

Booknotes / Références Bibliographique

Volume 57, numéro 1, printemps 2006

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt57_1bn01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

(2006). Booknotes / Références Bibliographique. *Labour/Le Travail*, 57(1), 261–265.

BOOKNOTES / RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

Mary Margaret Fonow, *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2003)

FONOW TRACES the involvement of women in the United Steelworkers since the 1960s, suggesting ways in which they fought discrimination and fought for a feminist agenda on the shopfloor and in the union's political priorities. Most of the book deals with American locals of USWA. But one chapter focuses on Women of Steel, the Canadian women's organizing efforts of the 1980s and onwards. While Fonow outlines successes of USW women in both countries, she suggests that these efforts have been more successful in general in Canada. The political climate in Canada (including the brief period of NDP rule in Ontario) and somewhat greater receptivity to feminism in the trade union movement have combined with the militancy of women in the steel factories to yield various gains.

Lois Kathryn Herr, *Women, Power, and AT&T: Winning Rights in the Workplace* (Boston: Northeastern University Press 2003)

IF THE FONOW BOOK above is representative of a working-class feminist approach to women in the workplace, Lois Kathryn Herr's book is equally representative of liberal bourgeois feminism. Her focus is not on all women workers at giant

AT&T but on the more ambitious women who sought management positions in the company but were stifled by its sexist policies. Aided by the National Organization of Women and government agencies, these women posted some success. Herr was both an active participant in the campaigns for more women executives and ultimately a beneficiary of their success.

Robert Bruno, *Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press 2003)

BRUNO TRACES the process by which a mobster-controlled Teamsters local turned into a rank-and-file-controlled local. He also compares the changes that occurred in this local with the largely cosmetic reforms that have occurred in other Teamster locals, outlining the variety of factors that made this local a good bet for genuine reform in the members' interests.

Jonathan Zeitlin and Philippe Pochet, eds., with Lars Magnusson, *The Open Method of Co-ordination in Action: The European Employment and Social Inclusion Strategies* (Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang S.A. 2005)

IN 1989 the European Economic Community [EEC] adopted the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of

Workers as a response to worker opposition in several countries to greater harmonization of government economic policies in Europe and to the increasing competition of sweated Third World labour to European workers. But the Charter protections promised even less than the ILO conventions that all the EEC members had already adopted. With popular opposition to the EEC as an agent of capitalist globalization and declining living standards barely abated, and with New Labour in power in Britain and the Socialists in France by the late 1990s, the "Open Method of Coordination" [OMC] was added to the social equation, with the EEC to assess national plans to meet its social standards. Peer pressure, rather than organizational power, would be the means to get countries to live up to their commitments. The essays in this volume analyse the extent to which social policy in various European countries has been influenced by the OMC. For the most part, they argue that it has had little effect. In countries such as the Netherlands, where social guarantees exceeded the slim demands of the OMC, little has changed. But little has also changed in Italy which did not meet the standards of the OMC. That country has simply devolved more and more authority to under-financed regional and municipal governments, all the while claiming that its own hands are tied. Though this is a cautious and even ponderous book, its underlying message seems to be that the EEC, so willing to intercede to insure the equality of the interests of European capitalists as they deal with various governments, is not willing to intercede to defend the rights of workers. It is simply willing to issue pious statements suggesting that it will. The book's concentration on the bureaucratic legislation of the EEC and member countries, and the behaviour of administrators and lawmakers, leaves, however, no room for the attitudes and actions of the workers whose lives the legislators are attempting to regulate.

