immigrant life writing, diaries, autobiographies, letters. S. Ackerman, a Swedish colleague, challenged me to write a novel but I did not dare do so and remained in the mould of social history.

I want to illustrate this life course-approach by using the life writings of two families, both written by men: Felix Albert — marginal farmer, casual labourer, farmer, small businessman — whose family migrated from the St. Lawrence river valley in Québec to New England in 1881, and Josef Jodlbauer, an Austrian journeyman baker arriving in the US in 1910. Jodlbauer was part of the Austrian labour movement and throughout his life remained grateful to Austrian social democracy for giving him a world view and encouraging his self-education. His



partner Mathilda worked in a cooperative store of the movement. They left Austria for a very private reason. Though both were still married to their former spouses, they had a daughter and lived together. This was not acceptable in Austria, not even in the politically progressive society of social democracy.

The family reason for migration notwithstanding, Josef immersed himself in working-class organizations immediately after arrival in the US. His autobiography seems to report only what he did in the labour movement, the big house of organization. But upon closer look, windows open into the private sphere and gendered lives. When he is without a job, Mathilda and a woman friend of hers decide on how to place him in a factory. Through labour connections he is hired as a master mechanic in a Singer sewing machine factory, although he had never worked with a sewing machine. Gender issues arise here: women working below him have to teach him how to do his job. He informs himself about the US labour movement so as not to appear like a theory-preaching foreigner. His first activity, leafletting in front of the factory, results in immediate arrest for loitering. From Austrian experience he prepares for a big political trial, but within a few minutes is fined for littering the street and let off. Then, instead of firing him, the boss merely remarks, "that wasn't such a bright idea, was it"? All preparation for the new society notwithstanding, this was cultural shock pure and simple.

Mathilda has less overt problems, though at first she does not like the new society. Whenever her husband is without a job, she supports the family. She takes care of him and of their, by then, three children. Though he presents himself as explaining politics to her it is clear that she has opinions of her own and acts by herself. She develops neighborhood networks, joins union struggles. While he excluded his family and home from his written memory, his life in labour's big house is possible only by her labour and emotional support in the small family house.

Felix Albert is the head of a marginal farming family. But it was his wife Deneiges who gave birth to nineteen children in 35 years of marriage. To feed 21 mouths she has to economize and skillfully manage family resources. This memoir is one of sadness, of fear of leaving the family/religious community, a discourse of loss seemingly unique among French-Canadians. The Albert family remains among French Canadians migrating to New England; Felix never mentions his daughters, his sons but rarely. Deneiges, like Mathilda, tries to improve the family economy by earning money — which deeply offends Felix. As a wheeler-dealer among other French-Catholic immigrants he perceives himself not as a community leader but, harking back to the past, styles himself *le habitant*. Often working as hard as any casual labourer, he never considers himself a worker. He accosts newly arrived compatriots at the railway station and then makes money out of them by renting and selling. When the family loses everything in the 1893 financial crisis his co-ethnics do not hide a certain glee. Felix and Deneiges are forced to go back to marginal farming. They belonged to what has been called the "independent prole-

ariat." Dependence and independence were entwined. Contrary to Josef and Mathilda Jodlbauer, Felix and Deneiges Albert never entered labour's house. They search for niches like all immigrants and the lowly in general.

Social historians need to rework their concept of labour's big house. In Gramsci's terms, it is a hegemonic view imposed on houses, huts, and shacks, in which paid and unpaid, productive and reproductive, repetitive and creative work is done by men, women, and children. Twenty-five years ago, William H. Sewell studied the workers of 1850s Marseilles and showed that young single men who were still able to migrate tended to be more radical and take more easily to the streets. Older men needed regular wages to feed their families and built labour organizations. They preferred to negotiate. Similarly, we study factory "girls" in the garment trades — but where are the factory mothers? Our house of labour has a lot of lean-tos, multiple entrances, unfinished rooms.

Lesson. I could go back to the three national social history discourses. In the German approach I would propose a systematic analysis of what we should do. Alternatively, I might formulate a well-grounded hypothesis — that would be the American way. I chose the French way: I will ask a question — *je me pose la question*. That has the advantage that the researcher remains in the picture, the "I" or *je*. First, I ask whether our analysis of skilled work and production on the shopfloor is well suited to academic discourse but much too narrow? It enables us to link skilled and factory work to theories of production and relate both to theories of capital. If we expand the analysis slightly to male service work in maintenance, to labour in economic niches, the overarching theory loses some of its explanatory value. If we look at household work the theory becomes useless. Jacks (or Marys) of all trades do not fit into our model either. Labour history, even much of working-class history, has been a one-dimensional discourse: we need to theorize a multidimensional discourse. The concept of "brokerage" (Philip Curtin) between cultures, classes, along the dividing line of production and reproduction, within families, accepts the need for continuous negotiating among spheres that do not fit one single model. Our drive for one over-arching theory may have undercut our understanding of complexity. Second, I ask, whether we should not start from individuals at the bottom of society? I suggest that the concept of "lifecourses" and family economies permits us to integrate class-centered research on everyday cultures, ethnicity-centered research on differences and similarities between regional cultures, gender-centered studies on roles of and hierarchies between sexes. The result should be a holistic view of the lives of the little people — and, for that matter, of the powerful ones. The big house of labour history will then no longer overshadow the little shacks, the importance of front parlour and back kitchen may then be reversed, relations between shopfloor and home rearranged. It is my wish that this group will discuss all these issues in the same friendly spirit that I found here 30 years ago.

