Labour/Le Travailleur

Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques

Volume 14, 1984

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ltt14bn01

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)
Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN
0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cette note

AXELROD TAKES US back in time to a period that some of were never part of, but that others in the university remember and indeed, to this day, live in. Those who have been teaching in universities since the 1950s recall a time of economic buoyancy, corporate largesse (reaching its peak in Ontario in 1957, when the Soviet Sputnik pushed corporate aid to provincial universities to $11.6 million, an increase of 450 per cent in one brief, eventful year), and an unchanging and uniform curriculum governed not by relevance but by “standards” (a word usually pronounced with distinctively non-Canadian accents). Changes came. The mid-to-late 1960s witnessed the transformation of academic life. Economic needs and demographic pressures unleashed a reckless expansionism, while student activism and the politicization of intellectual life posed new demands and raised serious doubts, in the public mind, about student and, in some cases, professorial antipathy to the values of the “free world.” But throughout the entire post-war pre-1968 period, in spite of dramatic shifts, two constants remained in the history of higher education. First, universities were supposed to be both centres of critical thought and a utilitarian training ground for a materialistic world. This dual purpose, however, posed no contradiction; a growth economy had places for engineers and thinkers, and actually premised its self-conception on the need for thinkers and engineers to be interchangeable. At least that was the corporate and academic rhetoric. Second, because of this dual purpose higher education was to be publicly funded, but privately run; the benefits of education were to accrue to all, but the guidance of programmes must be left to those who knew what to do with them. When businesses gave money to the universities, for instance, it overwhelmingly went towards the concrete, in both senses of the word, capital outlay in construction being the corporation’s favoured path of support. Planning, as a consequence, was piecemeal and inconsistent, and university administration rather haphazard. This was affordable in the days of limitless educational growth and unrestricted horizons. But stagflation in the economy, and the narrowing employment prospects for all Canadians, including university graduates, brought the state to a new set of senses in the post-1968 years. Decisions that had supposedly long been governed by abstract ideals turned increasingly on the hard realities of costs and marketability. More scholar for the dollar was the government demand, but there was as yet no policy or programme to realize this end. Ontario’s universities were plunged into the chaos of cutbacks, where they have been balanced uncertainly ever since. If Axelrod provides only tantalizing glimpses into some of the consequences of this deterioration — faculty unionism, the shift from student activism to apathy, the reification of the “hard” sciences and the waning of the humanities — he has
laid the material foundations upon which an appreciation of the state of higher learning in Canada can be built.


THIS IS A pessimistic but serious look at bilingualism and multiculturalism in Canada, with stress upon the inadequacies of state policy and practice. It is distinguished from the current crop of studies on such issues by its attempt to broaden the discussion beyond the limitations of the French and English ramifications, including as well treatment of ethnicity and the dilemmas of native peoples.


LABOUR HISTORIANS in the making will enjoy this fictional account of working life in Montreal in the 1870s. The fourth in Freeman’s adventure series for those aged 9 to 13, *Trouble at Lachine Mill* is the story of two child workers, Meg and Jamie Bains, and their acclimatization to the Lachine Shirt Factory. Hired as strikebreakers, this precocious duo eventually lead a strike themselves, overcome the barrier of French vs. English, drive a tyrannical foreman from the shop, and secure the original skilled strikers their old jobs. Life in the new factory was not so bad after their intervention: "There were no more fines, no beatings, and the black hole was closed for good." Too good to be true, perhaps, and certainly unlike Fortier’s cigar works in Montreal, known for its black hole well into the 1880s. But truth is often stranger than fiction, and usually more perverse.


THIS IS A detailed and sensitively-organized bibliography encompassing both primary and secondary material relevant to an understanding of social policy in Canada since the 1840s. Introduced by an overly brief essay on the historical evolution of the welfare state, it is appropriately catholic in its inclusion of works attending to trade unions, housing, education, child immigration, and literally scores of other topics. At times the organizational precision presents a daunting maze, but researchers in many fields will benefit from wandering around in it. They will find omissions, of course, and question why some works are cited while others are ignored. In the end, however, they can only agree that this compilation is a major help, saving them countless hours and endless frustration.


