

Top Seven Reasons to Celebrate and Ask More from Labour/Le Travail

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Résumé de l'article

Le hommage aux 49 premiers numéros de Labour/Le Travail, de même que leur évaluation, se concentre sur le ton et le contenu du journal. Les sept sections de l'article traitent des sujets variés allant de l'art et la conception, à la poésie longue et riche contenue dans ses pages, à la capacité de publier des articles contenant des idées à la fois éclairées politiquement et rigoureuses intellectuellement. L'évolution de la section de critique des livres, élargie et exemplaire, ainsi que l'attention invétérée portée par Labour/Le Travail aux divisions de races et de genres parmi les travailleurs ont attiré l'attention, de même qu'une brève comparaison du parcours de Labour/Le Travail avec celui de la publication Labor History aux États-Unis. Une dernière section prend en considération la nécessité d'avoir du débat libre parmi les historiens, en particulier sur la question de classe et la place de Marxisme dans notre travail.

Top Seven Reasons to Celebrate and Ask More from *Labour/Le Travail*

David Roediger

I WAS DELIGHTED WHEN ASKED to make some remarks at the start of the Writing Canadian Labour: Critical Perspectives Conference, which was to honour and examine my favorite journal of labour studies — and the only major North American one that has not recently vilified my work. But some days after the invitation, two boxes arrived, containing the nearly 20,000 pages of *Labour/Le Travail* (*L/LT*) published to date. My charge was to somehow address those pages. The talk would take a few minutes, and this article would fill a few pages, but the perusing took many days. No matter that I had devoured issues of *L/LT* since becoming a labour historian in 1976. Indeed that only made things worse, making me linger over back issues like high school yearbooks, reliving old memories and occasionally catching people in embarrassing poses. As the disjuncture between input and output of labour for the talk widened, my search for a form that could be suitably episodic also quickened. Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* seemed to offer an appealing noun and "notes" (also from a Marx title) had its momentary appeal. From there, things rapidly degenerated into a David Letterman-style top-ten list, but one that limits itself, for practical and biblical reasons, to seven items.

Number One: We're jubilating

Knowing that we come together to celebrate the coming 50th issue of *L/LT* immediately brought to mind Peter Linebaugh's monumental article "Jubilating: Or, How the Atlantic Working Class Used the Biblical Jubilee against Capitalism, with Some Success." Recalling my Leviticus, it seemed possible to rationalize reviewing only every seventh issue of the journal, times seven. But this homage is very much about the whole lot, the descriptions of misery and exploitation year after year, the small ameliorations that the Old Testament renders as sesquiannual and

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the “loud trumpets” heralding the possibility, linked to the number 50, that the land and labour of working people will “not be sold forever.”¹

That I misremembered Linebaugh’s piece as having first appeared in *L/LT* indexes my admiration for both the journal and for the article, which typifies the best of *L/LT* in its challenging of borders between nations, between disciplines, and between past and present freedom struggles. In fact, the piece appeared in the estimable United States journal *Radical History Review* (in issue number 50!!), although Linebaugh’s seminal and earlier “All the Atlantic Mountains Shook” did appear in *L/LT*. It shared an issue with Marcus Rediker’s “Good Hands, Stout Hearts and Fast Feet” two decades before their spectacular collaborative publication of *The Many-Headed Hydra*. Surely that book’s analysis was enriched, sharpened, and emboldened by a freewheeling and passionate exchange — in many ways a model of scholarly and political debate — between Linebaugh and Robert Sweeny in *L/LT* in 1984.²

Number Two: Some of it has rhymed and it’s pretty

For much of its life, *L/LT* included a regular workers’ poetry section, making it a rare labour history publication which has taken poetry something like as seriously as the working class historically has. Slim McInnis’ 1988 verse “Tramping Down the Highway,” for example, got at deindustrialization in a way that has usually eluded sociologists and historians:

And the whole darn Constitution
Wouldn’t buy a single meal
When you’re tramping down the highway
Or laid off at Sydney Steel.