## French-Speaking Radicals in the USA: The Possible Usages of Prospography

Michel Cordillot

THANKS TO THE COLLABORATION of some twenty scholars over the past ten years, the *Biographical Dictionary of French-speaking Radicals in America* is now practically completed. It features some 4400 biographical entries (representing altogether 1600 single-space typed pages), of which seven per cent are women. The main interest of such a dictionary lies in its potential uses for social and immigration historians.

It is first of all an instrument of reference *per se*. This biographical tool will give to ordinary, otherwise unknown persons and citizens their rightful place in scholarly history. For by taking their fate and to some extent that of their contemporaries into their own hands they did *make history*. Widely regarded as a unique achievement, Jean Maitron's *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français* (now 110 000, and soon 150 000 biographies on CDRom), has amply demonstrated the relevance of such an approach. Suffice it then to say here that the present dictionary was from the outset conceived as a natural offshoot of the *Maitron*.

Second, the new *Dictionary* will offer extensive data making it possible to write the more complete story of French-American radicals, a chapter in US social history that has remained so far largely ignored though several episodes have already been thoroughly studied. One may have heard of the Icarian and Fourierist settlers, of the French sections of the IWA, possibly of the Paris Commune exiles and French-speaking anarchist movements among the miners in Pennsylvania, but many other aspects have remained thus far *terra incognita*. These include the saga of French blacklisted miners who migrated by the thousands to the Pennsylvania and Illinois mining regions. Then there is the decade-long story of French-speaking socialist efforts to set up a French-language federation of the Socialist Party of America. They had just managed to meet the party requirements when World War

Michel Cordillot, "French-Speaking Radicals in the USA: The Possible Usages of Prospography," *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 234-7.

I broke out, and because they disagreed with the official party line on the war, their Federation had to declare itself *independent* and remained so until its final dissolution, some time after 1922.

The history of French-speaking radicals may also provide some insight into understanding the real but often difficult to evaluate impact on immigrant communities of American events (Haymarket, Debs's presidential campaigns) as well as European ones (the Paris Commune, the outbreak of World War I). A biographical approach may permit a clearer view of the effective role played by militants and local radical leaders in trade union and political activities, and even more so within the astonishingly dense associative network of francophone cooperatives, mutual aid societies, cultural societies of all kinds — theatre, music, dances, even horticultural associations — whose appeal reached far beyond the small circles of militants to involve entire French-speaking local communities.

Third, and this is certainly its most promising potential usage, the new dictionary will enable scholars to undertake a series of prosopographical studies, that is to say collective sociobiographies. From a methodological standpoint, the prosopographical approach is based on the comparative amalgamation of the life stories of individuals forming a coherent group, to single out relevant factors such as age, social, cultural, and professional backgrounds, that may help to identify underlying social processes and thus discover unexplored features of causation.

Indeed the point is not just to replace history from the top down by history from the bottom up, but to go beyond both. Previous approaches have tended to personify and treat indiscriminately such historical factors as ideology, political programs, organizational structures, or collective action. We suggest an approach that constantly moves back and forth between the individual and the group so as to account for the known fact that some people who do the same thing at the same time can have differing motivations for their thoughts and actions. A dictionary that features several thousand biographical entries, a collection of individuals large enough to be in many respects representative, makes it possible to analyze otherwise extremely complex social — or political — processes (such as personal commitment) with much greater accuracy.

Based on the biographical sketches, it is possible to assess complex issues such as assimilation. A tentative list of criteria could help define the extent of social assimilation of a given group, while another such exposition might help assess the level of cultural resiliency. The following sets of criteria could be used to evaluate the degree of social assimilation and accommodation:

-socio-professional criteria: social and professional mobility, social upgrading, acquisition of material goods (house, car) and/or professional machinery and equipment; such criteria become all the more relevant when a given individual's life can be traced over an extended period of time.

-socio-cultural criteria: the ability to read the English-speaking press or speak English; joining an American lodge or fraternity; Americanizing one's first name and family name; becoming naturalized.

-socio-political criteria: joining an American trade union or an American political party; being elected to offices in such organizations; actively participating in the celebration of American events (Labor Day, 11 November); getting involved in electoral campaigning and voting; being slated on the Socialist Party ballot, and in quite a few cases getting elected.

As regards cultural resiliency and the definition of ethnicity, one might conversely take into account the following criteria:

-cultural criteria: speaking French only; renewing one's subscription to a French or a Belgian paper; visiting the Old Country; celebrating French or Belgian traditional festivals (Saint Hubert's Day for hunters, Sainte Barbe's Day for miners); being primarily interested in the cultural life of the Old Country (e.g. the excitement aroused among the French socialist diehards by the announcement that Sarah Bernard was going on a US tour!).

-family criteria: living within an endogamic system (getting married in the French-speaking community, and quite often within one's political family); passing on the French language to the next generation(s); deciding after many years spent in the US to return home for good.

