

Urban History Review

Englander, David. *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. Pp. xviii, 342. Tables, index. \$64.25

Victor M. Batzel

Volume 14, Number 1, June 1985

URI: id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017900ar
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1017900ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN 0703-0428 (print)
1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Batzel, V. (1985). Englander, David. *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. Pp. xviii, 342. Tables, index. \$64.25. *Urban History Review*, 14 (1), 88–89. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017900ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1985

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online. [<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>]

The logo for Érudit, featuring the word "érudit" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letter "é" has a distinctive red accent mark above it.

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research. www.erudit.org

that case it may be reasonable to project upon politicians the characteristics of their society: but, the absence of any inductive proof will not breed certitude.

Footnotes and bibliography are extensive. Research into primary and secondary sources is extensive. With the exception of an occasional lapse (p. 125, last paragraph), the writing is clear and direct.

James P. Walsh
History Department
San Jose State University

Englander, David. *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. Pp. xviii, 342. Tables, index. \$64.25.

It is always disappointing when a book which promises to be good and which ought to be good turns out, in the event, to fail in its promise and to be less than it could have been. This, unfortunately, is the case with David Englander's revised doctoral thesis, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918*. By the time one has completed a close reading of his study, attention has turned from the subject to the book itself and to a quest for answers to the question of what went wrong with the analysis.

The very idea of focusing, not upon the formalities of housing policy and administration, but upon the relationship between landlord and tenant is significant. It is important to be reminded that housing serves to determine the political behaviour of both owners and occupiers. It has often been suggested that the North American labourer's access to home ownership goes far to explain his aversion to radical political movements. Englander, on the other hand, provides a salutary reminder that the nearly uniform condition of English and Scottish common labourers as renters had a radicalizing effect upon them. In mid-century Leicester, only 4% of all houses were owner-occupied and in Ramsgate, 80% were for rent. Englander's treatment of the contribution of politically active working class tenants to the movement from free market housing, first to controlled rents and, ultimately, to state-subsidized housing promises an analysis in which the rent-strikes in England and Scotland assume new significance.

Alas, the promise does not reach fulfillment. The temporal and spacial dimensions of the study serve more frequently to confuse than to enlighten. Englander has little to say of the period from 1838 (the year of the Small Tenements Recovery Act) to the 1880s, which, as he said, "mark a turning point that failed to turn." His discussion is dis-

jointed and does not allow the reader to develop a sense of process. Similarly, Englander's decision to draw his evidence from all parts of England and Scotland adds another level of complexity. One bounces about the kingdom, for the most part ignoring the different economic, social and political circumstances and traditions of the urban centres from which examples are taken. Englander, himself, pointed to the weakness of this approach in discussing the housing crisis during the war; he distinguished between those locations effected by the expansion of munitions manufacturing and those which were not. Finally, he has added unnecessary confusion by too often burying general discussions of background material in the midst of detailed example. His insightful discussion of the problems of organizing a rent strike in the context of the free market, for example, occurs in the middle of a description of the activities of F. W. Souter in Bermondsey.

A second unrealized promise has to do with Englander's emphasis upon both landlords and tenants — a duality which suggests that he has in mind an analysis of the system in which both were caught. Indeed, early in the study, he observed that: "Property owners were, in fact, the victims of an inequitable system of local taxation that was increasingly unable to shoulder the burden of social and civic reform heaped upon it by central and local government. Much of the conflict examined below arose from this predicament." One is struck immediately by the idea that the study will, finally, move away from the moralistic conflict model of social interaction which all too frequently passes for social history, and in its place undertake an analysis — or at least a substantial recognition — of the economic structure within which the conflict took place.

As before, however, the promise is essentially unfulfilled. Despite the title and the stated recognition that landlords, too, reacted to stimuli, it is soon apparent that the landlords are the forgotten characters in the drama (except insofar as Englander required an object for the renters to strike against). There is no analysis of the pattern or system of ownership, no distinction between individual owners and housing agencies and no analysis of rating and assessment schemes or of urban expenditures. Not only is there little effort to recognize system (and one should not too harshly criticize an author for not writing the book he didn't intend), Englander was not as consistently careful as he should have been in accounting for the finer divisions amongst either the landlords or the tenants. Neither were as homogeneous as he too often assumes.

In sum, the book may be taken for a well-researched and lavishly documented initial foray into a part of the British experience which has been too frequently ignored. Englander, too, can be credited with several suggestive insights and stimulating flashes of understanding which are reward-

ing. But it is far from the last word on the subject. Landlord-tenant relations still await their historian.

