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Citer cette note

Lab workers constitute the third largest health profession in Canada. But their history is vastly under-studied compared to that of nurses and physicians. Twohig traces the origin of lab work across the Maritime provinces. He notes the beginning of training programs in the 1920s and the absorption of a large female force of trained nurses for lab training. But medical laboratory work was gendered, with women staffing hospital and public health laboratories while men worked in research laboratories at universities. In both cases, the workers carried out technical functions while physicians interpreted results. Twohig traces recruitment practices as well as outlining wages and working conditions over the period.


On 14 October 1976 more than a million Canadian workers struck for one day to protest the Trudeau government’s wage and price controls which, as Trudeau had warned when Tory leader Robert Stanfield had campaigned for controls in 1974, controlled wages but did not control prices. This book, by one of the organizers of the Saint John edition of the general strike, describes the events that led to the strike and suggests that labour pressures succeeded in reducing the impact of controls on organized labour and eventually killing the wage controls program.


District 8 of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), lead by Communist William Sentner, played a leading role in promoting militant unionism in St. Louis and Iowa in the 1930s and 1940s. It was a casualty of the Cold War and the “intraclass political struggle” (236) of that period. Feurer demonstrates that the Communists and their allies in the union campaigned hard for grassroots unionism but lost out to their conservative working-class opponents who enjoyed the support of both capitalists and the capitalist state.


This book won the 2005 Frederick Jackson Turner Award, among other prizes. It presents a rather different view of “American frontierism” than Turner. Ngai traces the evolution of government policies regarding immigration from the 1920s, policies in which racial categories proved paramount. The book focuses especially on efforts to keep out Asians.
between the wars and the “braceros” policies that attempted to create a Mexican agricultural proletariat in the US without giving these workers citizenship in the country that was benefiting from their labour.


Fogelson traces the use of restrictive covenants in the development of posh American suburbs. Not only did such covenants explicitly exclude racial and ethnic minorities regardless of income, but requirements for particular home features insured that both the working class and non-conformists of every type were excluded as well.


This is a narrative institutional history by the co-director of the Samuel Gompers papers. Grace Palladino presents the history of the crafts unions sympathetically while also posing gently some questions regarding their positions on race, gender, and other social issues. Overall, however, she provides too little information about issues of democracy or its absence within these unions, their relations with other segments of the labour movement, and their larger involvement in society. This is a detailed and well-written history of business unionism, but largely an uncritical one.


This is a cold warrior’s analysis of pro-Soviet forces in the British Labour Party. Lilleker focuses on the relatively small group of Labour MPs who could see little wrong with Soviet policies and practices and regarded the Soviet regime as unequivocally socialist. But Lilliker, in turn, views the similarly black-and-white anti-Soviet views of the Labour mainstream with uncritical, Cold War eyes.


Reay’s focus is on rural labourers in the nineteenth century. He notes that many rural workers were engaged in non-agricultural enterprises, and portrays the varieties of work that existed in both agricultural and non-agricultural settings. He also points out the varieties of forms of leisure and types of protest within rural England.


This is a study of workers in a single trade and their responses to the unfolding events of the early years of Bolshevik Russia. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks initially clashed within the independent printers’ union, and the printers often acted in opposition to productivist dictates from the leaders of the new regime. The book traces the evolution of labour regimes in 1920s Soviet Russia, from a brief period of militarization of labour during the Civil War to one of collective
bargaining within enterprises beginning in 1922 that was stifled by the end of the decade after a Stalinist purge of the union. The “golden years of nep” and the active debates about how work should be organized and what individual workers owed to the collective goals of society form the most interesting part of this book which demonstrates the chasm between the Lenin and Stalin periods in terms of workers’ rights.


Rossman uses archival evidence from the former USSR to unearth innumerable examples of workers opposing the Stalin regime’s labour policies. Strikes, demonstrations, food riots, slowdowns, assaults on officials, and letters to the authorities scared the regime and resulted both in repression of dissenters and sometimes reforms or capitulation to specific workers’ demands.


The image of outdated, polluting industrial plants in the former German Democratic Republic is a familiar one. To this could be added mutilated forests, nitrates and heavy metal in the waters, and chemical-intensive farmland. GDR scientists often warned the Communist authorities about the long-term damage of a model of industrial planning that made no allowances for nature’s limits, but their concerns were rejected. Nelson charges that party ideology, which applied Marxist and Leninist notions in a rigid manner and was closed to considerations other than the need for economic growth, was the culprit in the despoiling of the environment in the USSR.

Michel Duquette et al., Collective Action and Radicalism in Brazil: Women, Urban Housing, and Rural Movements (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2005)

This book examines key social movements in Brazil since the collapse of military rule in the 1980s. The landless movement, the housing movement in São Paulo, and the women’s movement are highlighted. The book outlines the joy and then disillusionment of the progressive movements with the election of Lula da Silva of the Workers’ Party as president in 2002 as it became clear that the socialism espoused by Lula in the 1990s had given way to neo-liberalism in office.


Dore suggests that coffee growing, which began its Nicaragua boom in 1870, produced systems of feudal peonage rather than a capitalist land-holding system. Within this system of peonage, Indigenous women were the most oppressed group. Dore focuses equally on that oppression and on the various ways in which Indigenous peasant women resisted patriarchal control both by planters and by the men in their families.

This sociological study analyzes the results of an extensive survey of British women that questioned what they considered as they purchased new kitchens. Unsurprisingly, they sought a combination of practical features and aesthetics, all within their pre-determined budgets. The book however makes no distinction among women on a class or income basis, a definite weakness.


Breton explores Victorian and early twentieth century ideas of work and workers in Britain as revealed in the literature of three key figures. Breton finds that all three authors romanticized precapitalist organizations of work and that they all had shallow understandings of political economy, including Orwell. The writing is unfortunately rather opaque.

A.F.


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