The marvelous influence of the worker-poet Tom Wayman, once designated the “poetry support system” of the publication, enchanted those sections. Even after the sections diminished — I’m told new ones are coming — poetry maintained some presence, for example in Marc Leier’s deft short article on samplings of

¹Peter Linebaugh, “Jubilating: Or, How the Atlantic Working Class Used the Biblical Jubilee against Capitalism and with Some Success,” *Radical History Review*, 50 (1991), 149-80; *Leviticus*, 24:1-55.

²Peter Linebaugh, “All the Atlantic Mountains Shook,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (Fall 1982), 87-122; Marcus Rediker, “‘Good Hands, Stout Hearts, and Fast Feet’: The History and Culture of Working People in Early America,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (Fall 1982), 122-44; Robert Sweeny, “Other Songs of Liberty: A Critique of ‘All the Atlantic Mountains Shook,’” *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 161-73; Linebaugh, “Reply,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 173-81; and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston 2000).

Rudyard Kipling by the Industrial Workers of the World and in a fine obituary tribute to E.P. Thompson.³

More broadly, it is noteworthy that the subtitle of *L/LT* proclaims it a journal of labour studies, not simply history. As the new field of Working Class Studies matures in the US, it will have much to learn from *L/LT*, especially where the arts and the popular are concerned. An early survey of readers showed them to largely be labour historians, but the jibe my intellectual hero Archie Green directed against the new labour history in the US (myself probably included) could hardly have applied to what readers found in *L/LT*. Green, the great labour folklorist, complained that the more he read of workers' culture in the introduction to a labour history book, the less culture he'd actually find in it. *L/LT*, on the other hand, has unassumingly treated everything from rough music to hip-hop. Its arresting covers include Ellison Robertson's beautiful and irreverent painting "Labouring the Millennium," commissioned by the journal for its Fall 2000 issue. On another cover, a plywood worker bowls. She reminds us of the new labour history's long-deferred promise to study the history of workers' bowling teams with some of the zeal previously reserved for eighth vice-presidents of international unions. *L/LT* has not redeemed that specific promise — it has published fine accounts of militancy by pinsetters in bowling alleys and of women workers and softball — but it has treated workers' culture as fully as any journal.⁴

*Number Three: It runs book reviews before the book appears
in remainder catalogs*

A book review section first appeared in *L/LT* in 1979. Nine reviews covered thirty-seven pages. By 1986, the section had doubled in size and polled readers re-

³Don MacGillivray, "The Industrial Verse of 'Slim' McInnis," *Labour/Le Travail*, 28 (Fall 1991), 283; Bryan Palmer, "Homage to Edward Thompson, Part I," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 11-71; Marc Leier, "Kipling Gets a Red Card," *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Fall 1992), 163-8; on Wayman see "Contributors/Collaborateurs," *Labour/Le Travail*, 11 (Spring 1983), 5 and, in the same issue, his article, "Inside Job: The Transformation of Literature," 155-70, and poems, "Paper, Scissors, Stone" and "The Detroit State Poems: Final Day," 171-2 and 180-2. See also his "To Be Free Full-Time: The Challenge of Work," *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (Spring 1995), 223-36.

⁴The covers mentioned are for *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000) and 48 (Fall 2001); on music see, for example, Bryan Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 5-62; William Eric Perkins, "A Crate of Records Is Like a History Book," *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (Spring 1995), 273-80. On Working Class Studies, see John Russo and Sherry Linkon, eds., *The New Working Class Studies*, forthcoming; on bowling and softball, see Ian MacMillan, "Strikes, Bogeys, Spares, and Misses: Pin-boy and Caddy Strikes in the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 149-90; and Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 167-200.

