
For some time now, sociologists, economists and assorted futurologists have flooded the pages of learned journals and the shelves of libraries with analyses of the continuing decline of industrial and other forms of labor. In proportion to the decline of working time, those social scientists proclaim, the forward march of leisure has become an irresistible trend of the most recent past, the present and, most definitely, the future. Those of us living on planet earth have on occasion wondered about the veracity of such claims which, quite often, appear to stand in flat contradiction to our experiences in everyday life. The work of the Italian sociologist Pietro Basso is thus long overdue and proves to be a welcome refutation of this genre of, to paraphrase Basso, obfuscating hallucinations.

The second paragraph of Basso’s introduction sets out in exemplary manner the thesis of his ceaseless labor to expose the hollowness of such social scientific insights. It deserves to be quoted in full: “This book maintains that in Western society, for at least twenty-five years, the average working time of wage labourers has become increasingly burdensome and invasive, more intense, fast-paced, ‘flexible’ and long. This is true not only in industry and agriculture but in all branches of social organisation, and is particularly true in that very world of services which has been so aggressively presented as the postmodern El Dorado of light, clean, satisfying work, with short working hours.” (1) In many ways, the ensuing 216 pages of text, plus the forty-eight densely-packed pages of endnotes, are merely demonstrations of this thesis statement. But these pages deserve to be studied with painstaking care. And such efforts will uncover unexpected pleasures.

For Basso, despite the serious nature of his topic, manages to inject a healthy dose of irony into his exposition of the fallacies of so many learned tomes announcing the imminent arrival of a paradise of leisure. But, most importantly, in the process of deconstructing his opponents’ views, the author manages to convey a wealth of facts and figures which should raise question marks in the minds of even the most determined believer in the writings of the prophets of the imminent, if not already present, golden age of pleasurable consumption in copious free time. What does Pietro Basso actually say?

Realizing that it would be all-too-easy to ridicule his opponents by looking at laboring conditions in the vast majority of regions of this world, Asia, Africa, Latin America and, especially after 1989, Eastern Europe, Basso concentrates on Western European states. This has the added advantage of avoiding easy countercritiques on the part of those observers who are only too aware of the particularly workaholic atmosphere governing working conditions in two other flagship economic powerhouses of the modern world: Japan and the United
States of America. Within Western Europe, particular attention is devoted to three countries seemingly at the forefront of ever-increasing reduction in labor time: Germany and France (where certain national arrangements for the establishment of a thirty-five-hour workweek have been prominently touted) and his native Italy, “the only country besides France where there has been talk in recent years of a law for a thirty-five-hour week.”(173)

In inverse proportion to the amount of learned tomes vaunting the arrival of a society of leisure, serious and detailed studies on the actual conditions in the world of labor are virtually impossible to obtain. Honni soit qui mal y pense. Nonetheless, Pietro Basso manages to compile sufficient data to confirm that, far from experiencing an improvement in working conditions, be it concerning the number of hours worked or the intensity of labor, even in Western Europe, including France and Germany, image and reality are literally worlds apart. The German labor movement’s conquest of a thirty-five-hour workweek for metal-workers and typographers has had precisely little impact on average working times in German society as a whole. In industry, in 1997, the average work week was 39.3 hours, in “services” 40.5 and in banking and financial services in particular 41.0 hours. In France, “in 1997 average working time in industry was 39.9 hours per week—1.2 hours more, not less, than in 1987,”(163) Basso states, and in general his book is crammed with useful data which begin to approximate the actual experiences of those of us who have experienced the world of labor in recent decades.

Even in those cases where recent years have seen an improvement in the length of working time, i.e. a diminution, such nominal gains have in almost all cases been more than offset by heavy increases in the intensity of labor. The 1998 French Aubry law legislating a thirty-five-hour week sweetened the deal for the employing classes by allowing for plentiful exceptions and simultaneous massive openings towards further intensification and flexibilization of labor. Anyone studying labor negotiations and agreements in the past decades will undoubtedly agree with Basso who claims that over “the past twenty years the West has been one big building site of flexibility,”(69) compressing ever further amounts of stressful labor into usually at best stagnating numbers of hours worked. It is a sign of the times, the author rightfully asserts, that union negotiations have increasingly shifted from the redistribution of daily working hours to weekly and even annual working time, leaving the door wide open for the maximal daily exploitation of laboring women and laboring men.