-communitarian criteria: belonging to one or several French cultural organizations in the community; to a francophone mutual-aid society; joining a French-speaking section of an American organisation (SLP, SPA, IWW); celebrating French or Belgian political anniversaries (18 March, 14 July, 22 September) and otherwise cosmopolitan dates (syndicalist May Day).

-criteria related to ethnic loyalty: feeling concerned about the catastrophes in the Old Country (for France the Courrières's mining disaster with its 1600 casualties in 1906, the floods that drowned Paris in 1910) or the social conflicts back home (strikes, imprisonment of militants); de-Americanizing one's name in the weeks following the outbreak of World War I; for the SPA members, letting their ethnic loyalty take precedence over political loyalty to rally to the French flag in early September 1914.

The individual biographies and factual data will certainly be food for thought and help formulate more comprehensive answers in the current debates concerning ethnicity, over its development as a form of consciousness born from immigrants' collective experience that transformed their perception of themselves, or over the rapidity, ways and limits of the acculturation of those same immigrants. Likewise, concerning debates in social history, for instance over the existence of interactions among militants on both sides of the Atlantic, including the creation of organizational networks and their resulting mutual consequences (the general strike strategy, May Day, the development of the Knights of Labor in Europe, the debate on Gustave Hervé's theses on anti-patriotism).

As most scholars now agree, a full understanding of phenomena related to European immigration in the US and Canada will necessarily require a comprehensive, multilateral, and comparative examination of the migration movements within

the context of an integrated transatlantic — and even worldwide — economy. This approach is antithetical to an earlier, quite unilateral America-centred vision. The systematic exploitation of data found in the *Biographical Dictionary of French-speaking Radicals in America's* individual life stories will hopefully represent a step forward towards such an approach. We would of course gain much if similar researches were carried out on other communities, thus enlarging the possibilities of comparison and differentiation.

## American Workers and Justice in the Global Order

Donna Kesselman

TO SAY THAT COURTS are the scourge of workers is a truism in American labour history. Recently, though, organized labour has often looked towards the courts for salvation. Striking Detroit newspaper unions placed their hopes in a 10(j) court injunction to reinstate strikers. Workers *hoping* for an “injunction”? For the last decade, Teamsters have been run by federal courts under a receivership agreement with the union to eliminate racketeering from the ranks. Has the role of the courts changed? Are they now part of labour’s solutions instead of its problems? The question is raised all the more as American big business has proclaimed new legalistic ethics in its fight against both labour at home and foreign competitors abroad. Thus the crusade against *corruption* has become a component of American business’s ideology of global domination.

### *Government and Globalization*

Justice and the courts must be seen within this broader perspective. And yet, the function of government interference into labour affairs has not fundamentally changed, despite “globalization’s” ideological smokescreen. Behind the rhetoric, then, is the reality: globalization’s loudly trumpeted attempt to “reinvent government” advocates a minimalist state but concomitantly, state interventionism has taken new and often stepped-up forms. In the US, new prominence for *ad hoc*

Donna Kesselman, “American Workers and Justice in the Global Order,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 237-43.

judiciary bodies, and the interplay between NLRB labour and federal courts are among them. Two cases in point, the Detroit Newspapers dispute and the Teamsters, will help us take a closer look at these altering institutional relations.

### *Detroit Newspapers Dispute*

Detroit newspaper workers walked out to protest employer plans to restructure in July 1995. The dispute soon became a *cause célèbre* due to the dramatic stand-off between workers and employers. When rank-and-filers initially tried to block the distribution of newspapers, local police and private militia stormed picket lines and attacked by helicopter. Openly intending to break the unions, newspaper employer CEO Frank Vega<sup>1</sup> immediately secured striker replacements and announced the publisher would drag out legal proceedings until locked-out workers moved away, retired or died. The highpoint of the fight was 21 June 1997, when tens of thousands of demonstrators from all over the country took to Detroit streets, the mobilization prepared by rank-and-filers and finally called by the national AFL-CIO. On the eve of the march, the NLRB first declared the existence of an unfair labour practices dispute (UP) by employers, which lent the day an air of victory.

In fact, despite the militant face, the dispute's main focus was turning toward the courts. A few months after the initial walkout, striking unions'<sup>2</sup> efforts were already spent pressing NLRB authorities to declare an unfair labor practice dispute against employers, including a court-sanctioned Section 10(j) injunction<sup>3</sup> to reinstate strikers with back pay and fire striker replacements. Thereupon ensued a complex, media-charged boxing match between NLRB and federal judges (to whom the NLRB petitions for injunctions), reciprocally granting then rescinding the 10(j). For instance, two months after the initial NLRB declaration of an employer UP mentioned above the tables turned, as federal courts refused to grant the 10(j) injunction.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, the militant rank-and-file resistance coalition ACROSS

<sup>1</sup>The employer, "Detroit Newspapers," is made up of the two dailies, *The Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*, which function under a Joint Operating Agreement, authorized by the US government in 1989. The agreement allows them to combine their advertising, business, production and delivery systems. Policies of relaxing anti-trust legislation to increase employer clout is fully in sync with our analysis of the function of current government interventionism.