garded it as among the most valuable parts of the journal. In the Fall 2001 issue, there were 37 reviews and the books section stretched to nearly a hundred pages. *L/LT*'s timely reviews cover working-class history from around the world. They allow a great deal of space — I may well be the only person who pays any attention to the word limits its editors set — and the reviews often generally provide apt summaries of the book's content and methods, not just assessment. Perhaps partly for that reason, the reviews and review essays are intellectually generous, even when they air differences. (Michael Katz may disagree.) At times the prose has also been wonderful, as when James Epstein remarked that Gareth Stedman Jones' writings have British workers "present at their own incorporation." What makes the book section so great a service to labour scholars throughout the world are not only its internationalism but also the ways it expands what counts as of interest to those who would understand the working-class past. For example, the 2001 issue mentioned above reviews the autobiography of the gay Canadian activist Jim Egan, not only seeing Egan's life as working-class history but also realizing, in way too few US historians have, that George Chauncey's *Gay New York* is a critical contribution to the history of class in the US. The same issue features reviews of a history of advertising in Canada, a study of science and the Cold War, a book on Adorno and right-wing Christian radio, and *The World Guide*, an alternative almanac of great use to anti-globalisation campaigners. Other issues include such virtually inconceivable-in-the-US items as Mariana Valverde's sympathetic review essay on Derrida, William Eric Perkins' appreciation of Brian Cross' rap scholarship anthology *It's Not About a Salary*, praises for Al Grierson's *A Candle for Durruti* CD (on the Folkin' Eh! label), as well as reviews of books on French spas, on sport and sexuality, and on Aunt Jemima pancake batter.⁵

To take one particularly sustained and impressive example, *L/LT* has published reviews, review essays, and exchanges that make slavery and the political economy of the US South utterly central to working-class history. These include Lawrence McDonnell's useful reminder that there is very little political economy in Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox Genovese's *The Fruits of Merchant Capital*, Noel Ignatiev's provocative comparison of W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* and Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* and Marty Glaberman's polemic on slavery and capitalism. Thus it was perfectly appropriate that David Montgomery should have chosen an *L/LT* essay to argue in 1987 that slavery studies have set the pace in showing

⁵The relevant issues are numbers 4, 18, and 48. For the survey see André E. LeBlanc, "Labour/Le Travail Reader Survey: A Report," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 316-27; Bryan Palmer, "Emperor Katz's New Clothes, or with the Wizard of Oz," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 190-7; Perkins, "Crate of Records," 273-80; Mariana Valverde, "Deconstructive Marxism," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 329-40; and James Epstein, "Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 204. The reviews mentioned from 48 (Fall 2001) are at pp. 277-9, 285-8, 300-3, and 345-7.

working-class historians how to address “structures of power and structures of meaning” dialectically.⁶

*Number Four: What’s in a name (Part 1) — Broaching divisions
in the working class*

L/LT is the only major labour history journal I know whose very name can be read as raising the issue of how working-class experiences are crosscut with ethnic, language, or national divisions. It is true that the bilingual title of the journal on one level simply reflects Anglophone/Francophone divisions in Canadian universities and is replicated in publications of various stripes. However, the title also has meaning in light of the fact that many central figures in *L/LT* were radicalized amidst intense struggles over Québec nationalism and its relationships to class in and after the 1960s. This ferment fundamentally challenged, as Ian McKay writes, Canadian left “rhetoric of ‘the people’ with a discernibly centralist bias” and called into question tendencies to adorn radical literature with maple leaves. I of course leave it to Canadian comrades and more knowing internationalists to decide whether the cup is half full or half empty when it comes to *L/LT*’s nurturing and featuring of scholarship in French, on French-speaking Canada, and on the complex impact of national and language divisions among workers. McKay’s 2000 remark on the “strange” absence of any major study of “French-English relations of the Canadian left” suggests room for further research. Certainly accounts of French-Canadian immigrant workers in the US have been a high spot in the journal for US historians.⁷ Moreover, it seems worth observing that the questions raised by *L/LT*’s title recur with frequency and force in the special “millennium issue” of the journal — not only in

