

Lis, Catharina. *Social Change and the Labouring Poor: Antwerp, 1770-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. xiii, 237. Tables, maps, index. \$20.00 (U.S.)

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and tables which should satisfy even the most addicted printout buff.

One additional observation. As a colonial historian I applaud and am grateful for the volumes produced by Byers and his predecessors. As an historian of New England, however, I think it's time to move on. The New England town didn't disappear after the colonial period. What we need now are studies of towns in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Should Edward Byers be looking for another project, he might find fascinating the study of Nantucket's last 160 years. His interest in the tension between conformity and individualism, in utopianism, in elites, and in statistics could be put to fully as productive use as it has been in this admirable volume.

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Lis, Catharina. *Social Change and the Labouring Poor: Antwerp, 1770-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. xiii, 237. Tables, maps, index. \$20.00 (U.S.).

This necessary and substantial piece of scholarship adds much to current knowledge about evolving European cities and the development of their working populations. Using rich archival sources to provide extensive quantitative evidence, Catharina Lis attacks the theory that poverty was the result of economic underdevelopment or backwardness and that the problem of the poor would be solved with "industrialization" or "modernization." The theory under attack, as it is stated by the author, is somewhat of a "straw thesis" which does not give credit to the complexity and nuance of the works which support it; but Lis goes on to draw a fascinating portrait of Antwerp in change during a period which, she argues, was not one of underdevelopment but rather "an accelerated phase in the development of capitalism," with drastic social effects.

Antwerp is remarkable because economic growth during the period 1770-1860 was accompanied by industrial decline. From the mid-seventeenth century, it had been a textile manufacturing centre with a large population of masters and skilled journeymen. But during the 1740s, those with capital began to invest in the textile industry. This trend and increasing competition led to the gradual degradation of textile craftsmen and concentration of industrial mastery into the hands of a wealthy few. Even as artisans became poorer in the late eighteenth century and the use of cheaper child and female labour increased, the reform of poor relief was underway to provide a more centralized, stringent system which abolished guild relief, forbade begging and provided

miniscule allowances as an incentive to work for reduced wages in increasingly miserable conditions.

This increasing division between capital and labour is the familiar weave of classic Marxian fabrics, but Antwerp was not to become a classic industrial town. By 1820, a combination of technological problems, political changes and the transfer of capital to more profitable ventures in commerce and finance had undermined the importance of textiles, and the town on the Scheldt had become primarily an international port. This transformation had "disastrous" results for the labouring population. Already "proletarianized," they were more than ever to suffer "pauperization." As port-related activities gained predominance, there was some new employment to compensate for the loss of textile jobs, but casual labour, the primary new occupation, was even less reliable and more taxing than the degraded textile work. Work in the port usually also demanded the physical strength of young males. This necessity excluded women and children, and deterred many former textile workers. Much of the casual labour force was therefore provided by migrants from rural areas of surplus population and economic crisis. The influx of young immigrants was fundamental to the expansion of the wealthy commercial economy; but it also aggravated the social problems caused by deindustrialization. Natives with unwanted skills were more than ever forced to accept poor relief. An increasingly young, single, working population competed in a fierce and uncertain labour market.

While she eschews the debate on living standards in her introduction, Lis nonetheless enters that fray with great statistical vigour in chapters six to nine. Military considerations, commercial expansion and the extension of exclusive areas for the elites reduced living space for a growing population of workers whose income in any event was such that new residential building for the poor was unprofitable. Rents rose and families were often forced to inhabit windowless rooms with only a few square metres of space per resident. In addition, the poor of Antwerp suffered a steady dietary degradation in both caloric intake and the quality of food. Despite increasing strictness in the application of eligibility criteria, the proportion of relief recipients in the total population remained high throughout the period, rising above forty per cent in crisis years, such as 1845.

In the almost continuous emergency of the early nineteenth century, according to Lis, the poor resorted to various strategies of self-preservation. Attitudes to marriage and procreation, for example, underwent a gradual change as incomes became less certain and the port economy diminished the value of female and child labour. The abandonment of infants grew increasingly common until the 1840s, when working people began to adjust their matrimonial and sexual habits to the reduced prospects which by then seemed permanent. Even *in extremis*, however, the labouring classes of Antwerp were not dangerous. Rates of theft, begging and prostitution did rise, but crime remained a marginal solu-

tion, rejected by most and temporary to many of those who did adopt it.