<sup>2</sup>There were six striking unions: two Teamsters Locals (Drivers Local 372, Mailers Local 2040), Newspaper Guild Local Local 22, Typographical Local 18, and also the GCIU, Graphic Communications International Union, (Graphic Communications pressmen's and photoengravers locals), which has since merged with the Communications Workers of America.

<sup>3</sup>Section 10(j) of the National Labor Relations Act allows the NLRB to propose injunctions to federal judges, i.e. cease and desist orders to stop violations of the Act carried out by employers or unions.

<sup>4</sup>One year later, in Septembre 1998, judges once again approved the 10(j) but employers refused to adhere and appealed.

(Action Coalition of Strikers and Supporters) had predicted the consequences of diverting class struggle towards legal procedure, immediately denouncing the local leadership's strategy in as many words: "The legal system is in the hands of the bosses. If you have expectations [for a legal solution], you'd better have a long life expectancy."<sup>5</sup>

In this situation the NLRB took the limelight, enjoying new prestige since the Reagan packed-labour-court years. The number of its dispute decisions and Section 10(j) injunctions have grown significantly under the Clinton Board. Its recently retired chairman, William B. Gould IV, oversaw this comeback by reasserting New Deal industrial pluralist assumptions, which promote the NLRB's role to ensure the "balanced regulation" of social conflict, based on shared social power between labour and management as equal partners. A highpoint of his crusade was Detroit Newspapers. Chairman Gould went out of his way to make what he himself called "unprecedented" public statements to openly defend the NLRB's 10(j) request against the federal court justices' decisions to deny it.<sup>6</sup> By playing the NLRB *good cop* against the federal court's *bad cop*, he ultimately helped to legitimize state intervention into labour affairs and shore up the image of a "good" injunction for workers.

The NLRB, though, has been hard pressed to keep its promises towards labour. Less than one half of 10(j) requests made by NLRB judges are ever carried out and even then, not always to workers' gain — most notably when they concern workers' picketing to block production during a strike. What is more, legal procedure has engendered a life of its own, turning NLRB unfair labour practice disputes into a zero-sum negotiating game: each side accuses the other of unfair labour practices essentially as a bargaining ploy, then moves towards settlement by mutually retracting their respective charges. This is the pattern followed at such major disputes as the UAW against Caterpillar (900 UP charges filed then finally withdrawn) and General Motors (summer 1997). As the courts assert themselves as the ultimate arbiter, disputes are diverted away from the point of production, original contract demands fall by the wayside and strikers, like at Detroit newspapers, find themselves out of a job and then dispersed. The resulting defeats or pyrrhic victories (7-year long Caterpillar dispute, 4+-year Detroit newspaper dispute) have the end result of undermining strike militancy and, in an apparent throwback to the 19th century, justifying the courts' authority to determine the boundaries of shopfloor power.

<sup>5</sup>Position paper unanimously adopted at meeting of the Labor/Community/Religious Coalition in Support of Striking Newspaper Workers, 24 October 1995; "ACROSS Strike Call," November 1996.

<sup>6</sup>"The Board, the Supreme Court & the National Labor Relations Act: Reflections of the Chairman on Issues decided and Issues Presented," William B. Gould IV, NLRB, 21 May, 1998; "Acting NLRB General Council Fred Feinstein Issues Four-Year Report on use of Section 10(j) Injunctions", NLRB, 24 July, 1998.



The state's assertiveness seems all the more surprising given government's retrenchment in favour of the now trendy *civil society*. According to this globalization buzzword, social actors should be free to fight out compromise in a worldwide ring with no state borders. This explains why, despite the NLRB's rhetorical exalting of New Deal virtues, the reality of government intervention is otherwise: its own case backlog remains enormous, notably due to state personnel cutbacks, including NLRB's entry level Administrative Law Judges whose number has hit a historical low. In the legislative field, Congress intervenes not to bolster but dismantle New Deal era institutions. As David Brody notes, the pre-Wagner Act individual rights doctrine is seeking historical revenge against Wagner's albeit minimal recognition of workers' collective organization and welfare.<sup>7</sup> An example is the Paycheck Protection Act, which under various forms remains on the legislative agenda. The stated purpose of the bill has to do with election financing: union leaders would have to solicit a "prior, voluntary, written authorization" from individual members in order to spend dues for anything but the strict defence of shopfloor demands.<sup>8</sup> While claiming to uphold an individual worker's right to spend his paycheck money as he sees fit, Paycheck Protection is but a euphemism for conservatives' most recent assault on hard-won workers' gains like the union shop and labour's right to run broadbased, issue-oriented campaigns in the collective interests of working families.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Teamsters*

The paradox of "lesser government" discourse is more striking still in the Teamsters affair. The fate of the Teamsters over the past decade has been inextricably linked to the state: under a 1989 consent decree with the Justice Department, the union agreed to receivership in order to avoid federal prosecution for racketeering. For the moment, the outcome has been the state-engineered cancellation of the 1996 Teamster elections, the expulsion of reformist, militant UPS strike leader, anti-NAFTA president Ron Carey, and the coming to power of James Hoffa jr., the candidate of the union's "old guard." The American government's campaign against union corruption launched in the 1950s with the Landrum-Griffin Act (Labor-Management Reporting & Disclosure Act) — the legal basis for today's receivership — has thus followed its course, and in the end the union has come full circle. For the basic function of government intervention now seems clear: tame a

<sup>7</sup>David Brody, "A Question of Rights", *New Labor Forum* (Fall/Winter 1998).

