

EDITOR'S REMARKS

The dialectical relationship between technology and the relations of production has always been of concern to historians of labor. In this issue's Scholarly Controversy Philip Scranton takes recent historians of U.S. labor to task for failing to clarify what they mean by technology; for being so spellbound by the development of large-scale mass production that they ignore the persistent variety in styles of industrial production and hence misleadingly cast the whole of working-class experience in the narrow mold of the modern male metalworker; and, ultimately, for adhering to an obsolete agenda of studying class struggles, which blinds them to the more promising questions of social analysis posed by recent works in economic and social theory. The theories discussed by Scranton stress the danger of "stages of development" notions, the contingency and the open possibilities of industrial innovation and organization, and the important and often rewarding role of workers in many forms of production. He urges historians to take the diverse ways in which production is structured and the roles of workers in those structures as their point of departure, rather than categorizing workers and their behavior in terms of craft and industry.

Although Patricia Cooper welcomes Scranton's emphasis on the diversity of work experience, the limited reach of Fordism, and the flexibility of small-batch production, she regards the social theorists Scranton celebrates with considerable skepticism. Whether capitalist production is large or small in scale, rigid or flexible in organization, she contends, the social historian can understand its workings only by keeping in mind that exploitation and conflict inform all of its manifestations. She urges us to choose our theoretical tools carefully and not to rush to embrace ideas that analyze social structures as though they were something apart from the relationships informing the activities of human beings. It is not enough to lament the absence of gender and race from other historians' discussions of class relations, Cooper insists; rather, we need a synthetic analysis that locates the changing ways in which capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy have shaped styles of production, work relations, and the actions of working men and women.

Andrew Gordon suggests that the first step in theoretical tooling for historians of labor in the United States should be to learn much more about other parts of the world and thus to broaden their perspective on North American developments and to sharpen their sense of how international flows of goods, capital, technology, and people have shaped labor history. He remains unconvinced by Scranton's arguments against the narrative mode of historical presentation and disturbed by the opaqueness of the jargon in which the recommended social theories is couched.

In a review essay dealing with recent studies of working-class women and socialist movements in Russia and France before World War I, Jane Caplan notes that the consolidation of unions and parties in both countries marginalized women's concerns and activities. This was the case despite the persistent, and even increasing, importance of women in the ranks of industrial workers. She reflects on the ways both studies discover political history in the everyday lives and experiences of women, and thus suggest conceptual alternatives to the dichotomy of social versus political history that has often plagued labor historians.

Lars Edgren and Lars Olsson have provided an overview of recent work in Swedish working-class history. Questions of technology, paternalism, and the interaction of skilled and unskilled workers have loomed large in Swedish writings over the last twenty years. The limited implementation of Taylorism in Sweden and the decisive role of the labor movement's political arm reinforce Gordon's argument about the value of comparative analysis for labor historians. Similarly, the abundance of careful research on rural-urban migration, childhood and education, and the relations between recent migrants and more urbanized workers suggests promising ways of thinking about class formation.

Sheila Fitzpatrick examines carefully the impact of World War II on workers in the Soviet Union. There was nothing new about the state's attempts at total mobilization and assault methods of production: all that had begun with the First Five-Year Plan (1929–32) and was to continue through the postwar reconstruction plans. The war, therefore, did not represent such a departure from the norm in the USSR as it did in capitalist countries. Nevertheless, the devastation and disruption inflicted by the German invasion killed or relocated tens of millions of people, moved centers of industry, inspired draconic state regulation of daily life, and, paradoxically, rendered much of that regulation futile, as individuals devised their ways of surviving. It also accelerated the urbanization of Soviet life and left both agriculture and industry dependent on women's work to an unprecedented degree. While recognizing the unique place of the war in Soviet workers' experience, memories, and perception of the world, therefore, Fitzpatrick also underscores the remarkable continuity in both state practice and daily life that spanned the 1930s and 1940s.

Fitzpatrick's essay is a major contribution to *ILWCH's* continuing effort to demythologize the study of workers in the USSR and to make them part of our effort to understand the experience and activities of workers in the creation of the world in which we now live. It is provocatively supplemented by Louis Menashe's discussion of the recent writings of Moshe Lewin. Lewin's close scrutiny of the "popular layers" of Soviet society, and especially of the peasantry, shows how they decisively shaped and limited state policy during the first five-year plans. Menashe situates Lewin's work in the context of other writings on Soviet industrialization, and thus reveals the importance of Lewin's conception of the incubus of Russia's rural past on Soviet rule and the significance of the reassertion of civil society in that country through party reform in our own time.

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