The family, a traditional base of solidarity in industrial slums, was much weaker in the deindustrialized slum because the peculiarities of the port economy reduced the frequency of family formation and the ability of families to take in aged relatives. Moreover, the iron discipline and the indignity of life in the *ateliers de charité* of Antwerp were particularly harsh. And so, the author argues, the town's proletariat relied heavily on "dense social networks" of mutual aid before succumbing to the workhouse or the street. The assisted poor in every case were not a discrete *lumpen-proletariat* but rather part of a larger working class whose members were only too aware that they themselves might easily become the objects of charity in hard times.

Professor Lis's analysis is densely packed and concise, perhaps too much so; at times she falls into the arid pattern of simply explicating her excellent quantitative work. Her book needs a Henry Mayhew or Restif de la Bretonne to provide some illustrative detail, colour and immediacy. A clearer discussion of systems of assistance and their underlying philosophy would also have been helpful. Her dismissal of private charity, for example, is somewhat perfunctory. Bourgeois donors, she argues, on rather slim evidence, were consciously propping up the social order rather than simply responding to need and to their own humanitarian impulses, an assertion that evokes, to the reader, E. P. Thompson's warning against "the enormous condescension of posterity." That having been said, however, Professor Lis has given here much of great scholarly value, presented with admirable economy.

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Greenberg, Brian. *Worker and Community: Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York 1850-1884*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. Pp. ix, 227. Map, index. \$34.50 cloth; \$12.95 paper (U.S.).

Oestreicher, Richard Jules. *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. Pp. xiv, 263. Figures, 7 black and white plates, index. \$24.95 (U.S.).

In that curious intellectual amalgam called urban studies, community studies in labour or working class history have come to form an important ingredient. The collection of American monographs is particularly impressive, thanks in part to the two scholarly series whose recent offerings are

herein reviewed; the SUNY Series in American Social History (Charles Stephenson and Elizabeth Pleck, Editors), and the University of Illinois series, *The Working Class in American History* (David Brody, David Montgomery, and the late Herbert G. Gutman, Editorial Advisors). Neither series provides the reader with a statement of its *raison d'être* (and apart from personal acknowledgements to Stephenson and Montgomery by the two authors, the role of the general editors is also obscure) but judging from these volumes and others, they seem to represent a convergence of at least two historiographical themes. The first is the introduction of a Marxist perspective on social change in the United States, albeit in muted and modified forms; the second is that distinctively American quest for community, as an alternative counterpoint to prevailing ideologies.

Brian Greenberg, a University of Delaware historian, chooses mid-nineteenth century Albany for a critical assessment of class and community in industrializing America. At first glance the upstate New York capital does not look like a promising locale, but as late as 1860 the former fur-trading post stood thirteenth in America's hierarchy of cities, and its administrative and commercial functions were supplemented twenty years later by some 800 manufactories whose size was slightly above the national average. Before the rise of Chicago, Albany was a leading centre of meat-packing, its stoves were famous, and at one time its shopcrafts boasted being "the most extensive railway establishment in the country." The city, however "failed to generate truly large-scale manufacturing, and by the 1880s, important segments of Albany's economy were under great pressure from competing cities." Such patterns of urban growth, decline, and competition across the sprawling expanse of North America would have major impacts on class formation and working-class effectiveness which remain, perhaps, inadequately studied. The removal of New York Central railway work by the Vanderbilt monopoly from Albany, for example, blunted the militancy of shopcraft workers who were pioneers of the Eight Hour struggle fourteen years before Haymarket. Somewhat analogous was the situation of another leading sector of Albany labour, the iron moulders, who attempted to overcome the evils of competition through a series of local co-operative ventures. There were no simple solutions, however, to the industrial stagnation correctly described by Albany leaders as the "danger that menaces the working man as well as the rest of the community."

Greenberg's site and periodization — 1850-1884 — offers an outlook on the world of an "early" industrialism directed by entrepreneurs and local elites firmly rooted in their communities. The essential context of such a political economy was actually pre-industrial, and though Greenberg's paradigm of "class versus community" loyalties or consciousness owes much to orthodox Marxism, he also finds insights in the writings of the pre-industrial observer, Alexis de Toqueville. De Toqueville believed that the primary ameliorative