<sup>8</sup>Quote from HR 1625. Other versions of paycheck protection bills include HR 2698, S.9. The latter, S.9 has 34 Senate cosigners, HR 1625 has 158 co-signers in the House. State-level initiatives, like California's proposition 226 which voters rejected in June 1998, have essentially the same designs.

<sup>9</sup>Donna Kesselman, "Financement des élections: mise en cause des syndicats américains," *Argent, Politique et Corruption*, bilingual Symposium published by Publidix, 1999, Anne Deysine & Donna Kesselman (eds).

militant union, precluding internal union democracy by preventing workers from autonomously choosing their own leaders. Though supposedly carried out in the name of fighting racketeering, government action has helped to bring back the Hoffa dynasty, with its shady reputation, which has ultimately been an objective ally of the state throughout this whole operation.

The case illustrates the new forms of state interventionism in labour affairs. The *ad hoc* committees set up to oversee the union mark a new breed of para-state structures under the aegis of a Federal District Court and Judge whose democratic accountability, including safeguards against conflict-of-interest, remain to be proven. Among the *ad hoc* Independent Review Board members who censured Carey was William Webster, former FBI head and member of the board of directors of Annheuser-Busch, the beer firm against whom the local Teamsters were striking at the very time the Carey case was being heard. In addition to the nature of their composition, the looming powers granted to these committees are worth notice. Consider Carey's speedy removal from the union presidency and ultimately from the union without any semblance of due process.<sup>10</sup> Since Carey's demise was officially due to a money-funelling scheme involving the former Teamster president and the Democratic National Committee during the 1996 national elections, compare the prerogatives of the Teamster *ad hoc* committees to that of the FEC's impotence in regards to campaign financing. Despite extensive press coverage of Washington's recent campaign finance scandal, directly sighting the Democratic administration, and the Federal Election Commission's prestige as an independent government agency, presidential candidate Gore is campaigning with a free hand (and wallet). No congressman or senator has ever been seriously sanctioned, let alone removed from office, for campaign financing irregularities, despite documented abuses of a serious nature.

The theme of corruption is thus being put to use by American Big Business against labour within the US, just as it is against its other traditional rival, competitor trade countries abroad. After 20 years of Washington lobbying since the 1977 US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the OECD passed its Bribery Convention in 1997.<sup>11</sup> The convention's solemn goal of ensuring business ethics should be understood as a level for promoting American corporate practices, and thus business interests the

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that while Carey was found guilty and barred from rerunning, his adversary for union president James Hoffa jr. was also being investigated. A Federal court-appointed election overseer charged and fined Hoffa for financing improprieties in the same 1996 union elections but, unlike Carey, permitted him to rerun in the new elections overseen by state supervision at the end of 1998. In the same affair while Hoffa was cleared, his key aids were barred from working or running in the 1998 campaign. *New York Times*, 18 April 1998.

<sup>11</sup>Frank Romano, "The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the OECD Bribery Convention-The Polemic and the Fraternal Twins," *Argent, Politique et Corruption*, bilingual Symposium published by Publidix, 1999, Anne Deysine & Donna Kesselman (eds).

world over. Especially targeted are European business strongholds in Africa.<sup>12</sup> New legalistic ethics have also helped the US to impose its global agenda on countries and international agencies through voting extra-territorial laws, often justified in moralistic terms (anti-terrorist, religious oppression, drug lords). What is more, just as in the US, where union presidents are deemed more corrupt than mainstream political candidates, America's concern for *ethical* business practices is quite selective, targeting various foreign countries, firms or leaders at opportune moments.

The crusade against corruption was launched as a post-witchhunt expedient to root out working-class militancy. The timing was perfect: the Landrum-Griffin Act came right on the heels of the HUAC, filling the ideological gap left once red-baiting in the US had done its historical time. In retrospect we know now that the post-witchhunt, anti-racketeering onslaught against US workers was but a dress rehearsal for the post-Cold War anti-corruption campaign for American business domination in the global market, starting with the domestication of labour at home.

### Conclusion

Despite globalization's call for "less state," courts are in the forefront of what have been called more adaptive forms of government intervention into labour affairs. What is common between protracted NLRB suits, 10(j) injunctions, the Teamster consent decree and — in the legislative field — measures like Paycheck Protection is their claim to replace workers' right to hold their line on the shopfloor and run their own internal affairs without state interference. Formal references to 19th-century individualism or New Deal welfarism should not cloud over the year 2000 function of these historical precedents: dismantling workers' gains which, through years of hard-won struggles, have been imposed on both employers and state institutions.

