

**Petrow, Stefan. *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. Pp. xiii, 343. \$78.95**

**John C. Weaver**

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Harry Braverman on the labour process by focusing on the clothing, boot and printing trades in Victoria, Australia from 1880 to 1939.

Braverman's thesis has fallen on hard times as of late, with good reason, and Frances provides an excellent discussion of the recent literature, both Marxist and feminist, on this topic. In doing so, she indicates the numerous problems with Braverman's thesis about women as a reserve army of labour used by gender-blind employers to replace men and their higher wages. Her approach widens the field within which changes to the organization of work is viewed, suggesting that "it is not possible to accord theoretical primacy to any single factor; the precise weighting of each contribution can only be established empirically." (2) Frances also carefully details the ambiguities of the effectiveness and extent of Taylorism and other strands of scientific management.

As well, her immersion in the numerous debates concerning 'Bravermania' is coupled with a view of feminist debates about the social construction of skill and the position of women within the labour market. For Frances, the nature of work processes under capitalism in these trades "arose out of the interplay between product and labour markets, capital supply, technology, racial and gender orders and the activities of the state." (11) Frances provides a narrative of the dynamic of control and exploitation in each trade through her attention to the uneven but discernable processes of the deskilling, fragmentation and feminisation of work.

For example, at the end of the nineteenth century, men in the clothing trades were able to monopolize higher paying jobs in the factory while women remained primarily confined to outwork at much lower rates of pay. While the gendered division of labour in this trade remained con-

stant during this period, the reorganization of work in the boot industry through mechanization was successful. In this case, working men rationalized the use of machines through the use of the male breadwinner ideal, stressing the importance of their earnings to the maintenance of the working-class family. This resulted in the displacement of female and child labour, a process even more intense in the printing trades, where machines such as the linotype were masculinized, entering the workplace as the sole domain of men. Thus, it is clear that there was no simple link between the presence of women in wage labour and the organization of work.

What should also be clear from the above examples is that women's particular demands were customarily not supported by male trade union hierarchies. While women in the printing and textile trades won their struggle for the establishment of a female organizer after World War One, women in the boot industry remained dependent on male officials. Generally, all women encountered difficulties in getting effective representation of their needs on both a daily basis and in times of negotiations. This resulted in women's increased vulnerability when work was reorganized, as men often settled for limiting the effects of scientific management on their work at the expense of changes to women's work.

In *The Politics of Work*, we are presented with a portrayal in which the cycles of the colonial economy and the increase in the involvement of the state are seen very effectively alongside ideas about the male breadwinner, female domesticity, and child labour. Unfortunately, it is the complexity of the thesis that undermines her presentation. With a monograph of this size, Frances has approximately sixty pages to cover sixty years of history in each trade. As a result, we are given few glimpses about how workers themselves

actually experienced the transformation of the labour processes in question. Instead, the focus is primarily upon union officials and their struggles with employers, managers and the state. As well, little space is devoted to detailing the prevailing gender order outside of the workplace. Despite these criticisms, this book should prove to be a very good example of the theoretical and methodological potential of a feminist-informed study of the transformation of labour processes.

Todd McCallum  
Department of History  
Simon Fraser University

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This addition to studies on the history of English policing is a revised thesis; it had been supervised by V.A.C. Gatrell and examined by Oliver MacDonagh and David Phillips. Such a provenance implies a well-crafted, thoroughly researched, and provocative book. That is what we get. The acknowledgements likewise indicate that *Policing Morals* is situated in an intellectual tradition, for the thesis supervisor and the two examiners are revisionists. Their writings on the growth of state power in the nineteenth century criticized "the engines of moral repression"; moreover, they doubted the effectiveness of state agencies in achieving the improvements claimed for them.

Appropriately, the book opens with John Stuart Mill's case against the use of criminal law to enforce moral order. (7) It closes with a tribute to the civil libertarians who "never acquiesced in the state regulation of individual morality." (301) Stefan Petrow, then, does more than chronicle events. He has taken a libertarian position—more common among histo-

ries of English than American policing—which guides him as he covers the modernization of policing by discussing four topics: the attempts to watch over habitual criminals, and the crusades against prostitution, drunkenness, and betting. It is noteworthy that he does not consider the Metropolitan Police surveillance of political activity, perhaps because he has defined the topic as the policing of morals. Or was it because, as my colleague Richard Rempel discovered some years ago, the files on political matters were closed? The want of a freedom of information act expresses a secretiveness that stimulates libertarian scholarship in the United Kingdom.

The dust jacket proclaims that this is “the first full scholarly study of the Metropolitan Police...when it was transformed into a recognizably modern professional police force.” In fact, Petrow sets aside enormous areas of policing history. His is not directly a work about administrative developments, hiring and recruitment, training, detection and prevention, the beat, traffic control, and other common subjects. After an important introductory section charting arguments by contemporaries for and against police supervision of morality, Petrow takes up the first of four sets of topics. In two chapters he traces the evolution of ideas about accumulating information on criminals, identifying them, and supervising their movements. This is as close as he comes to describing police work. These chapters show the foundation of a regulatory impulse within the police and the

Home Office. While the roots of this proclivity ran deep into Victorian anxieties about a dangerous class, the collection of information—spying, compiling records, fingerprinting—did little to deter criminals or reduce crime.

The remaining three sections treat, respectively, prostitution, drunkenness, and gambling. Petrow’s social history narratives about the commercial dimensions of “immorality” are at least as interesting as his accounts of interactions among the several parties who attempted to fashion a regulatory state: moral reformers, parliamentarians, the Home Office, the solicitors who advised the Home office, and the police. To his credit, Petrow does not assume that legislation led to oppression; neither does he argue that all moral reform measures were universally unwelcome among people in the working class.

Senior police officers, for example, believed enforcing liquor licensing laws and arresting staggering drunks was a waste of resources. Action took the constables off their beats and protecting property was considered more important than handling drunks. Night duty policemen disliked appearing at court the next morning. Petrow’s conclusion is that “the practicalities of policing drunkenness weighed more heavily on the ordinary policeman on the beat than moral considerations.” (217) Most police also realized that drinking was a popular pastime. Moreover, the judicial system thwarted the regulatory state. Magistrates exer-

cised discretion and some practiced a humane understanding of social conditions; a few were suspicious of unsupported police testimony.

All the same, while indicating complexity, it is easy to suspect that this was not the author’s first inclination. “The Metropolitan Police,” he argues before enumerating qualifications, “were a menacing and unwelcome presence in most working-class lives.” (297) Not having undertaken a comprehensive history of the relations of the police and the working class, the assertion is unproven. Some of his other remarks undermine this direct assertion about the pervasive unpopularity of the police. The lower ranks, as he notes, were half-hearted in their enforcement of intrusive laws. Although relations of the police with the people of Victorian neighbourhoods may never be fully understood now, constables surely did more useful things than attempt to control morals.

What is exciting about this excellent book is that it combines political, social, and intellectual history. By a slight recasting of emphasis, it might have been about the Personal Rights Association, or vice as business in London.

John C. Weaver  
Department of History  
McMaster University

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