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# BOOK NOTES/ RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

Peter Gossage, *Families in Transition: Industry and Population in Nineteenth-Century Saint-Hyacinthe* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1999)

THIS EXCELLENT STUDY of a small town in the nineteenth century follows the life cycle of its inhabitants, searching for both material and ideological explanations of their marriage patterns, household structures, and family sizes. Parish records and census information provide the raw data of the study, but these are analyzed in the context of a broad family-history literature. Gossage interrogates the impact of the development of industrial capitalism on patterns of family formation. He demonstrates that families made conscious choices and were not mere tools of invisible economic forces, but he also is clear about the limits that capitalist power relations placed on families' options.

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press 1998)

WHILE AMERICAN HISTORIANS of reform usually make some mention of European influences on American debates regarding social reforms, they rarely foreground such influences. Rodgers attempts to locate such debates from 1870 to 1945 within their European context. American reformers and reactionaries alike, he ob-

serves, were in tune with European discussions regarding the role of the state within developing capitalist economies. They responded to such debates from American-formed perspectives, but this did not produce the extent of "American exceptionalism" that some historians emphasize, reading history backwards from the Cold War when "foreign" ideas became automatically suspect. Interestingly, while the book includes indications of how American middle-class "progressives" responded to European labour and socialist parties' perspectives, one has to search elsewhere for clues as to whether American workers and their institutions kept in touch with European developments.

Claudia Orenstein, *Festive Revolutionaries: The Politics of Popular Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1998)

THIS IS ANOTHER BOOK that tries to locate the development of an American institution within European traditions. *Festive Revolutionaries* also presents a portrait of changes in America, and on the American Left from the 1960s to the 1990s. It examines the experiments of the Troupe in creating political theatre that reinforced the political activism of audiences, or caused them to rethink liberal assumptions about what constituted progressivism. Following the principals of the Troupe from their years of youthful

idealism in the sixties through political splits in the seventies and into the years of political compromise in the eighties, when they accepted government funds, this study raises interesting questions about radical theatre in the US and radicalism more generally. While supportive of the Troupe's overall efforts, Orenstein brings a critical perspective to some of their more recent work, demonstrating the impact of disillusionment on radicals' faith in popular politics.

Micheal Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: New Press 1997)

BACK TO AMERICAN exceptionalism. This extended essay tries to explain the failure of integral class politics to develop in the United States by demonstrating the corrosive impact of elite-sponsored racism on the white working class and their trade unions. Goldfield points out the many times throughout American history when white workers' institutions played a role in oppressing African Americans. He tries to balance this with evidence of occasional successful attempts to link the struggles of black and white workers. Though he marshals much evidence for his case, Goldfield's argument, based solely on secondary sources, lacks nuance. Too wedded to the defence of the American Communist Party's positions on everything, he finds as little positive to say about relatively progressive — though Cold Warrior — labour leaders such as Walter Reuther as he does about the Ku Klux Klan.

Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997)

SCRANTON ATTEMPTS to demonstrate that it is incorrect to characterize the second industrial revolution in the United

States as simply the era of mass production and monopoly that emerges when the focus is on such industries as steel, oil, and automobiles. Instead Scranton outlines developments in specialty firms in such areas as furniture building, jewelry and tool making. Here, assembly lines were less common and crafts skills survived. Scranton's empirical evidence is fine. But his analysis is lacking on several fronts. There is too little study here of the relationship between monopoly capital and the "specialty" sectors. In several of these sectors, particularly tool making, the mass-production firms provided the major market. The monopolists' decision not to vertically integrate to absorb the functions of the specialty firms needs exploration: as Scranton's own evidence suggests, many such firms lead precarious existences, dependent on contracts that fluctuated. Clearly, as others have argued, monopoly capital prefers to "contract out" functions that are more risky than the core business of the big firms. Scranton's study of workers in the specialty firms is too skimpy to be helpful, and trade unions never receive a mention in this study.

Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce, *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy* (New York: New Press 1998)

THIS BOOK CHRONICLES the campaigns in various cities across the United States to compel municipal councils to pass "living wage" requirements for all employees of firms receiving municipal contracts. From 1994 to 1998, such campaigns were successful in Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, and Portland. But the authors are clear that the number of workers affected by such ordinances is relatively small. The importance of the "living wage" campaign however is its ability to mobilize working-class people across racial lines. Linkages among the municipal coalitions responsible for such legislation have oc-

curred with the objective of winning a federal living wage. The authors are progressive economists who chart the losses in income that American workers have suffered since the 1960s, and the real income required by families to achieve a living wage.

Christine Cousins, *Society, Work and Welfare in Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan 1999)

THIS IS AN EXCELLENT WORK of synthesis on labour market policies in Europe since the 1970s, focusing on Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Spain. It examines the growth of "non-standard" employment, gender inequalities, "flexible" employment, and poverty in the wake of global capitalist restructuring. But it demonstrates that state policies do matter, even when the power of trans-national corporations is increasing. That power, unchallenged, however, does threaten the gains of workers in all countries. Even in Sweden, after 70 years of extensive welfare-state policies, the class struggle between employers oriented towards international markets and workers attempting to hold on to their acquired employment wages and social wages is acute. Women workers, largely segregated in the public sector, have most to lose as capital's growing power over social democracy erodes the welfare state.

Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want* (New York: Cornell University Press 1999)

BASED ON SURVEY RESEARCH, these authors report that American workers, viewed by some as interested only in the size of their pay packets, would like to see a large worker role in managing firms. Regarding themselves as largely powerless within their workplaces, American workers are not enamoured of corporate

power. They want more powerful unions, formal mechanisms to directly involve workers' representatives in making the big decisions that affect their working lives, decentralization of power within companies, and more government regulation of employers' treatment of workers. But they also believe they are unlikely to see any of this happen. The authors are liberals who exhort government, management, and unions to harness this spirit of worker willingness to be involved in management for the good of corporate America. But the authors' results are open to a socialist interpretation that American workers, while not thinking of it in these terms, largely reject the morality of capitalism's organization of work life. The challenge for radicals, as opposed to corporate America, is to challenge the widespread belief among workers that the pursuit of fundamental change is futile.

Stephen J. Frenkel, Marek Korczynski, Karen A. Shire, and May Tam, *On the Front Line: Organization of Work in the Information Economy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1999)

THE DISCIPLINE of organizational behaviour has become popular in schools of business and management because it applies social science research methods to questions of extracting the most labour-power from individual workers. *On the Front Line* uses survey research, much as *What Workers Want* does, to determine what it is necessary for employers to do, in this case in the areas of service, sales, and knowledge work, to produce happier, more productive workers. But the approach here is rather more restricted than in *What Workers Want*, which gave workers the opportunity to express their views of an ideal workplace. Instead, *On the Front Line* is concerned with defining what needs to be done to insure worker satisfaction and therefore productivity in specific jobs. So, for example, the authors reject the view that service organizations

are regimented by pointing to the diversity of tasks involved, contact with other workers, and "a high tolerance for shortfalls in productivity." (268) Much of this is unconvincing in light of recent news stories about the precarious work lives of employees of Amazon.com and other notable information-economy employers. While this book demonstrates that the

word "empowerment" is easily assimilated to the goals of capital, there is little attention here to workers' rights to design their work environment, determine the character of the products being sold, or to hold on to the wealth that their work alone generates.

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