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Seccombe, Wally. *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline*. London: Verso, 1993. Pp. vii, 286. Bibliography, index. $65.00 (cloth)

Bryan D. Palmer

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Seccombe, Wally. *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline*. London: Verso, 1993. Pp. vii, 286. Bibliography, index. $65.00 (cloth).

This volume continues Seccombe's historical sociology of the relationship of production and reproduction. Like its predecessor, *A Millenium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe* (1991), this long essay seeks to materialize demography, family history, and gender relations, by situating them within analysis of particular modes of production and class relations. At the same time, it broadens historical materialism by insisting on the complementarity of the extraction of surplus value and the replenishing and sustenance of the capacity of workers to bring labour power to the theatre of class relations. It is a forceful revisionist statement, one that should be read by a wide audience.

Seccombe's argument is grounded in a deep familiarity with relevant writings and a painstaking conceptualization. Against Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group, who have posited the continuity of the nucleur form in family structure, and their simplifiers who have reified the nucleur configuration and defend this "traditional" unit against the contemporary "disintegrating" family, Seccombe historicizes family formation in ways attentive to the shifting reciprocal structures of families, farms, factories, and forces of production. Central are the changes in the ensemble of demographic and development disciplines as the first industrial revolution gave way to the second. Premised on the application of steam power and the diffusion of technologies capable of transforming the division of labour from handicraft to manufacturing, the first industrial revolution was associated with movement within family formation. Increasingly families took on the trappings of proletarian existence, structured by considerations of various markets (labour, housing, marriage) which defined and restricted options in ways to confirm the family as a nucleur unit, augmented by prolonged adolescence, a contingent of mobile lodgers, and the taking-in of economically marginalized, often elderly, kin. Much of the complexity of family structure during the first industrial revolution was a product of the interplay of possibility and need, in which economies of the wage and economies of subsistence blurred in the proletarian household. Seccombe sees this as an act of theft:

> wages funded merely the daily replacement costs of labour-power, not the full generational reproduction costs; the difference was reaped by capitalists as profit. Vast sectors of industrial capital were dependent upon the replacement of worn-out urban labourers with "fresh blood" from the countryside. This was a form of "primitive accumulation" — an immense value appropriation from the periphery to centre. (pp. 74-5)

Much of the historiography on poverty and the "standard of living" controversy can be read in this light, and Seccombe provides a useful update and familial twist on this literature.

The extraction of economic and demographic surplus could not last. Employers had successfully and actively dismantled "a centuries-old mode of intergenerational skill transmission among the labouring classes (based on guild and craft organizations), while state authorities had yet to establish a universal alternative." (p. 79) Capitalism's qualitative expansion and continuity demanded new agendas for a more judicious consumption of labour power, lest the proverbial golden eggs laid by the working-class family be squandered in the aggressively short-sighted handling of recklessly individualist bosses. Thus capitalism as a social formation, now consolidated, demanded and secured, often against the protests of employers, curbs on working time and child labour, invested in an infrastructure of education and urban improvement, and raised the breadwinner wage to allow working-class families a gendered division of labour more attentive to the long-term reproduction and replenishment of the proletariat as a whole. Benevolence had little to do with such a shifting of gears. Ironically, but understandably, labour's own protests at the intolerable brutality of life in the capitalist city fueled the engines of change, especially when insurrection threatened as in 1848, 1871, and periods of the 1880s. The working class proved more far-sighted in its program of preservation than did capital.

At the point of production this coincided with the intensifications and concentrations of labour — mass production, Fordism, and the profit-generating advances of hydro-electricity, steel-making, refinements in engineering, and the employment of rubber and chemicals in industrial processes — in the second industrial revolution. Changes in the family were no less momentous: working-class households were now rigidly segregated from those of their class superiors, codifying class as "a life apart"; within homes more decidedly nucleur, the status of the male "breadwinner" took on enhanced prestige, necessitating a hierarchy of decision-making that extended from the allocation of *his* wage to the demeanour and dividends of the dinner table. Most dramatic was the proletarian fertility decline that substantially

reduced the size of working-class families in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Seccombe's explanation of this process of "starting to stop," what he calls an "un-immaculate reconception," stresses the reciprocities of the working-class bed, where economic necessity met sexual agency in tempering male desire and enhancing women's wants.