New global ethics of legal responsibility, like the fight vs corruption at home and abroad, are components of US business's new discourse of global domination. Even globalization's civil scientists who call for more autonomy among social actors, look to the state's strong regulatory role in certain fields and, in this sense, the Teamsters' affair precedent should be heeded. The *ad hoc* committees can be compared to today's so called non-governmental organizations; like NGOs, they are given growing prominence despite the ambiguous nature of their public legitimacy. Their function in the Teamsters' case was unsettling at best: bypass the nation's own legal traditions and staunch respect for procedure, removing the leading

<sup>12</sup>American businessmen say they're aghast at the legal and deductible payment of "commissions" to foreign governments as a means of getting contracts by businessmen from countries like France or Germany. And yet, the complex US accounting structure for international contracts makes most tax payments to foreign countries deductible. The business practices may change, but in both cases the result is the same: it's Western taxpayers who underwrite foreign business investment and foreign governments who pocket the bucks.

militant unionist who dared take on corporate America. At the end of the day, who can say what overriding legal doctrine guides these increasingly complex, para-institutional workings?

The courts' aptitude to equitably arbitrate disputes and rid unions of racketeering has yet to be proved. After years of struggle and legal appeals, one Caterpillar striker wife and picket line leader came to her own conclusion: "Strikers in America are like Blacks: there is no justice for us."<sup>13</sup> Justice for workers includes labour's fight to defend its own historical gains, within state institutions or without.

<sup>13</sup> Interview carried out by the author in Peoria, July 1997.

## Our Collective Project: Marianne Debouzy and Three Decades of American Social History

James Green

IN THIS BRIEF REVIEW of American labour and social history since 1968 I want to begin with personal references to the contribution of Marianne Debouzy to my own work and then I will try to place our collective social history project in history, a history I share with Marianne as do most of you in this room.

We're heard much already about 1968 and what an important turning point it was in the work of Marianne. I remember 1978 – 20 years ago – when I first heard from Marianne through one of those lovely little blue *par avion* letters she still sends (no e-mail for Marianne). She was asking me to contribute to a special issue of *Le Mouvement Social* on American labour history. I was thrilled to be included not only with our leading labour historians, Herbert Gutman and David Montgomery, but in a French journal devoted entirely to the history of social

James Green, "Our Collective Project: Marianne Debouzy and Three Decades of American Social History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 243-49.

movements. I wish that we had such a journal in the US and I am glad that *Le Mouvement Social*, which Marianne still edits, remains alive and well as a journal.<sup>1</sup>

I looked back at the issue, no. 102, which Marianne edited, and at her own article on the uprising of 1877 which she presented not only as a mass strike and an eruption of class violence, but as a kind of strike movement, not totally different perhaps than the strike movement she saw sweeping across France in 1968. One of the things I have learned from her over the years is how to identify social movements in all their eruptions.<sup>2</sup>

Flash forward twenty years to 1998 during which time our friendship and comradeship deepened. This past April I visited Marianne in Paris to talk to her about my new book, to be called — what else — “Movement History.” I sent her a chapter on the memory of Haymarket and she corrected some mistaken use I made of sources on the memory of the Paris Commune. She took me to Père Lachaise to see Le Mur des Fédérés which I wanted to compare as a place of memory to Waldheim Cemetery where the Haymarket anarchists are buried. In writing this essay on the memorial legacy of Haymarket I drew upon the work of Marianne’s students in her volume *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers, and Citizens in the American Republic 1880-1920* and on her own essay about working-class memory.<sup>3</sup> In other words, my current work as a movement historian and activist connects just as closely with the work of Marianne as it did two decades ago.

With these two personal bench marks noted in time, let me proceed with remarks on our collective project in a larger sense. Among some historians and intellectuals in the US there is the feeling that the new labour and social history is no longer very important — that its time has passed, along with the passing of Herbert Gutman and Edward Thompson, its intellectual progenitors. These two historians invoked, says one critic, a cultural world of democratic scholarship now “almost abandoned.”<sup>4</sup>

There is also a feeling of pessimism among some in our political generation that the working class has no future and, therefore, has no past worth studying. Academic fashions change, and now the new cultural historians are in vogue; they

<sup>1</sup>James Green, “L’histoire du mouvement ouvrier et la gauche américaine,” *Le Mouvement Social*, 102 (janvier-mars, 1978), 3-40.

<sup>2</sup>Marianne Debouzy, “Grève et violence du classe aux États Unis en 1877,” *Le Mouvement Social*, 102 (janvier-mars 1978), 41-66.

<sup>3</sup>Hubert Perrier and Michel Cordillot, “The Origins of May Day: The American Connection,” in *The Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers, and Citizens in the American Republic, 1880-1920*, edited by Marianne Debouzy (Urbana 1992), 157-196 and Marianne Debouzy, “In Search of Working-Class Memory: Some Questions and a Tentative Assessment,” *History and Anthropology*, 2 (1986), 260-282.

<sup>4</sup>Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York 1987), 163-166.

are more concerned about representations than social structures, more focused on language than experience, more respectful of particularities than solidarities. To some it would seem that our collective project of 30 years — our effort to reconstruct the lost world of workers and their struggles — is merely the political obsession of our generation of 8ers — a desperate attempt to do history as a way of doing politics “by other means.” This fashionable pessimism assumes that our work has not changed or evolved, that we have not changed or evolved.

I am here to say that our project has matured since its inception. Labour and social history have adapted and its practitioners have overcome some of the earlier biases and shortcomings in the field which resulted in part from our efforts to correct for an elitist, institutional bias in the old histories. This brief historiographical review of the new social history touches on four points.

