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Hanging by a Thread. Social Change in Southern Textiles

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Hanging by a Thread, Social Change in Southern Textiles, edited by Jeffrey Leiter, Michael D. Shulman and Rhonda Zingraff, Ithaca, N.Y., ILR Press, 1991, 248 p., ISBN 0-87546-173-5 (case: alk. paper) and ISBN 0-87546-174-3 (pb: alk. paper)

This interdisciplinary study, based on historical and sociological research, explores the historical roots and current dynamics of the southern textile industry. The book provides an analysis of the industrialization, modernization and development of capitalism and an example of the consequences of deindustrialization for industry, workers and communities. The essayists illuminate the process of social change with attention to both human agency and social processes. Their series of helpful case studies include paternalism, technological change, unionization and strikes and the Brown Lung Association. Essays dealing with Normandy, Great Britain and Maritime Canada add a comparative aspect and shed light on the role of gender and the issue of peripheral industrialization.

In his essay on textile industrialization in the Carolinas and Maritime Canada the author, while acknowledging some similarities between the regions, focuses on the differences and seeks an explanation for the stagnation of these Canadian mills in contrast to the Carolinas greater buoyancy. He pinpoints differences in the character of the labor forces as the key variable. In the Piedmont, agricultural developments and limited migration opportunities created a pool of impoverished, easily exploitable workers. In Maritime Canada, on the other hand, textile mill owners faced a labor force with access to farming, forestry, and fishing as well as industrial employment. In addition, textile manufacturers in the Maritimes had difficulty retaining workers attracted by economic opportunities elsewhere in Canada and in the northeastern United States. This use of the comparative method clarifies how two regions which confronted similar problems of peripheral industrialization and utilized similar social institutions and practices produced very different outcomes because of racial and especially class factors.

A series of essays on the development of the southern textile industry comprise the heart of the book and illustrate the interconnections and conflicts between human agency and social processes. Paternalism pervaded North Carolina textile mills and mill villages from the early 1800's to the end of World War II. The Cones of Greensboro, North Carolina, used paternalism to undergird management control for a quarter of a century following an unsuccessful strike in 1900. Management offered employees a lavish Fourth of July celebration, a Christmas ham and a fairly relaxed work pace. However, when troubles mushroomed after the end of World War I and company profits declined the Cones introduced massive layoffs, new technology and an accelerated work pace. These practices destroyed the informal labor-management agreement and galvanized many mill workers into collective action. Local leaders, preaching a radical Christian message, used the workers' kin-based networks for solidarity as mill workers faced firings and evictions when they struck in 1925. Defeat failed to cool the ardor of the strikers who formed several local unions and turned to the United Textile Workers, an American Federation of Labor affiliate, for aid in a 1930 strike. Although the strikers lost again they depicted the strike issue graphically as they asked workers to choose between the Company's Christmas

ham and the worker's union. As a result of these worker initiatives paternalism lost much of its allure and labor solidarity increased its appeal.

Labor-management relations changed in 1958 when the Textile Workers of America led a strike of one thousand textile workers in Henderson, North Carolina, which sought to preserve a collective bargaining agreement with the Harriet Henderson cotton mills. In the 1920's the appeal of company paternalism faded as management cut wages and workers struck unsuccessfully in 1927 aided by the solidarity of their kin-based networks. Thereafter elements of paternalism coexisted with management productivity initiatives and increasing worker assertiveness. In 1944 the Henderson facility was unionized and workers won more job security and self-respect. When the company demanded the elimination of arbitration in 1958 workers used their mill village culture with its strong religious roots to battle against the company and the state. The union reached out to black workers and the strike offered women opportunities to picket and run relief efforts. Although the strike activity left many workers with a sense of empowerment, the defeat raised fundamental questions for activists dedicated to social change. While unionization drives continued in the 1970's and 1980's, especially against J.P. Stevens and Cannon Mills, some activists sought another mobilization strategy. They focused on the occupational health issues facing retired and disabled textile workers and formed the Brown Lung Association. They established screening clinics to provide free medical examinations to workers suspected of having brown lung disease, used mass filings of compensation claims and held demonstrations outside of government offices. This campaign generated media attention and raised resources and membership in the late 1970's and early 1980's before the movement began to fade.

