

## Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques

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Volume 60, Fall 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt60bn01>

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### Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

### ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

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### Cite this note

(2007). Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 60, 333–338.

## BOOK NOTES / RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

**Judith Hudson Beattie and Helen M. Buss, *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-1857*** (Vancouver: UBC Press 2003)

THE HUDSON'S BAY Company headquarters in London diligently stored letters sent by family to Bay employees who could not receive them because, by the time they were delivered, the employee had returned to Britain, left the Company, or died. Hundreds of these letters are reproduced in full here, including letters to men on ships, *voyageurs*, men at the posts, and emigrant labourers. Company files provide some background regarding the working-class men while the letters reveal a great deal about the family contexts from which these men emerged. There are glimpses here of lives both in Britain and British Columbia. But these fragments will mainly be of interest to those with a good general picture already of lives in this period in both areas.

**Boyce Richardson, *Memoirs of a Media Maverick*** (Toronto: Between the Lines 2003)

THIS IS A SPIRITED tale of a left-wing journalist who managed, by judicious self-censorship, to push the limits of what the bourgeois press normally allows. But he only got to express his broader perspectives when making films or writing books after he had become a freelancer. Richardson's conclusions from a long career in bourgeois journalism match my own

from a brief career in that vocation: "...in my view the so-called objectivity of journalists is really just set up to disguise the fact, well-known to them in their hearts, that they can only work within the limits established by their bosses...No one gets into a position of authority in a capitalist newspaper who does not accept the basic premise that its central purpose—apart from making money—is to propagate the values of capitalism." (223)

**Sandra Lambertus, *Wartime Images, Peacetime Wounds: The Media and the Gustafsen Lake Standoff*** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2004)

I SUSPECT THAT Boyce Richardson would regard Sandra Lambertus as rather naïve about the role of the media in capitalist economies. Lambertus does a good job of demonstrating the success of the disinformation campaign that the RCMP mounted as they attempted to disband an occupation by Shuswap First Nation militants who claimed land in the 100 Mile House area had been taken illegally from them. But she accepts uncritically the view of the journalists that the media were powerless to prevent the RCMP from manipulating their coverage. Lambertus is too committed to a liberal analysis that suggests media unwittingly create uninformed "false dichotomies" of Native versus European and she admonishes them to stop doing this. As Richardson suggests, the media create such dichotomies deliberately. They are not victims of discursive practices the impact of which

they do not understand; they are capitalist institutions peddling capitalist social values.

**Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War*** (Toronto: James Lorimer 2003)

WHILE REG WHITAKER has published weighty tomes on Cold War topics, all of great value, this collaboration with Steve Hewitt is intended for a popular audience. It is nonetheless a comprehensive account of the origins of the Cold War, Canada's role within that ideological and military battle, the anti-war movement in Canada, and the suppression of internal dissent. With big print and lots of images, this is both an easy and a worthwhile read, and useful as an undergraduate textbook.

**Megan Taylor Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954*** (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press 2004)

CIVIL RIGHTS LITERATURE in the United States has gradually come to acknowledge the roles of both middle-class and working-class African-American women in advancing the causes of racial equality and social justice. Shockley gives equal space to working-class and middle-class minority women. The book demonstrates the successes and failures of working-class black women's struggles for equal employment, welfare, and citizenship benefits, improved working conditions, and the right to be treated with dignity in their workplaces and in the larger community.

**Philip L. Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration, and the Farm Workers*** (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2003)

THOUGH THE SUCCESSES of Cesar Chavez in organizing farm workers in California in the 1970s are well known, less known is that in subsequent years, employers in that state successfully repressed unionization drives. Farm workers' wages in the state are less than half those of non-farm employees and working conditions remain grim. Martin documents the failures of the United Farm Workers but within a conservative economic model in which new illegal immigrants are as much the culprit for the previous immigrants' misery as the employers and the state.

**Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession*** (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press 2004)

THIS IS AN APPEALING but flawed biography of one of the founders of the social work profession in the United States. Agnew is aware of the critical literature on this profession that emphasizes social control over the poor and the working class by middle-class women whose relative freedom comes at the price of being willing accomplices in restricting options available to working-class people and especially women. Of course, most of that literature recognizes the genuine desire of early social workers to help the poor, though within understandings of poverty that accept capitalism as a given and seek to better incorporate marginal people within the overall system. That nuance is certainly present in Agnew's account, but too cursorily to place her subject in a critical light. Instead, what emerges

strongly is Richmond's own view of herself and her career within an ideological framework that is clearly, if unthinkingly, pro-capitalist.

**John Bezis-Selfa, *Forging America: Adventurers, Ironworkers, and America's Industrial Revolution*** (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2003)

PARTICULARLY INTERESTING in this account of 18<sup>th</sup> century furnaces and forges in the American colonies is the role of both slave labour and indentured servants in providing the sweat equity for the US's earliest industrial establishments. The existence of unfree labour had consequences for free labour since employers' expectations of their workers were steered in this period of slavery and indenture.