James C. Van Hook, *Rebuilding Germany: The Creation of the Social Market Economy, 1945-1957* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004)

VAN HOOK, as the book cover tells us, "is the joint historian of the U.S. Department of State and the Center for the Study of Intelligence at the Central Intelligence Agency." So, it is no surprise that this book does not provide a radical interpretation of why the Western zones of post-war Germany adopted a market-based economy with a bit of social policy tossed in to appease workers rather than a socialist model. As Van Hook notes, at war's end, the Social Democrats, and the left-wing of the Christian Democratic Union, joined the Communists in supporting socialization of heavy industry and worker participation in the management of the resulting state industries. Van Hook provides a detailed narrative, focusing on key political institutions and politicians, to explain the turnaround. He largely whitewashes the role of the American occupying authorities, defending them against charges of ideological interference or imposing their self-interest on the Germans. For a book that mentions "the social market economy" in its title, this account is inexcusably thin in its presentation of what social groups, organized and otherwise, thought about all the maneuvering by national and international elites on subjects that affected the workers' right to work and their employment conditions. It is a rather old-fashioned account of a capitalist victory, much as one might expect from an historian whose employers are the State Department and the CIA.

Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005)

AN ANCIENT JEWISH custom prohibited the discarding of sacred writing. To the

extent that wealthy Jews in medieval Egypt considered the letters they received from poor Jews to fit within the ambit of this custom – the letters tended to invoke God's name – they were preserved. Hidden in a chamber (called the Geniza) of the synagogue in Old Cairo, these documents provide the basis for Mark Cohen's assessment of relations among Jews in the city. Indeed, the letters reveal a great deal about Jews throughout the Middle East at the time, with letters from captives of Crusaders needing ransoms figuring in among the begging notes of the luckless and poor in Cairo. Cohen suggests that Jewish religious notions about charity had persisted into the medieval period and that charitable giving closed the gap between rich and poor. But that conclusion depends upon the comprehensiveness of the materials stashed in a hole in the wall in a synagogue. Clearly, rich Jews who provided charity to their destitute fellow tribespeople wanted the memory of their good works preserved; but do we really know that all the rich were so charitable or that the charity ended up being enough to provide the needs of all the poor in the community.

Mark R. Cohen, *The Voice of the Poor in the Middle Ages: An Anthology of Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005)

This is the documentary companion to *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt*. It includes requests for and agreements to provide food and shelter, help for the handicapped, help to bring relatives to visit or live in the city, child support for a divorced woman, and help with poll taxes, among other things. The precarious position of women in this patriarchal society is particularly evident.

Angel Smith, ed., *Red Barcelona: Social Protest and Labour Mobilization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge 2002)

The essays in this collection examine the emergence of industry in Barcelona, and with it the emergence of a class-conscious working class. The on-the-job and political struggles of that working class are traced from the period of early industrialization through to the period of the Civil War, Francoism, and finally the post-Franco period of restoration of parliamentary democracy. The essays dealing with the rise of both anarchist and Marxist currents in the workers' movement of the city provide the most detail both about the character of working-class life in Barcelona and the strengths of the competing ideological movements. Another essay discusses the position of women workers, but none of the essays links in any way gender issues with the materials on the popularity of anarchism and Marxism. The least two satisfying essays trace the sad history of the working class in Barcelona first under fascism and then under a democratic regime. But little effort is made to analyse why the working-class movement became class collaborationist except for the editor's claim that this was a necessary compromise in order to convince the bourgeoisie to support a return to democratic norms. Nor is there much analysis of the extent to which Barcelona workers' fond hopes before 1939 of working-class control of industry gave way to acceptance of simply greater wages. The focus on institutional history throughout all these essays somewhat limits their utility in answering broader social history questions.

Binka Le Breton, *Trapped: Modern-Day Slavery in the Brazilian Amazon* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press 2003)

"IT SOUNDS LIKE something out of the Dark Ages: a bunch of poverty-stricken, illiterate men chopping down the forest, hired by trickery, imprisoned by debt, and abandoned when their use is past. Not the sort of thing you would associate with twenty-first century big business. Hardly what you would expect to find in a country with such elaborate labor laws as Brazil. Yet slavery flourishes because violence is unchecked, starving men need to eat, and business likes a cheap workforce." (176) Le Breton traces the history of debt slavery in the Amazon and its persistence to the present day. But he also interviews its victims, and chronicles their resistance, individual and collective, to a type of agricultural capitalism whose labour forms mock notions of free labour within capitalism.