First, if social history left out the state, the law, the trade union and the political party, it also laid the groundwork for new studies which integrated these concerns without losing site of the real world working people inhabited. I think of David Montgomery’s *Fall of the House of Labor* and two studies of Chicago workers, Liz Cohen’s *Making a New Deal* and Richard Schnierov’s recent book, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Urban Liberalism*.<sup>5</sup> These studies bring labour history and social history from the margins to the mainstream of American political history.

Second, there is the criticism that the new social history depended too heavily upon social science concepts and quantitative methods, and was too influenced from the left by Marxian ideas about class and class consciousness — the “grandest abstraction of them all” in the words of one critic. As a result, real people and their “real world” disappeared or were reduced to categories. In the process social historians also sacrificed the narrative power of history for trendy, but static, forms of “analysis.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no time to address these large concerns, but there needs to be time to say two things. Social historians have turned to effective story telling using the biographical mode so that narratives of individual lives are placed in social history — as we see in Nick Salvatore’s reconstruction of the world of the free black man Amos Webber or in Steve Fraser’s biography of Sidney Hillman or in Christopher

<sup>5</sup>David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York 1987); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York 1990); Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism, 1864-1897* (Urbana 1998).

<sup>6</sup>See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Essays and Reappraisals* (Cambridge 1987) and the excellent review by Sean Wilentz, “The New History and its Critics,” *Dissent* (Spring 1989), 242-249.

Johnson's study of the radical labour lawyer Maurice Sugar.<sup>7</sup> Other historians have employed social history in new master narratives like Alan Dawley's beautifully written *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State*, Nelson Lichtenstein's study of Walter Reuther and his times, and Eric Foner's new book, *The Story of American Freedom*.<sup>8</sup> Just two weeks ago I heard Foner speak about his study as one in which he drew upon social history to describe the boundaries of freedom and how they were defined and later expanded.

Third, the most serious criticism of the new labour history centres on its insensitivity to race, gender, and cultural identities due to a preoccupation with trade union consciousness and/or class consciousness as manifested by white, male workers. There is much to say about these issues — still the subject of very lively debates among labour historians. I will make only one rather optimistic remark about this historiographical debate over worker consciousness and identity. I think labour history has been enormously and beneficially complicated by studies of working women, immigrants and workers of colour, by studies sensitive to the resonance of class experience in the lives of these outcast workers. Those of us who believe that social history revealed the power of class forces and that labour history revealed oppositional cultures hidden from history need not feel threatened by this new, revised labour history which deconstructs white male identities and notions of solidarity. On the contrary, the labour movement today needs much more from history than a past based on heroic struggles.

It might seem that in turning away from trade unions as a subject, the new social historians refused an opportunity to address the concerns of the actually existing labour movement. As we have seen in David Brody's presentation on the failure of American labour law, those historians who focus on the institutional problems of worker organizations have much to say of direct relevance to the current crisis of the labour movement and the efforts to revive it. I argue in my book on "movement history" that studies of movement building and organizing, including works on the civil rights and women's movements, have influenced a new generation of historically-conscious union organizers.<sup>9</sup> But in an equally important way, studies of race, gender and ethnicity derived from the new social history are relevant to the problems of today. One of our main tasks as labour educators is to

<sup>7</sup>Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (New York 1996); Steve Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York 1991); and Christopher Johnson, *Maurice Sugar: Law, Labor and the Left in Detroit, 1912-1950* (Detroit 1988).

<sup>8</sup>Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge 1991); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York 1995); and Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York 1998).

<sup>9</sup>James Green, *Movement History: Essays & Reflections* (forthcoming, University of Massachusetts Press 1999).

confront unions' exclusionary past practices, to understand how they were created and constructed; it is a necessary intellectual step in thinking and working toward a newly constructed and inclusionary house of labour.

Fourth, the maturation and complication of social history has coincided with an increasingly effective effort to reach a wider public audience, including a popular audience in the labour movement itself. The documentary film series *The Great Depression* produced for public television reached 22 million Americans in 1993 with stories that were decisively shaped by the new labour and social history.<sup>10</sup> I describe my encounters with these audiences in *Movement History* as part of a journey that began with writing about the labour movement from the outside as a radical historian in 1972 to a point twenty-six years later when, this past month, I completed a ten-thousand word history of the US labour movement for the AFL-CIO Education Department which will be, in a sense, the official history of the movement distributed to union affiliates and their members. True to the new reform spirit in the AFL-CIO, the education director wanted a history that "told the truth" about labour's past, and that also reflected the new labour and social history.<sup>11</sup> In conclusion I offer as my little homage to Marianne a few paragraphs from a somewhat autobiographical account of this search for an audience that comes from the Prologue to *Movement History*.