HERE IS A reminder that the bread-basket of the world was something more than it seemed. Breen presents an assessment of the bonanza years of the beef companies between 1874-1896 and the political struggle that resulted as the ranchers contested squatting and settlement before 1911. The final section of the book outlines the ranchers’ increased political fortune with the Conservative electoral victory of 1911 and then explores the cattlemen’s rush to organize and secure markets in the post-war years. Few “hands” put in an appearance besides the ranchers. But as Breen notes in passing, the ranching frontier rested on a bedrock of waged labour that encompassed mobility, race, ethnicity, gender, and patriarchy: "[One] factor setting the ranch apart from the farm was the matter of labour... The ranching enterprise... was much more congenial to the establishment and maintenance of a country estate. Those who would not labour on farms
would herd cattle on a ranch, for even in its own day there was a mystique about the cattle industry that ensured a ready supply of 'cowhands.' The retinues, including governess, cook, foreman, and cowboys, reached substantial proportions on some larger ranches. . . In their comfortable homes with a Chinese cook and a maid or governess to look after their children, members of the cattle compact lived in a manner that contrasted sharply with the agriculturalist in his sod or frame house situated on the often treeless and windswept plain.”


AN EXCITING AND bold exploration of the material culture, social relations, and sources of religious and political discord in early Virginia, this book is an imaginative effort to reconstruct the texture of a colonial society. Isaac scrutinizes the land and its uses, church and home, occasions of leisure, and the consolidation of the gentility's authority prior to the Revolution. He then provides analysis of movements of religious dissent and the ways in which they chipped away at authority and order, contributing to the revolutionary ferment of the 1770s. Finally, the book ends with a discussion of the transformation of Virginia, where “the principle of individual autonomy... was reorganizing late eighteenth-century Anglo-Virginians’ perceptions of their world and the expectations they had of it.”


THE CORE OF this study examines themes of interest to students of working-class life, situating particular discussions of the failure of socialism in America, the black experience, and women's place within the cultural (largely literary and artistic) history stretching from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to the end of World War I. Focusing on figures like Henry James, Emma Goldman, and W.E.B. DuBois, Conn argues that America experienced a fundamental cultural schizophrenia in these years. It wrapped itself in contradiction as it turned anxiously to the past at the same time that it gazed hopefully into the future. It is E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and Robert Wiebe's *The Search for Order* revisited, structured around the facts of fiction and other creative endeavours.


STARTED BY Jack and Judy McCusker, this newsletter is now entering its third year. The Marine Workers Historical Association was itself started in 1979, the product of a gathering of ex-shipmates drawn largely from the New York City metropolitan area. They have members across the United States and Canada, and are “dedicated to record a true account of the maritime struggle against the shipowners, in collusion with phony union officials.” Filled with oral histories, work poetry, reminiscences, epitaphs, accounts of specific struggles, and letters, the newsletter is, like some of the products of the History Workshop in England, an exercise in democratizing history. Both the political combativity of the newsletter and its broad treatment of the maritime work experience emerge from a glance at the contents of specific issues. In the final issue of 1983, for instance, a former vice-president of the NMU responds critically and bluntly to official union views of the organization’s origins, a lively account of the Great Lakes Strike of 1947 appears, sources from the 1930s are
reprinted, and a number of recollections
are offered by a host of seamen. Mem-
bership in the MWHA, which includes a
subscription to The Hawsepipe, is $10.00
yearly. Send cheques or money orders to
Marine Workers Historical Association,
10 Mitchell Place, Apartment 3B, New
York, New York, USA 10017. If you
have material for publication send it to
Loretta Szeliga, 137 Avenue A, 3G, New
York, New York, USA 10009.

Jonathan Schneer, Ben Tillett: Portrait of
a Labour Leader (London: Croom Helm
1982).

BEN TILLETT's rise from the obscurity of
working-class radicalism in the 1880s to a
socialist unionist of national standing by
the turn of the century is chronicled in this
biography by Jonathan Schneer. Cast into
the very centre of British labour history in
the Victorian age by his prominence in the
London dock strike of 1889, Tillett's
trajectory captured the direction of the
labour movement as a whole. Agitator and
organizer, orator of uncommon ability,
Tillett's grasp of theory and principle was
less than impressive. His failings may
thus have been those of the very same
rank and file in whom he placed so little
faith. He was the archetypal "labourist"
or, what to many may be the same thing,
the archetypal proletarian.