⁶See Lawrence T. McDonnell, “The Janus Face of *Fruits of Merchant Capital*,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), 185-90; Noel Ignatiev, “The American Blindspot’: Reconstruction According to Eric Foner and W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (Spring 1993), 243-51; Martin Glaberman, “Slaves and Proletarians: The Debate Continues,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 209-14, with a reply by Ignatiev at 215-6; John T. O’Brien, “After Slavery: Black Labour and the Postwar Southern Economy,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 8-9 (1981-82), 285-95; and David Montgomery, “Trends in Working-Class History,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), 21-2.

⁷Ian McKay, “For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 77, 109, and 69-105; Yukari Takai, “Shared Earnings, Unequal Responsibilities: Single French-Canadian Wage-Earning Women in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1900-1920,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (Spring, 2001); Bruno Ramirez, “French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (Spring 1983), 125-42. See also Joanne Burgess, “Exploring the Limited Identities of Canadian Labour: Recent Trends in English-Canada and Quebec,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1-2 (Spring-Fall 1990), 149-67. For a call for a still bolder approach to French North American working-class history, see Jacques Ferland’s important paper from the Writing Canadian Labour Conference, Trent University, May 31-June 2, 2002.

Ralph Guntzel's fine account of the Québec labour movement and "sovereigntism," but also more generally.⁸

The extent to which the fracture (and unity) bespoken by *L/LT*'s title have opened, or might open, insights regarding other divisions among working people in Canadian history remains an open question. McKay's call for a Canadian socialism and social history that have "really grasped the central significance, to any socialist project on Canadian soil, of First Nations issues," may be widely shared by writers in and readers of *L/LT*, but it has not significantly impacted articles in the journal to date. That Steven High's very good study of native wage labour was a happy exception in *L/LT* when it was published in 1996 is underlined by that fact that none of his 91 footnotes in that review of the literature cite anything from *L/LT*. Nor could Janet Mary Nichol cite anything published in the journal in her superb "'Unions Aren't Native: The Muckamuck Restaurant Labour Dispute, Vancouver, BC (1978-1983)" the following year. Nonetheless there are praiseworthy attempts to come to grips with settler colonialism, White nationalism, and the racialisation of immigrants scattered throughout the issues, dating from very early ones. Peter DeLottinville's "Joe Beef of Montreal," perhaps the single piece most expressing *L/LT*'s affinities with *History Workshop* in Britain, is especially acute on class unity and fragmentation, and the 2001 special issue on race and ethnicity is superb. Perhaps most revealing is the extent to which questions of race, dispossession, citizenship, and anti-Asian mobilisations emerge in the expansive comparisons of Canadian and Australian histories in a 1996 special issue.⁹

⁸Ralph P. Guntzel, "'Rapprocher les lieux du pouvoir': The Québec Labour Movement and Québec Sovereigntism, 1960-2000," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 369-95; David Frank, "Short Takes: The Canadian Worker on Film," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 417-37; Cynthia Comacchio, "'The History of Us': Social Science, History and the Relations of Family in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 167-220; McKay, "New Kind," 69-125; and Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present and Future," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 127-65.