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Movement history is not an academic field, but it is defined by a recognizable body of work produced largely by radical intellectuals who have struggled since the mid-1960s to establish our credibility as historians. At first, our work was dismissed simply as too ideological, too "presentist" to meet the profession's canon of objectivity. We failed to respect "the pastness of the past," said our critics. We ignored the power, "the hegemony," of ruling ideas and institutions and romanticized popular opposition. We were too subjective, too sentimental.<sup>12</sup>

In response, we criticized the myth of objective history. We denied that impartiality made for "real history" or that subjectivity made for bad history. As movement historians, we were motivated by the struggles of our own time to write about those of the past. The movements of our own time *did raise* many of the questions we asked about the past, but they did not, as our critics charged, determine

<sup>10</sup>I describe my role as research coordinator of the series in "Making The Great Depression for Public Television: Notes on a Collaboration with Documentary Film Makers," *Perspectives: Newsletter of the American Historical Association* (October 1994), 3-5.

<sup>11</sup>"A Short History of the US Labor Movement" should be available in early 1999 from the AFL-CIO Education Department, 815 16th St., Washington, DC, 20006.

<sup>12</sup>Aileen Kraditor, "American Radical Historians on their Tradition," *Past & Present*, 63 (August 1972), 136-153 and James R. Green, "Debate," *Past & Present*, 69 (November 1975), 122-130.



how we answered those questions. We *did care* about the people and movements in our stories, and we wanted our readers to care.

It was, and it is, tempting to allow our sympathies to control our interpretations. Sometimes, our subjectivity has produced simply partisan history, but, most times, I believe, our emotional and political engagement has sharpened our skills as story tellers and interpreters. We have shown that "good history" is not always determined by objectivity. Moreover, our work has helped demonstrate the importance of human agency in how history is made, and thus, it has helped to reshape the way US history is written and taught.

Movement historians have made their mark on the history profession. A far more receptive professional audience exists now than when our work first began to challenge the canons of objectivity and neutrality propounded by the gentlemen's club that dominated the history profession. A recent survey of US historians revealed that 40 per cent agreed that "historians' commitments to social and political movements have improved, not distorted, the writing of history," while 28 per cent disagreed. Even more American historians teaching abroad agreed.<sup>13</sup>

But movement history is not entirely the work of professional scholars. Movement historians have reached out to others who have compelling stories to tell about their own lives in struggle. Oral history, which has been so important to us, is the most democratic sort of work we do because it requires mastering the art and politics of dialogue. This is also true of movement history, as I understand it.<sup>14</sup> Thus, movement history encompasses more than the books and articles, the plays and films, the workshops and public projects we have produced; it embraces the appositional narratives of those who have lived movement history.<sup>15</sup>

I was inspired, like so many other movement historians, by Edward Thompson who wrote his great book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, thinking not about "the academic public," but about the left and about the audience he had first encountered as an adult education tutor "in evening classes of working people, trade unionists, teachers and so on." Edward's writing about plebeian life offered workers "a new past to live from," wrote Marcus Rediker, a different "social memory" that allowed readers to think "forward to a new set of possibilities." His tone was highly engaging. Thompson wrote "with continual human reference, affirming certain values over others," said another disciple. He tried "to make his readers active

<sup>13</sup>David Thelen, "The Practice of American History," *Journal of American History*, 81 (December 1994), 941.

<sup>14</sup>See Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison 1997).

<sup>15</sup>For two outstanding appositional narratives, with brilliant comments by the historians who collected them and reflected on them, see George Lipsitz, *A Life in Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia 1988) and Mario T. Garcia, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley 1994) with Garcia's excellent Introduction on "appositional narrative."

valuing agents" as they thought about history and politics.<sup>16</sup> It was impossible to imagine writing and speaking in public with Edward's eloquence and effectiveness. But his brilliance did not seem intimidating. While he was here among us, making movement history, he encouraged each of us who admired him to find our own voice and use it.

From superb mentors like Thompson our generation of social historians gained the energy and direction needed to write history from the bottom up, as an alternative to elitist, top-down political history, which explained opposition movements as conspiracies. We understood social history as a study of conflicts often generated by social movements; and so, following the lead of Herbert Gutman, we sought to place those movements in their social context in a way that explained opposition to oppression as organic and endemic to our history.<sup>17</sup>

Our generation of radical historians travelled the same road together, sustaining hope and comradeship through a kind of mini-movement of our own. Long after our New Left imploded, and our utopian dreams of one big radical movement faded, long after the excitements of discovery gave way to the inducements of reality, we have remained connected to each other, to our traditions, and to our aspirations. Like most historians, our writing usually ends up being a matter of individual effort, but our thinking is unusually collaborative and mutually supportive. Most scholars are lucky to have one caring mentor and a few devoted colleagues who share the same interests. I was blessed with many mentors and many cohorts who offered comradeship as well as friendship. In this way, I express my appreciation to and for Marianne Debozy and for what she has contributed to our project.

<sup>16</sup>Marcus Rediker and Fred Inglis quoted in Harvey J. Kaye, "E.P. Thompson, the British Marxist Tradition and the Contemporary Crisis," in E.P. Thompson, *Critical Perspectives*, edited by Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland (Philadelphia 1990), 246. Thompson recalls his working-class students in *Visions of History*, edited by Henry D. Abelove, et. al., (New York 1984), 7.

<sup>17</sup>George Lipsitz, "'Apotheosis of Glory': Surveying Social History," *Journal of American History*, 81 (September 1994), 588. Also see Herbert G. Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York 1987), especially the introduction by Ira Berlin.



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