Indeed, Basso points out early on, the most recent important international agreement to limit working hours dates back to 1919! The particular dating of this initiative is, of course, by no means accidental. The length of the working day has, above all else, been determined by the ups and down, and especially the peaks, of an elementary fact of social life futurologist predictions of utopia consistently neglect to mention: class struggle. Thus, to mention but one additional important fact, the last significant improvement of the average duration of labour time on a supra-national scale dates back to the late 1960s, and this was a reduction of weekly, not daily hours of toil. In this context it is worth noting
Basso’s superb deconstruction of Paul Samuelson’s “mystified representation”(102) of the evolution of working hours in the United States, where the Nobel-prize winning economist manages to erase virtually all traces of the realities of the severe ups and downs in the seesaw of class struggles between 1905 and 1955 by rendering the secular decline in one continuous, gracefully smooth, slowly descending line.

To close on a slightly critical note: Given the appalling lack of concrete data furnished by national and international statistics offices, it would be demanding the impossible to expect Basso to have eliminated all illusions regarding the veracity of futurologists’ claims. Nonetheless, it would have been enormously useful if the author had presented his major data in a more accessible and easily comparable fashion. Much of his data is finely dispersed within the densely-packed pages of his bold exposition. Often, for no fault of his own, the individual data are not strictly comparable, as they are based on conflicting sources. Note here, for instance, Basso’s report on the admission of the coordinator of the First European Survey on The Work Environment, published in 1992, that “information on working conditions in Europe ‘often does not exist, or is not accessible’ (a curious admission, coming from a government institution—PB), ‘or, if available, is not comparable because of the differences between the monitoring of the various member states.’”(140) Still, perhaps a carefully constructed statistical appendix could have resulted in greater clarity for the nonspecialist reader.

My first three years at Warwick University Ltd. overlapped with the final three years of teaching of a colleague in the office next door, whose career had begun with the launch of this university in the 1960s. In his final years he taught on a third-time, phased-retirement basis. He was fond of standing in my office door with a smile on his face, informing the new arrival that now, with a thirty-three percent teaching load, he taught precisely as many students as he did when starting out working full-time. Basso makes no claim of a tripling of the burden for most workers in the modern world. But perhaps his daring and well-informed exposition will contribute to bring a future generation of social scientists back to the worsening realities of planet earth.

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Approaches to the history of class relations in Germany as elsewhere have changed dramatically over the past two decades or so. Historical class analysis, which once pointed to the clear significance of class as a social marker, a cultural and political identity, in short, as a force of history, has became dulled in the wake of the collapse of socialism, the decline of organized labor, and the intel-
lectual challenges associated with postmodernism, feminism, and race theory. As one student remarked in a recent seminar on the history and historiography of class relations in Europe, class has become the unexamined third pillar of the race, class, gender triad. Historians do not deny the significance of class relations; it has just that figuring out how to theorize and document the history of class is much more complicated than it used to be.

It is therefore refreshing to encounter Carol Poore’s study *Bonds of Labor* which approaches this question of documenting class from an interesting angle: the boundary between German workers and their social superiors as this has been described by a century of boundary crossers, in Poore’s words “writers and others from the middle or upper classes [who] have set out for the most varying reasons to enter into the world of manual labor by becoming workers themselves for a time.”(14) Poore’s study focuses on key authors and their published works (with an occasional glance at cinematic and visual representations), very much rooting these sojourners in their social, political and intellectual contexts. The history is not continuous but rather episodic, as at different political moments the motives and institutional supports for such projects has varied and as the imagination of class has advanced and receded in the consciousness of readers and writers.

The book’s organization thus follows the episodic quality of the literary production of accounts of journeys into the working world. There are chapters and sections on particular historical moments when the idea of descent into the working class was sufficiently embedded in literary and political institutions to encourage the genre of cross-class travel literature. Writers like Paul Göhre and Max Winter established many of the conventions of the genre in their social reportage that emerged with the flourishing of the Social Democratic Party in the 1890s. These early works in many ways set the parameters for the genre’s later evolution. They wrote accounts of undercover operations of varying durations during which they took jobs in factories and mines, for middle-class publics who were increasingly fascinated with or fearful of working-class neighborhoods, lives, and subcultures. Often employing metaphors of depth or darkness that echoed other forms of othering, these writers acted from quite diverse political motives, all traits that would characterize later episodes of cross-class narratives. Some traveled and wrote as moral uplifters who sought to reform life in the depths; others operated from hopes of generating cross-class nationalist solidarities that would counter that class-based organizations proliferating under the auspices of the socialist movement. Still others, like Winters, who wrote of his experiences in underground Vienna, were sympathizers with the socialist movement. Throughout her analysis of the accounts, Poore addresses the questions of political perspective, authorial positioning, and representations of workers and their options in a manner that is nuanced and adept.