⁹McKay, "New Kind," 124; Steven High, "Native Wage Labour and Independent Production during the 'Era of Irrelevance,'" *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 243-64; Janet Mary Nichol, "'Unions Aren't Native': The Muckamuck Restaurant Labour Dispute, Vancouver, B.C., 1978-1983," *Labour/Le Travail*, 40 (Fall 1997), 235-52; Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869-1889," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8-9 (1981-82), 9-40; Rennie Warburton, "The Workingmen's Protective Association, Victoria, B.C. 1878: Racism, Intersectionality and Status Politics," *Labour/Le Travail*, 43 (Spring 1999), 105-20; Franca Iacovetta, "Manly Militants, Cohesive Communities, and Defiant Domestics: Writing about Immigrants in Canadian Historical Scholarship," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 231-42. The "Australia and Canada" issue is *Labour/Le Travail*, 38 (Fall 1996). In it see especially Bryan Palmer, "Nineteenth-Century Canada and Australia: The Paradoxes of Class Formation," esp. 19-26; and Ann McGrath and Winona Stevenson, "Gender, Race, and Policy: Aboriginal Women and the State in Canada and Australia," 37-53. The "Race and Ethnicity" special issue is *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (Spring 2001).

*Number Five: What's in a name (Part 2) — The working class,
self-criticism, and gender*

In 1984, the journal began its thirteenth issue with an impressively economical self-criticism: "Readers will note a change in our title. *Le Travailleur* has given way to *Le Travail*. We apologize for the implicit sexism of the previous name."¹⁰ In and of itself, of course, such a name change could not alter the contents of the journal, any more than *History Workshop's* decision to become a journal explicitly claiming feminism in its subtitle could automatically change its course. Indeed in the US case, as Alice Kessler-Harris and I have argued, gender-inclusive terminology ("labour history") has at times proven quite compatible with the assumption that the subject, unless otherwise noted, is a male worker or union leader.¹¹

Nonetheless, and admitting considerable room for further progress, particularly in gay and lesbian history, *L/T* has (like *History Workshop*) made the study of working women and of gender in working-class life central to its excellence. In contrast to the token presence of women on the editorial board of *Labor History* through most of its existence, *L/T* has achieved rough gender parity. Ambitious special issues, including the 1989 one on "Women and Work" and the 1998 one on "Masculinities in Working-Class History" have highlighted the indispensability of gender to the understanding of class. More impressive still is that some issues *not* explicitly devoted to such themes are nearly as full of relevant materials. Gender and the history of telecommunications work has been especially well historicized since the early issues. Meg Luxton's "Feminism as a Class Act" offered an important 2001 reinterpretation of Canadian feminist history, class alliances, and class tensions. The history of industrial homework and of the family economy has graced *L/T's* pages, although the study of women's unpaid labour in households has remained relatively absent. The millennium issue included a central section, the longest in the volume, on "Gender, Family, and Sex." In it Joan Sangster's "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History" eloquently insisted that gendered history and class analysis cannot be counterposed.¹²

¹⁰"Editor's Notes/Notes de Directeur," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 5.

¹¹The change in the subtitle to *History Workshop* came in 1982, adding the adjective "feminist" to "socialist;" Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male Worker as Other: Redefining the Parameters of Labor History," *Labor History*, 34 (Spring-Summer 1993), 190-204; and David Roediger, "What If Labor Were Not White and Male?" in *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley 2002), 179-202.

¹²The special issues are *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989) and *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998). In the former see especially the innovative essays by Jacques Ferland, by Michele Dagenais, and by William Carroll and Rennie Warburton; in the latter my personal interests likely cause the singling out of pieces by Todd McCallum, Steven Maynard, and Deborah Stiles, from a superb set of articles; for an issue not "special," but nonetheless containing remarkable material on gender and class, see *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997) and especially the essays by Magda Fahrni, Robert Ventresca and Carol Strange; Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Can-