Trevor R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2004)

GETZ STUDIES the intricacies of the battles among slaveowners, slaves, and abolitionists regarding the fate of slaves in 19th-century French-controlled Senegal and the British Gold Coast. Though Britain ended its role in the slave trade in 1807 and France in 1819, a combination of European and indigenous slavers kept the slave regime legally alive until 1848 in Senegal and 1874 in the Gold Coast. Getz goes beyond the conflict between slaveowning elites and abolitionists to provide equal coverage of the slaves themselves. Their "self-liberation" — flights from harsh masters, abetted by members of their tribe — sometimes to new masters and sometimes to work in the cities or mines forced changes in master-slave relations and reduced some of

the advantages that masters drew from formal ownership of their labour force.

David Renton, *Classical Marxism: Socialist Theory and the Second International* (Cheltenham, UK: New Clarion Press 2002)

THIS IS a highly readable analysis of the contradictory strands within the Second International, the home of self-styled socialist parties from 1889 to 1917. Renton provides critical assessments of the ideas and practices of luminaries from this period, ranging from Eduard Bernstein on the right to Karl Kautsky in the centre and Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn on the left. This is a well-nuanced discussion of revolutionaries and reformists alike.

Samuel Fleischaker, *A Short History of Distributive Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004)

THIS BOOK might more accurately be titled, "A Short History of the Philosophy of Distributive Justice," since it provides no guide to the evolution of either policies of distributive justice in various societies or of workers' and others' efforts to win greater economic equality. Fleischaker notes the relative recency of philosophy's consideration of economic justice as a component of justice within a society. Philosophers' concerns about equality awaited the 18th century when Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others began to see poverty as an issue worthy of the comment of moral philosophers. Fleischaker demonstrates how 19th-century philosophers built upon their foundations, including both Karl Marx and Jeremy Bentham. Finally, he looks at the work of John Rawls and the responses to Rawls's notions of distributive justice among philosophers who followed him. Like the O'Neill book, Fleischaker's has little to

say about the impact of the various ideas he is discussing in the real world. Nonetheless, this is a compact, and accessible account of how Western-based philosophers through the ages have dealt with the issue of poverty and more generally of economic inequality.

A.F.

**Eugene A. Forsey Prize
in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History**

Thanks to an anonymous donor, the Canadian Committee on Labour History [CCLH] is pleased to announce the ninth Eugene A. Forsey Prize competition. The CCLH, with the consent of the late Dr. Forsey's family, chose to name it in his honour because of his pioneering work in the field of Canadian labour history. Dr. Forsey, Research Director of the Canadian Congress of Labour and later the Canadian Labour Congress, also served on the committee which founded *Labour/Le Travail*.

The CCLH invites submissions for the ninth Forsey prize competition for graduate and undergraduate work on Canadian labour and working-class history.

Prizes are awarded annually for the best undergraduate essay, or the equivalent, and for the best graduate thesis completed in the past three years. Separate committees, established by the executive of the CCLH, will award the prizes.

The committees, like *Labour/Le Travail* itself, intend to interpret widely the definition of Canadian labour and working-class history. Undergraduate essays may be nominated by course instructors, but nominators are limited to one essay per competition. Additionally, authors may submit their own work. Essays not written at a university or college may be considered for the undergraduate awards.

For the graduate prize, supervisors may nominate one thesis per competition or an author of a thesis may submit a copy. Submissions of both MA and PhD theses are welcome. Theses defended on or after 1 May 2003 are eligible for consideration in the initial competition.

The deadline for submissions is 1 June 2006. Prizes will be announced in the Fall 2006 issue of *Labour/Le Travail*. Four copies of essays and one copy of a thesis must be submitted for consideration to Forsey Prize, Canadian Committee on Labour History, Faculty of Arts Publications, FM 2005, Memorial University of Newfoundland, FM 2005, St. John's, NL A1C 5S7 CANADA.

2005 Forsey Prize Winners

Sean Purdy, "From Place of Hope to Outcast Space: Territorial Regulation and Tenant Resistance in Regent Park Housing Project, 1949-2001," Ph.D. Thesis, Queen's University, 2003.

Anne Toews, "The Canadian Communist Party and the Women's Labor Leagues, 1918-1929," undergraduate essay, University College of the Fraser Valley, 2004.