Robert Schrank, ed., Industrial Democ-
rac
ty at Sea: Authority and Democracy on
a Norwegian Freighter (Cambridge: MIT
Press 1983).

THREE AMERICAN merchant seamen
provide their own accounts of reactions to
experimental democratization of working
life aboard a Norwegian freighter. Six
academics and consultants then respond to
these workers, among them William Foot
Whyte. Premised on corporatist notions of
the compatibility of labour and capital,
such Scandinavian innovations are much
acclaimed in the industrial relations and
QWL literature. What do workers have to
say about them, however? As one seaman
suggested, worker satisfaction does not
turn on "such words as democratization
or autonomy or self-actualization." These
are often abstractions, against which the
more tangible realities of wage rates and job
conditions weigh rather more heavily. But as
this seaman also noted, some intangibles seldom captured
in the conceptual ordering of the quality
of working life are equally important to
those who labour, including the opportu-
nity to do work that generates pride.
Democratization, so-called, does not
always address such concerns, tangible
and intangible, as some of the academic
commentary following the seamen's
accounts makes abundantly clear.

Sydney Labour History Group, What
Rough Beast? The State and Social Order
in Australian History (Sydney: George
Allen & Unwin 1982).

THIS EXCITING IF eclectic collection of
essays will prove invaluable for those
with an interest in the history of crime,
women, and workers. Organized in sec-
tions concerned with state intervention in
popular culture, containment of poten-
tially disruptive social groups (criminals,
the unemployed, and those who refused to
adapt to domesticity and conformist views
of sexuality), and the political place of
repression, the book ranges broadly
across time and topic. The result is a rare
assortment of empirical essays that are
tied together by common theoretical con-
cerns, associated with Australian confronta-
tions with capitalist, racial, and patriar-
chal relations and authorities.

M.I. Finley, Politics in the Ancient World
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
1983).

AN ACKNOWLEDGED authority on the
ancient world offers a succinct sweep
through state, class, and power in antiquity. He looks at politics and ideology, with particular concern for how the consent of the ruled was sustained over time. This is a topic of concern to all who study labour, in the past or in the present. Neo-Weberian in his approach, Finley lays stress upon the "acceptance in all classes of the legitimacy of status and status-inequality," exploring how patronage and shared values consolidated such consensus. His arguments will inevitably be compared to G.E.M. de Ste Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*.

B.D.P.


IN THE FIVE YEARS since it was originally published, Hopkins' book has become one of the most prominent lower-level texts on its subject. It is aimed primarily at English "A" level students, but is written at a level for beginning undergraduates in U.S. and Canadian universities. The book's coverage is good, both in terms of issues and perspectives in the research literature. It is, perhaps, skewed a bit away from the recent revival of Marxist-inspired critical social history. A new edition (rather than just a reprinting) might easily remedy this, and in general improve the book's scholarly currency. The scholarship is sound, however, and treatments usually fair. Hopkins does have a tendency occasionally to throw in his own unsupported challenges to the scholars he cites. See, for example, his suggestion on p. 37 that Thompson's evidence is inadequate to his characterizations of Peterloo. Though I am sympathetic to the notion that there are difficulties with Thompson's language of "class war," these are not pointed out to the student-reader. Instead, Hopkins just alludes to inadequate evidence for "proof." It's hard to know just what sort of evidence "proves" terminology, but students do need to know more precisely on what sorts of bases such arguments turn. Still, this is, as its printing history indicates, a very usable textbook.

Craig Calhoun
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill
It's an achievement. Twenty years of publishing. No small achievement for a socialist magazine. We're small, scrappy & independent. A national meeting place for people in struggle. This year we are celebrating. Watch for our 20th Anniversary Issue. Coming this October!

Varda Burstyn, Fred Gudmundson, Stan Gray, Brian Palmer, Pauline Vaillencourt, Reg Whitaker, And More. On the Women's Movement, the Native Movement, and (old) New Left. Canadian Labour, Quebec, & the Trudeau Era.

Subscribe Now! Choose your free copy of either:

- Sharing the Shop Floor — By Stan Gray, or
- The Life & Art of Jackson Beardy — by Ken Hughes


Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
________________________ (Postal Code) ________

Send cheque or money order. Orders must be pre-paid.

Canadian Dimension 891-44 Princess St., Winnipeg, Man. Canada R3B 1K2