Number Six: They were lucky; or, timing is everything

Through the years, *L/LT* has been sufficiently more ambitious, lavish, and exciting than its US counterparts as to tempt me towards a crude US exceptionalist explanation. Such an explanation might suggest that the relative weakness of the US labour movement (less union density and more density among union bureaucrats), and the relative lack of institutional support have foredoomed our best efforts to catch up with the Canadians. However much such musing identifies real differences, the increasingly interesting content of *Labor History* over the last several years warns against pushing any determinism too far. Moreover, if we took 1972 as a point of comparison, we would be left wondering how to explain the relatively advanced position of the US in the publication of labour history. A more restrained and plausible accounting for the long period of relative excellence by *L/LT* might begin by contrasting its *founding* with that of *Labor History*. The latter was nearly a decade old when the “new labour history” (an innovation of about the same vintage as eight-track tape recorders) came onto the scene. By that time the influences of the “old labour history” were firmly ensconced, intellectually and institutionally, at *Labor History*. Such influences continued to be strong over the life of the journal, favouring organisationally-based labour history decidedly. While there were critical exceptions, scholarship reflecting the impact of new social movements, especially feminism, had a difficult time coming to the fore. Although the journal provided some admirable coverage of the radical left’s history, it rarely spoke explicitly to contemporary labour. Its engagement with Marxism, and indeed with theory generally, was slight. Having old and new labour historians collaborating on a journal — with scholars bridging the two playing a prominent role — might have led to sharp and useful debates. But, with labour history fighting for a marginal place in US academia and with the union movement on the defensive, divisions tended not to be aired in print. The role of the labour bureaucracy was especially unlikely to be tackled.¹³

L/LT, on the other hand, was founded when the new labour history (and more broadly the new social history) were already in full flower and in a nation where the weight of the old labour history was perhaps less strong. While some older and es-

ada,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 63-88; Joan Sangster, “Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working Class History,” 127-66. See also Bettina Bradbury’s wonderful “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montréal Families, 1861-91,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 9-46; Sylvie Murray, “Quand les ménagères se font militantes: La Ligue auxiliaire de l’Association internationale des machinistes, 1905-1980,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 29 (Spring 1992), 157-86. See also Suzanne Morton’s important paper delivered at the Writing Canadian Labour conference.

¹³On the “new labor history” in the US, see David Brody, “The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class,” *Labor History*, 20 (Winter 1979), 111-26; Henry Abelove et al., eds. *Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); and David Roediger, “Coming in Late,” *Radical History Review*, 79 (Winter 2001), 119-21.

tablished scholars aided in its establishment, it was much more fully a product of younger scholars, many of them radicalized in new social movements and sometimes in left organisations. The result was a journal far more likely to raise the political implications of scholarship, to explore differences and, from the start, to treat the histories of unskilled, preindustrial and unorganized workers more fully.¹⁴

In risking this rough comparison, my hope is to open a question rather than to exhaust it. We would benefit greatly by reflecting on how the new labour history developed regionally, nationally, transnationally, and comparatively. Any history of its spread would have to be institutional as well as intellectual. On the latter score, transnational flows of ideas and movements of scholars — for example, the influences of E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Walter Rodney, Joan Scott, Eugene Genovese, Louis Althusser, and C.L.R. James — obviously mattered. However, how those influences were embraced, evaded, and applied on the ground can also tell us a great deal. Above all, accounts of the new labour history should apply social history methods, asking how and to what extent public audiences were constituted, which social struggles (often they were not necessarily trade union ones) inspired the idea that the people could make history and what social backgrounds, work situations, and political experiences labour historians brought to their tasks.

Number Seven: With success comes responsibility; or, L/LT and the question of class struggle

Because of its auspicious beginnings and ongoing work, *L/LT* can count among its relative successes the ability to connect working-class struggles with the possibility of broad social transformation. Even, and especially, at its most deeply historical, it has conveyed the sense that the world did not need to turn out like this for poor and working people. Its pages unearth a history alive with different possibilities, especially the possibility of resistance to class exploitation. Its incredibly sustained coverage of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and of other public and private agencies of anti-labour repression has provided apt reminders of the ways in which moments of force, and not just those of consent, structure capitalist hegemonies.¹⁵

¹⁴For one account of the development of labour history in Canada, see Desmond Morton, "Some Millennial Reflections on the State of Canadian Labour History," 46 (Fall 2000), 11-36; see also Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History," 130-2; Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montréal 1995).