**Sandy Polishuk, *Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila*** (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003)

JULIA RUUTILA was a life-long social activist and left-wing journalist in Oregon, where she had been raised in logging camps. Her politicization began early with activity in the IWW. Rejected by the Communist Party when she applied to join in 1927, she was a fellow traveler through much of her life though usually with a degree of critical distance. She also maintained a critical distance from the Democratic Party in which she became involved later in life. This oral history provides a lifetime of labour feminist stories and anecdotes about Pacific Northwest labour struggles and the Vietnam era anti-war movement. Married four times, frequently on the move, living for long periods in poverty and single motherhood, Ruuttila emerges as an irrepres-

sible woman well aware of how both her class and gender placed restrictions on her life but never willing to give up the good fight for social change. To the end (she died in 1991) she viewed herself as a communist with a small c. She asked that her stone be inscribed, "Died as she lived, shouting the system down." (235)

**Susie E. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931*** (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2003)

PORTER TRACES the development of working women's consciousness in Mexico City, focusing exclusively on changing discourses. At the beginning of the time period covered, working women, rather than contesting notions of themselves as the weaker sex, attempted to use this stereotype to argue for better treatment as workers. By the 1920s, however, they were more likely to strike and to demonstrate to demand better treatment. Porter rejects the perspective that the Mexican Revolution fostered this change, insisting that discourses internal to the work process provide the key to explaining women's changing attitudes and strategies. It is an unpersuasive argument because the timing of discourse changes remains a mystery to the end of the book. The book nonetheless has a wealth of materials on women's workforce experiences and the ambivalences of the ruling class, who simultaneously exploited these women and condemned their participation in paid work.

**Detlef Mühlberger, *The Social Bases of Nazism 1919-1933*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003)

THIS IS A LARGELY statistical account of the social characteristics of both the Nazi Party membership and electorate from 1919 to 1933. It argues that the characterization of the Nazi members and supporters as overwhelmingly from middle strata is unsupported by statistical evidence. Working-class involvement and support for the Nazis, in particular, is claimed to have been understated in the past. The book offers little however in the way of explanation of the phenomena for which it provides many numbers.

**Janet Hunter, *Women and the Labour Market in Japan's Industrialising Economy: The Textile Industry Before the Pacific War*** (London: Routledge Curzon 2003)

JAPAN'S MEIJI restoration was followed by industrialization that resulted in a boom in textile manufacture. Women drawn from agricultural areas were its primary recruits for a labour force. In a patriarchal society, the labour of these women was exploited both by employers and by families that demanded that most of their wages be handed over to them. The women sometimes went on strike to attempt to improve working conditions. But this book focuses far more on the structural characteristics of industry and industrial relations in pre-war Japan than on the attitudes of the women workers about their lot in life and their potential for changing things for the better.

**William Jankowiak and Daniel Bradburd, eds., *Drugs, Labor, and Colonial Expansion*** (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2003)

THE DRUG TRADE played an important role in the process of colonial expansion. These essays, loosely connected by their focus on products ranging from coca to ganja to caffeine, include analysis of employers' use of mood-altering substances to entice Aboriginal workers (as in the North American fur trade) and workers' use of drugs to compensate for their bleak lives under colonialism (as in the case of indentured East Indian plantation labourers in Trinidad). While some articles focus on exploitation of Aborigines, others suggest the importance of Aboriginal agency. So, for example, Aboriginal begging for tobacco in Australia and trading of souls with missionaries in return for tobacco are presented, somewhat dubiously, as cases of "mutual exploitation."

**Ursula Huws, *The Making of a Cybertariat: Virtual Work in a Real World*** (New York: Monthly Review Press 2003)

THIS BOOK DISCUSSES a variety of topics related to the increasing tendency to turn the home into a workplace, recreating in new forms the domestic workplace in which the cheap labour of home sewing exploited earlier generations of women workers. This is a book of feminist political economy that provides a chilling portrait of both paid and unpaid labour in the home in the era of microelectronics technology. Challenging those who suggest that home work allows women to combine employment with family obligations, Huws suggests that it generally leads to a hardening of gender roles, less

free time for working women, less contact with people outside the home, and little opportunity to protest poor wages or poor conditions of labour.

**Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*** (London: Verso 2003)

“A THOUGHTFUL, profound meditation on what a good society can be like,” writes Howard Zinn for the dustjacket. It is indeed! Michael Albert takes long-established notions in anarchism and libertarian communism such as workers’ councils and participatory economics (the phrase that supplies the title) and provides an elaborate, almost mathematical, socialist model for running an economy. Albert provides moral arguments for equal compensation for all forms of work, for creating jobs that involve each worker in many phases of a firm’s operation, and for involving all workers in decision-making of every kind. He provides strong arguments for complete elimination of market mechanisms in economic planning.

**Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*** (London: Verso 2003)

THIS SHORT BOOK calls for constructive engagement between Westerners opposed to the American national security invasions of Islamic countries and progressive Islamists. Buck-Morss notes that the fundamentalist Islamists no more reflect the overall perspective of Islamic thinking than Stalin reflected the ideas and goals of socialists of his time. She notes that imperialism consolidates the power of fundamentalists much as it aided Stalin: by confirming that their countries are indeed under external attack, imperialism pushes people to support the best organized anti-imperialist forces, though the latter may offer little in the way of social justice and human rights. In Buck-Morss’s view, the way to transcend the limiting of options for people that American imperialism threatens everywhere is through struggles that directly unite both Western and Islamic supporters of left-wing internationalism.

A.F.

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