After the First World War the genre was infused with new sorts of accounts, first those by work students who produced a spate of stories in the 1920s, followed by another novelty in the 1930s with the introduction of accounts by veterans of the Nazi Labor Service. Not surprisingly, these narratives emerged from
very different projects and perspectives than the previous social reportage that still continued. The Weimar-era work students were much more likely than their journalistic or socialist predecessors to express resentment at their forced migration into the world of work. Many felt little but disdain for their coworkers. Although some took with them a sense of comradeship they had associated with wartime experiences, student workers were generally far less open to or interested in developing cross-class relationships. They were not usually making their journey on a mission to redeem or expose. Instead, they were reluctantly to make their own way toward a better destiny, one that they felt they were owed. Wilhelm Wernet, for example, who kept a diary as a work student between 1921 and 1923, “could only view the workers as a hostile mass, an attitude that strengthened his own feelings of enmity toward them and of displacement from his rightful social position.” (71) In contrast, Nazi propaganda against such class arrogance was a feature of reportage produced in the context of the National Labor Service program; among its other goals, it was intended to bring together young men and women of all classes who would work together across cross class divides (and, of course, to reinforce racial divides). Politically sanctioned accounts of labor service years tended to be faithful to the party line. For example, Nazi Party propagandist Eugen Hadamovsky uses his 1938 account *Hilfsarbeiter Nr. 50 000*, in which he describes his stint as a factory worker, according to Poore, “to conjure up in frantic, empty phrases the supposed ‘togetherness’ between himself and the permanent workers.” (117)

After the Second World War, descent stories reemerged in the two Germanies in strikingly different forms and following different chronologies. In the German Democratic Republic the Bitterfeld Program, begun in the late 1950s, officially encouraged writers to combine art and life by creating art based in various work settings. Poore argues that the early Bitterfeld projects did bring something new to the genre. If earlier reporters wanted to expose conditions in the working world, uplift workers, or learn from their work experiences how better to lead and sway workers, in contrast, GDR journeys into the working world were rooted in a desire to participate in the socialist state’s project of building up a society qualitatively different from that of the past. These writers wanted to help dismantle older hierarchies of privilege and create new opportunities for the working majority to develop all their “human faculties.” In Poore’s view, their narratives thus “provide glimpses of the desire for creating a community of equals” (169–170) which was largely absent from the works of earlier boundary crossers. By the early 1970s, disillusionment with the GDR state undermined this form of writing; it reemerged later in a very different form at the moment of the *Wende*. Volker Braun’s career offers a telling example. Braun’s growing disillusionment with the GDR project of redefining class relations was already apparent in his first account of the factory town of *Hoyerswerda*, where many GDR writers had previously journeyed in their quest for cross-class enlightenment. In Braun’s 1971 article “*Die Leute von Hoywoy,*” the gaps between the intellectual visitor and the workers already seem unbridgeable. In Braun’s the post-unification return to the subject in “The People of Hoywoy II, 1992,” the
town appears on television as the site of racist violence on the part of the sons of his former workmates.

In the postwar Federal Republic, cross-class journeys were undertaken rarely and without official sponsorship. There were occasional journalistic ventures by reporters and in the late 1960s students of the New Left went into working-class settings in search of a political base. Often acting out of guilt over their own class privilege, most of these students found themselves unable to bridge to political and cultural gaps between them and the workers they encountered. In the context of the immigration of large numbers of guest workers from southern Europe and Turkey, a new twist on the genre appeared in the form of writers who disguised themselves as Turkish immigrant workers, most notably Günther Walraff, who published Ganz unten in 1985. Both of these new forms of social reportage of the postwar era proceeded in ignorance of their predecessors and with significant distinctions from earlier works. Turkish workers were generally presented as victims; the ideological context was German grappling with the racism of the Holocaust; the labor movement context had all but disappeared. The disappearance of the link between cross-class travel and the politics of class is striking, especially in the case of Walraff who had earlier practiced the reportage of class expose. The much more complex and racialized politics of Ganz unten produced a level of controversy that in effect brought such experiments to a halt.