Victor M. Batzel
Department of History
University of Winnipeg

Slavin, Morris. *The French Revolution in Miniature. Section Droits-de-l'Homme, 1789-1795*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. xviii, 449. Illustrations, maps, tables, index. \$55.00 (U.S.).

The Paris Section (ward) of Droits de l'Homme — known as Roi-de-Sicile until the overthrow of Louis XVI made its earlier name unfashionable — was at the heart of revolutionary Paris, running eastward from the site of the present-day Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville department store almost to the Bastille and the famous revolutionary *faubourg* of Saint-Antoine, and northwards from what is now the Rue de Rivoli to cover the southern part of the Marais quarter. It is thought to have been one of the most intensely political Sections and was the home of a famous *enragé*, Jean-François Varlet, one of the prime instigators of the radical risings of 10 August 1792 against the constitutional monarchy and of 31 May 1793 against the National Convention itself. Professor Slavin has spent many years working through the Section's records and has written a sober and solid history of the area and its institutions from 1789 until 1795. This is a useful contribution to the growing literature on the Sections, in the wake of Albert Soboul's monumental study of *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l'An II* and George Rudé's *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959), and compares with recent monographs like H. Burstin, *Le Faubourg Saint-Marcel à l'époque révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1983), R. Monnier, *Le Faubourg Saint-Antoine* (Paris, 1981), François Gendron, *La Jeunesse dorée* (Québec, 1979), the articles of R.H. Andrews on the political personnel of revolutionary Paris, and Barry Rose, *The Enragés* (Melbourne, 1966) and *The Making of the Sans-culottes* (Manchester, 1983). For the general reader and the undergraduate, Professor Slavin's work has the added advantage that, like Rudé's and Rose's studies, it constantly refers the reader back to the general framework of revolutionary politics at both the national and Paris levels and thus can be read as a synthesis of the political history of radical Paris down to 1795. These intense struggles are covered in French treatments, but are insufficiently known to the regrettably growing army of unilingual English-speaking students.

This constant shifting from the local to the municipal and national scene appears to have been forced on Professor Slavin in part by the patchy nature of his records, but also perhaps because, despite its reputation, not a great deal seems

to have happened in Section Droits-de-l'Homme. Varlet started his career there, but for him it was more a spring-board (or sounding-board) than a political base; it was in the putchist committee of the Evêché that he flourished. In this account, the neighbourhood played no outstanding part in the siege of the Bastille, practically on its doorstep, nor in the agitation outside the nearby Hôtel de Ville, which led to the march to Versailles in the October Days of 1789. When the crowds invaded the Tuileries on 20 June 1792, threatening the Royal Family and creating general havoc, the section's National Guardsmen were rather embarrassed, and helped to restore order in the palace. Even after the section assembly was opened to poorer citizens, it could not bring itself to join wholeheartedly in the insurrection which toppled the monarchy on 10 August of that year. In the new political climate, the radicals occasionally got a majority together in the thinly-attended section meetings (on 27 March 1793 they sparked a movement to set up an insurrectionary committee which eventually masterminded the anti-parliamentary rising of 31 May), but the section only took a decisive radical stance after its assembly was packed with militants from other, more committed, sections in mid-May, in time for the *coup* against the Gironde. The next year, true to form, they wavered again when it was time to save Robespierre. The section's elected representatives prudently showed no enthusiasm for the doomed sans-culotte risings of Germinal and Prairial of the Year III (April-May 1795), and, like most of the other Sections, missed out on the abortive royalist rising of Vendémiaire (October 1795) (they were otherwise occupied, by a massive jailbreak at the prison of La Force).

What lay behind this long tale of indecision and inaction — massive indifference or fierce hung battles? Professor Slavin rightly tries to link the political struggles in the Section to neighbourhood social structures and conflicts. His analysis of the social background of the men in power as justices of the peace and as members of the civil committees, revolutionary committees, and other organs of the revolution shows that Droits-de-l'Homme conformed pretty much to the general Parisian pattern: an influx of lawyers in the period of the constitutional monarchy, with its limited franchise and relatively liberal political system; somewhat less legal men during the radical phase from the autumn of 1792 to 1795. The average age level of participants in section government declined as the Revolution advanced, and during the radical phase, the revolutionary committee, as elsewhere, tended to be recruited from farther down the social scale and among younger age groups than the men in the other organs of revolutionary power.

But what lay behind these changes is not readily apparent, as Professor Slavin would himself admit. Droits-de-l'Homme was a strange neighbourhood. Like the Saint-Germain quarter, its money — noble wealth — deserted it in the first years of the Revolution, with presumably disastrous effects on the local economy. What was left was a heteroge-