Textile industry communities and employment levels suffered severe setbacks in the 1970's and 1980's from increased internationalization of the economy and the search for the lowest possible production costs. Textile and apparel producers in the newly industrializing countries menaced the future of our textile industry and its employees. United States corporations responded to this threat by increasing investment abroad and installing automated equipment. Automation fit into a new market orientation featuring quality control and quick response to changing market conditions. While the industrial robot failed to maintain its initial appeal to textile and apparel manufacturers, the quick response concept combined with computer aided manufacturing retained its popularity with textile company executives. The implications of automation for workers is less clear; unemployment for many current employees appears likely with enhanced education and retraining a possibility for other workers. Workers and their supporters faced by the combined challenges of automation and capital flight have developed new and creative initiatives including the formation of worker-community coalitions, support for economic democracy and advocacy of international labor standards.

This valuable collection is enriched by an interdisciplinary focus and a comparative aspect. It has a more integrated character than most anthologies due to a fine interweaving of narrative, analysis and interpretive frameworks. Although several essays underplay the racial aspect and a couple of others suffer from somewhat dense analytical frameworks, this is a fine volume with a

helpful concluding essay. The essay ends by posing the key question of whether the hardships faced by the textile communities of the South are the growing pains of a dynamic global economy which will confer widespread benefits or whether the suffering of the southern textile workers is part of a global pattern of bipolarization with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

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Index et résumés des sentences arbitrales de griefs, tome VII,
Montréal, Coplanam ltée, 1991, 755 p., ISBN 2-920391-04-6

Publiée pour la première fois en 1982, cette septième édition est demeurée fidèle à l'objectif initialement recherché, à savoir offrir un instrument de repérage des sentences arbitrales de griefs. Si, à l'époque, cet ouvrage comblait indéniablement un vide dans la documentation existante, il doit maintenant composer avec une forte concurrence notamment de la part de Soquij. En un tel contexte le service offert par Coplanam a certes encore son utilité mais il conviendrait de faire davantage.

Des trois catégories d'index qui constituent la première partie du recueil, le plus utile est indéniablement celui de repérage. Il se présente, tout comme d'ailleurs les index des arbitres et des présidents, sous forme d'une consolidation des index de 1970 à 1990. Pour connaître les résumés des sentences, il faut toujours manipuler l'ensemble des tomes. Les index renvoient par ailleurs aux numéros des sentences, lesquelles sont présentées par ordre numérique dans les sept recueils. Cette méthode oblige à feuilleter chaque volume pour localiser tel ou tel résumé. La consultation est loin d'être facilitée. La sentence arbitrale peut, quant à elle, être achetée du Bureau du commissaire-général du travail ou de Coplanam. La seconde partie comprend d'abord des résumés de sentences arbitrales rendues en 1989 et en 1990. Les critères de sélection des sentences résumées ne sont pas publiés. Des listes des décisions 1989-1990 par ordre alphabétique de parties et par thèmes complètent cette seconde tranche de l'ouvrage.

Une telle manipulation de documents et les coûts impliqués pour obtenir les sentences risquent de décourager l'utilisateur et de l'inciter à joindre les rangs de ceux qui privilégient dorénavant les services informatisés ou ne serait-ce que les recueils sous formes mobiles. Le service offert par Coplanam n'est certes pas à négliger. Néanmoins il ne facilite plus autant la collecte de données qu'il y a quelques années. Pour rencontrer son objectif initial, cet éditeur doit dorénavant donner un sérieux coup de barre en repensant la présentation matérielle de sa documentation.

Rodrigue BLOUIN

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