Poore concludes with a discussion of the problem of trying to cross class boundaries in a context where class is no longer widely recognized as a viable basis for political organization (despite economic evidence that suggests that inequalities of wealth and privilege intensifying). In the end, Poore provides not just a fascinating account of the particular writers and projects that are the focus of her study, but also a new and subtle iteration of the historical problem of class.

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Golfo Alexopoulos begins her first chapter by analyzing a 1917 Soviet poster titled “Autocratic Structure.” At the top of a stratified pyramid is Russia’s tsar, whose fur-trimmed cloak is draped around four layers of oppressors: the priests; the judges and bureaucrats; the police; and the landowning and bourgeois elite. Holding everyone up with their toil at the bottom of the pyramid are the workers and peasants. All but that last stratum were expected to disappear under the proletarian dictatorship because members of the exploiting classes, the former people, would stand outside the embrace of revolutionary society. The 1918 constitution of the Russian Republic codified their outsider status, specifying that
they could not vote, receive public assistance, or work in the civil service or military. They also languished on the lowest rung of the Soviet ladder when it came to securing housing, jobs, and ration cards, and, by the decade’s end, became candidates for exile and forced labor. Through her examination of Stalin’s outcasts, Alexopoulos demonstrates that the meanings of social class and, by extension, citizenship, shifted in response to policies and historical circumstances. In other words, notions of what constituted a Soviet citizen evolved in tandem with the changing definitions of who was to be excluded from the polity.

According to Alexopoulos, policies of rapid industrialization, forced collectivization of agriculture, and concomitant class war in the late 1920s resulted in a broadening of the category of disenfranchised Soviets to include outcasts’ family members, new economic policy (NEP) ubiquitous private traders, and kulaks. Penalties for exclusion increased as well. To be cast out translated at its least lethal into discrimination when it came to housing and jobs, and more perilously into arrest, deportation, forced labor in Stalin’s massive industrialization projects, and lack of access to food ration cards. With these policies, the regime not only reduced expenses and provided itself with a pool of slave laborers, it succeeded in “engineering a new political community” (18).

But slippery criteria for determining who was in and who was out left local officials free to make their own (often punitive and arbitrary) judgments. Among the disenfranchised could be found “a ladies man” (61), a sorcerer, a widower branded as a private trader for having “sold his dead wife’s clothing” (63), shepherds, and even a layman whose nickname of “Priest” proved his undoing. Much as the purges of the late 1930s provided local officials with room to unleash vendettas, the power to disenfranchise local citizens allowed authorities to settle personal and political scores, to reshuffle personnel, and to demonstrate their zealously to higher ups. Patterns remained nevertheless, with Alexopoulos finding among the excluded disproportionate numbers of “social deviants” (60), national minorities (especially Jews, who tsarist-era discrimination drove into urban petty trades), and “the most defenseless members of a community” (73), i.e., the poor, the weak, the physically disabled, the mentally ill, the elderly, and women in general.

The fate of the disenfranchised lay ultimately in the hands of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee’s Central Electoral Commission. Alexopoulos gained unique access to the operations of this agency, having been the first historian to plumb an obscure and formerly closed archive in the “tiny agricultural town of Ialutorovsk” (1) in Western Siberia. There, Alexopoulos discovered more than 100,000 dossiers of outcasts whose 1926–1936 petitions for reinstatement of citizenship reached the Commission. Alexopoulos analyzed .05% of these files—500 in all—finding that petitioners curiously strayed from standard Soviet narratives of self that emphasized self-criticism, loyalty, and labor. Rather than spouting requisite mea culpa or claiming to be communist warriors on the front of socialist construction, petitioners tended to adopt different approaches. Many forced laborers, for example, virtually demanded reinstatement of rights because they had rendered critical service to the state. Others, like the
woman who referred to her life as “one complete torture” (121), employed the form and language of time-honored ritual laments by characterizing themselves as unfortunates deserving of pity. Lamenters, argues Alexopolous, both implicitly and explicitly counted on authorities to distinguish themselves from “the notorious ‘heartless bureaucrats’ of the old tsarist power structure” (124). In reality, Russian Orthodox traditions emphasizing compassion for the unfortunate may have been equally relevant, but in any case, the fact that a full ninety-three percent of these 500 outcasts were reinstated as citizens made it clear to Alexopoulos that the petitioners’ unusual discursive strategies worked.