Many will find Seccombe's conclusions on change and the reconsitution of the family engrossing in light of concerns with familial breakdown since the 1960s. But, compared to his pains to rethink the long history of family formation, these last pages are suggestive rather than substantive. They open important questions, to be sure, but they do so in ways that strain credibility. Seccombe's statement that "the overall division of labour between spouses is probably more unequal now than in the 1950s" flies directly in the face of much that is happening in working-class households, whatever the persistence of gender roles, and seems less a judgement of actuality and more a statement of political purpose in which the male academic makes plain his gender allegiance.

Because so much more is there, in terms of engagement with a host of conflicting analytic positions, and because Seccombe is usually attentive to counter-evidence, the tilt of the text is not overly off-putting. I found myself less irritated by unsubstantiated assumptions about the masculinist bias of modern labour historians (p. 148) or his blunt generalization that working-class families were ordered by the subordination of everyone's needs to the imperative of replenishing the main breadwinner's labour-power (p. 155), than I was with his somewhat cavalier, and certainly decontextualized, caricature of Klara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg as "party luminaries" crusading against birth control (p. 165) or his willingness to abandon political and conceptual meaning in a trendy slap at marxism's understanding of class consciousness. In the former instances my disagreements could engage with the entirety of his presentation, wheras in the latter there was in fact little to grapple with save for Seccombe's grinding political axe.

In the final pages, the nuances, reciprocities, and relational developments central to Seccombe's understanding of family formation too often fade into fashionable formulae. Thus, his conclusions concerning gender struggle and fertility decline are, in the substantive chapter on this process, a balanced treatement of the political economy of family formation, exploring the structural constraints and necessities of productive life and the give-and-take of gendered difference within the household. "Husbands were prepared to temper, if not to surrender entirely, their right to incautious intercourse; and wives were better able to insist on restraint when they could appeal to a mutual interest." (p. 193) Pages later Seccombe loosens his political tongue and argues that "the fertility decline was instigated by married women who refused to carry pregananc-ies to term and became increasingly insistent that husbands exercise sexual restraint.... Most of the major changes in modern family life have been driven by women." (p. 210)

Fortunately, Seccombe's two books present sufficient evidence and analysis to challenge this interpretive bluntness and suggest that historical outcome is not reduced to a gendered choice (and that coming from the gendered sphere acknowledged to have the least access to power). Rather, it is the product of critical negotiations — some direct, but most mediated — involving men and women caught up in the constraints and imbalances of ideology and economy, mutuality and separation. Like no other texts, Seccombe's two volumes remind us that men and women make all aspects of their history, including themselves, but that they never quite do this just as they please.

Bryan D. Palmer
Department of History
Queen's University

Crocker, Ruth Hutchinson. *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Black and white photographs, bibliography, index. US $39.95 (cloth).

Stadum, Beverly. *Poor Women and their Families: Hard-Working Charity Cases, 1900-1930.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992. Pp. xxviii, 235. Index. US $16.95 (paper).

Ruth Crocker allows social workers such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelly to keep their place among the ranks of urban heroes, but in *Social Work and Social Order*, she strips the laurels from the brows of the the settlement movement's "B" team. Beverly Stadum, meanwhile, honours a group of ordinary heroes: women who used charity services, including settlement houses, to cope with poverty. Reading the two books together draws attention to welfare relationships between 1900 and 1930, relationships that helped form the social hierarchies and experiences of poverty in the early twentieth century city.

Stadum's argument is a challenge to the depiction of welfare recipients as dependent. Against the enduring right-wing stereotype of poor women as helpless, lazy, and chronically reliant on handouts, Stadum describes a highly resourceful group of working-class women, for whom