¹⁵See e.g. Reg Whitaker, "Official Repression of Communism During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 135-66; Barbara Roberts, "Shovelling Out the 'Mutinous': Political Deportation from Canada Before 1936," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 77-110; William M. Baker, "The Miners and the Mounties: The Royal North West Mounted Police and the 1906 Lethbridge Strike," *Labour/Le Travail*, 27 (Spring 1991), 55-96; Michael Lonardo, "Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police-Surveillance During the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (Spring 1995), 11-41; and Paula Maurutto, "Private Policing and Surveillance of Catholics: Anti-communism in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of To-

Along with the also exemplary journal *Left History* and other venues, *L/LT* has helped to spare the Canadian left from the condescension of posterity. At times, as in Glaberman's spirited exchange with Tom Langford, the journal has directly entertained political writing on how and when class mobilizations change society.¹⁶

While academic history journals are (often rightly) tempted to ration such direct forays into "politics" and theory, it seems to me that at this moment we urgently need them in redefining our project, our methods, and our claims on public attention and popular imagination. In particular, the question of how and whether we continue to deploy Marxism in our work is so little broached that profound confusions arise. Eric Arnesen's recent indictments of what he caricatures as "whiteness studies," provide a useful example here. Arnesen challenges the very idea of what Bruce Nelson calls a "logic of solidarity" in working-class history. While the rest of labour history has gotten over this crude notion, he holds, "many historians of whiteness" still embrace it. Only if the existence of such a logic is accepted, Arnesen ungrammatically adds, "does the failure of white workers to recognize their common interests with blacks, their creation of a labor movement that excludes people of color, and their own acceptance of white racial privilege require explanation." To follow Du Bois in searching for such an explanation, Arnesen charges, is to retain a "Marxism lite," which persists in imagining that the "social relations of production," and not "circumstances" centrally condition possibilities for working-class unity. To jettison any idea of a "logic of solidarity," and to lose the centrality of the social relations of production, dramatically breaks from the broadly conceived Marxism which has informed much of the best writing in *L/LT* and to a lesser extent in US labour history. However, because it seems to rail mainly against "identity politics," a polemic like Arnesen's is sometimes misread as a *defense* of historical materialism.¹⁷

On one level, of course, there is a heavy whiff of stateside peculiarities in this example. However, I want to use it to challenge us to wonder if, in the wake of the fall of the Soviet system and the weakening of many labour movements in the over-

ronto, 1920-1960," *Labour/Le Travail*, 40 (Fall 1997), 113-36. See also the important essay by longtime *Labour/Le Travail* editor, Gregory S. Kealey, "State Repression and the Left in Canada, 1914-1920: the Impact of the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review*, 73 (September 1992), 281-314.

¹⁶Martin Glaberman, "Marxism and Class Consciousness," *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 233-7 with Tom Langford's reply at 238-41. See also Murray E.G. Smith, "Political Economy and the Canadian Working Class: Marxism or Nationalism Reformism?" *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 343-68; Norman Feltes, "The New Prince in a New Principality: OCAP and the Toronto Poor," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 125-55.

¹⁷Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (Fall 2001), 11-12 and 3-32. The replies (33-80) by James R. Barrett, David Brody, Barbara J. Fields, Eric Foner, Victoria C. Hattam, and Adolph Reed, Jr., do not take up Arnesen on the "logic of solidarity." See also Alex Lichtenstein, "The CIO in Black and White," *Radical History Review*, 83 (Spring 2002), 203-10.

developed world, similar silences regarding why we write, for whom, and with what methodological assumptions and disagreements has pervaded the writing of working-class history. As much as we need informed critiques of identity politics and of postmodernism, we also need equally intense debates on method and politics among those who take social history and working people as their subjects, but who may not agree on much else. *L/LT*, having accomplished so much else, and having managed to retain a strong emphasis on labour and social transformation, is well situated to encourage such debates.