Although it appeared that the lives of the disenfranchised took a turn for the better when, in celebration of socialism’s purported victory, the 1936 Stalin Constitution mandated their right to vote, this was not the case. At that point the Central Electoral Commission lost control over them and they fell under the jurisdiction of the judiciary, police, and secret police, whose members were busy bloodying their hands in the purges. The disenfranchised, with their questionable pasts, found themselves targeted with renewed vigor, and reinstatement became a vain hope. Guaranteeing their continued marginalization was the vetting faced by all citizens who applied for jobs, housing, and services: de rigueur among questions were those about social origins. A former person from whose 1937 diary Alexopoulos quotes had it right: “They will never allow us to be equal, and they never will believe that we’ve forgotten and forgiven everything. We’re damned, from now until the end of our lives” (177). As Alexopoulos argues, “An earlier policy of social engineering that involved the dual practices of purging alien elements and evaluating worthy citizens was replaced by a campaign of expulsion with almost no possibility of redemption” (184).

Alexopoulos’s monograph is a worthwhile contribution to recent social histories of the early Stalinist period. Unlike the more prominent victims of the regime’s first twenty years, the disenfranchised left few traces of themselves. By tapping their petitions for meaning and by assessing the regime’s response, Alexopoulos has not only resurrected a lost social group, but she has succeeded in showing how the Soviet fold expanded and retracted according to historical circumstances. As the regime cast out and reclaimed its own, its definition of those who belonged and, by extension, those who did not, came into sharper focus.

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Joshua H. Howard’s fascinating book examines the experiences of Chinese arsenal workers in Chongqing, China’s wartime capital in three wars: the Anti-Japanese War, the Civil War, and class war from 1937 to 1953. Several clear and compelling arguments presented in Professor Howard’s study have brought new
approaches to the field of Chinese labor and new ways of seeing twentieth-century China.

The author argues that ever since the Anti-Japanese War had forced the relocation of China’s heavy industry to Chongqing, an unprecedented concentration of skilled and unskilled and migrant and local workers in the arsenals transformed the region not only into the center of China’s defense industry but also the fertile breeding ground of working class consciousness. Wartime demand for labor and the unfair political, social and economic treatment labor received in the state controlled factory system enabled the arsenal workers, local and migrant alike, to see what they contributed to the nation did not match what they received in terms of social, economic, and political benefits from the state. This recognition, Professor Howard argues, prompted the development of a strong class-consciousness among the arsenal workers and “a complex amalgam of regional, national, and class-based identities”(10). During 1937–1953, arsenal workers acted in class ways, fighting military, political, and class wars against foreign invaders, state and political parties’ control, and unfair mental and their manual labor division. By recognizing the formation and development of working class consciousness and their multiple identities, Professor Howard’s book challenges the previous studies that stress the particularity, regional identity, and class fragmentation of Chinese labor.

Howard’s study integrates the unexplored triumvirate of labor, wars, and political movements in modern Chinese history. By weaving arsenal workers’ experience into China’s social and political fabric, in this study Chinese labor is placed in the context of local and national history and interacted with larger political and social forces. In his treatment, the class formation of China’s arsenal workers was multidimensional and did not simply stem from everyday work and life experiences. It included workers’ mediated experiences with labor activists and underground Communists, their desire for “greater social status and political freedom”(6), and their participation in political movements during the Anti-Japanese and Civil wars and the early 1950s. Workers were both subjects and agents of history and their political actions reflected as well as shaped the China’s history before and during the early People’s Republic.

The study of urban and working-class experience from 1937–1953 also challenges existing scholarship on the Chinese revolution, which has mainly focused on rural China and on the efforts of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to win over the Chinese peasants. His study demonstrates that the CCP’s effort in winning the support of working-class people (not just intellectuals) in the Guomindang (GMD) controlled urban sector was equally important to the CCP’s victory in 1949. He points out that working-class people’s alienation in the arsenals that were controlled by the GMD state and their desire for and political activism directed at a better economic life, greater social status, and more political freedom paved the way for labor mobilization by the CCP.

This study opens a new window to show that modern Chinese state-building and the Chinese revolution cohere as a historical process in which both the CCP and the GMD made important contributions. Instead of giving credit to the
CCP, the victor of the 1949 revolution only, Howard’s book confirms what Esherick suggests: “GMD rule was as much the precursor of the Chinese Revolution as its political enemy” (Joseph W. Esherick, “Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution,” *Modern China* 21 1 [January 1995]: 4). During the war years, the GMD made as much intensive effort in politicizing, mobilizing, and indoctrinating arsenal workers as the CCP did in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It also provides one more concrete example in demonstrating that many of the post-1949 Chinese Communist government’s industrial welfare policies and practices, for example, medical care, retirement pensions, and housing allocation, as well as its social organization of the work unit system in mainland China, have origins dating back to pre-1949 GMD system (363).

In his study Howard demonstrates that during the war years because the defense industry was the backbone of Nationalist military and state power the class-conscious arsenal workers became a political force to be reckoned with by both the CCP and the GMD. His analysis places the workers’ interaction with the two political parties into the discourse of Chinese revolution. He believes that workers’ gradual alienation in the GMD controlled arsenals caused the Nationalist state to lose legitimacy and provided opportunity for the workers’ aspirations to converge with the CCP program and movements, essentially integrated into the revolution. Alternatively, the rise of a class-conscious working class as a political force in wartime time China can be seen as an indicator of the plural nature of wartime Chinese politics in which multiple political forces were at work. It offers us an opportunity to see “the role of total warfare rather than total revolution as the agency of enduring social change. Above all, it challenges a simple minded opposition between the Nationalists and the Communists, thereby sketching the outlines of an alternative historical narrative that breaks the constraints of the revolutionary chronology” (Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passage to Modernity and Beyond* [Berkeley, 2000] 11).

*Workers at War* is a finely researched and richly documented book based on extensive archive research and oral interviews. The inclusion of oral interviews adds a human dimension by giving emotional depth and personal voices to the study of Chinese labor and its role in structural reform, party politics, and radical movement. His skillful documentary research of using many unexplored archives, local, national, and international sources, his integration of social and political theories, and his adoption of interdisciplinary approaches make his book an exemplary work of scholarship.

With the current resurgence of labor unrest in China, it is obvious that Chinese workers are still at war. Howard’s historical analyses of structural reform and the relations of state and working-class people amidst internal and external pressures in the defense industry during the late Republican and early People’s Republican period will undoubtedly help us better understand current events.

Danke Li

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In this autobiographical account of labor relations on the Montreal waterfront, Alexander C. Pathy gives an insider account of the volatile relationship between shippers and longshoremen. Pathy worked as a lawyer and then official of the influential Maritime Employers Association (MEA). The MEA was in the forefront in changing employment relations to better fit the introduction of technological changes brought on by containerization. As in most ports around the world, the introduction of containerization was riven with challenge and controversy. The Port of Montreal, and the lesser ports of Quebec City and Trois-Rivières, shared this common experience. According to Pathy up to 1960 the respective ports had seen little strife. Indeed, it would seem that the relations between the two sides had been relatively amicable. This would change once ship owners and stevedores embarked on a rationalization scheme to make the loading and unloading of cargo that much more efficient and speedier. Beginning in 1960, negotiations became increasingly heated and hostile. Not least was the problem of language. In what could be best described as mutual ignorance the employers negotiated in English, while the union representatives, reflecting the membership, spoke in French. It was no wonder that misunderstandings could occur because of poor translation. But according to Pathy more than language, the principal point of conflict was perception. Each side brought to the table mutual suspicion and hostility. The problem Pathy contends was, “Each party did not see its glass half full but half empty.”(40) Therefore, negotiations over gang size, technological improvements, hiring methods, and union jurisdiction all became major issues of contention. Adding to the complexity of the situation was the role of Canadian government. Canadian industrial relations law gave the government a vital stake in the negotiations. Just as important, as both official and wildcat strikes broke out, the government scrambled to stabilize the situation as ships were diverted to US ports. The loss of trade and thereby revenue was seen as a critical impairment to the maritime economy.

The negotiations took a familiar pattern of deadlocked talks, followed by government commissions suggesting how the issue could be resolved. Generally at this point the government would appoint Judge Alan B. Gold to arbitrate. Gold would become the leading figure in drawing up a new collective bargaining system. Gold had little patience either for the intransigence of the management or trade union officials. As with all good arbitrators Gold insisted that both sides keep talking. Only through a continuous exchange of ideas and demands could a resolution be found. Initially the union was supportive of Gold and grateful for his early decisions to award large pay increases. In turn, the principal union organization, ILA Local 375, embarked on an aggressive campaign of expansion in and around the Montreal port.

For the MEA, the wage concessions were seen as unnecessarily generous. It decided to counterattack. First it unified with stevedores creating a solid em-
ployer front. Second, it demanded concessions in gang size, forced retirements, and changes to job security. The scene was set for major confrontations over these demands. Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s the ILA battled to hold onto its shrinking power. Using government commissions and Gold, the MEA handily secured most of what it wanted despite strike action by the ILA membership. The changing power relations were evident by the late 1970s when the union was forced to recognize the ascendency of management. Helping management was its close collaboration with the Canadian government. The government agreed to help finance the longshoremen's retirement costs. Just as in other ports throughout the world, the union and the men had to scramble to hold onto whatever gains they could. In the end though the ILA was forced to accept the break up of the traditional gang structure, its membership had be on call seven days a week, and the numbers of longshoremen fell precipitously.

The book provides a unique insight into employer attitudes and action. How the competing shippers and stevedores came together under the MEA umbrella says much about employer unity in the face of a strong trade union. Pathy also gives the reader biographical details of both management and union officialdom. Although at times Pathy tries extremely hard to appear fair in his appraisal, his approach is to concentrate on the managerial side of the conflict. This is both its strength and weakness. Understanding how management operates in a union dominated milieu provides a picture of contestation and struggle. Unfortunately, the approach relegates the union side of the story to the margins. Union officials who fight hard to protect their members' interests are characterized as hard-headed, or even boneheaded. Union officials are classed as simple wreckers with little forethought of what their obstructive posturing could incite. Pathy's leanings do not allow him to ask fundamental questions such as what it suggests when a managerial group does not literally speak the same language as its workers. This lack of attention to longshoremen leaves a large gap in the study. Who were these longshoremen? Other than being French-speaking, were there differences between them? What sort of cargoes were they handling? The widespread pilferage on the Montreal docks is condemned by Pathy, but what does such activity say about the longshoremen's culture of entitlement? The intimate relationship between the MEA and the government also needed to be discussed and contextualized. That is, what does it say about an industrial relations system where the employer group have ready access to government ministers? When the government agrees to financially support the employer's job security initiatives, how much does this change or shift the power relationship between the national state and employers and workers? One final problem with the study is its length. It is exceedingly long and inundated with mediation and arbitration meetings. After a while such specific details leaves the reader blurry-eyed. A better editing job would have made the reading easier and more enjoyable. Nonetheless, the book has much to commend it. It above all allows a critical view of the structure and machinations of an employer group. The MEA transformed itself from a part-time, non-French speaking group of shippers, to that of a multilingual and multi employer/stevedore organization. Its position as
employer representative was assured after it began a systematic restructuring of the Port of Montreal and elsewhere. A once-strong and vibrant Local 375 was transformed in the process. Its ability to withstand employer directives made it a formidable opponent, but once the Canadian government firmly attached itself to the MEA the ILA was forced into retreat. The power shift of the government made the battle of the longshoremen that much more difficult, and resulted in fundamental changes in their working world. Gone were the work gangs, and the speed of cargo moving back and forth increased exponentially.

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As textile and apparel production has been at the center of almost every major episode of industrialization since the sixteenth century, so too has it been a vanguard sector in the process of deindustrialization experienced by advanced capitalist countries beginning in the twentieth century. Thus it is no surprise that this sector would play a fascinating role in the world’s first postcolonial effort at economic integration between two countries at vastly different levels of economic development. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), implemented in 1994, was expected to speed the two already ongoing trends of a rising apparel sector in Mexico and a steadily declining sector in the United States. US apparel firms would be expected to be an important contributor to Ross Perot’s infamous “sucking sound” of jobs moving from the US to Mexico.

To some extent, the apparel sector is proof of the Perot hypothesis. As the editors show in their introductory chapter, employment in the US apparel industry fell by almost fifty percent between 1985 and 2000 while it increased almost fourfold in Mexico. Employment in Mexico’s apparel maquiladors rose from about 80,000 in 1994 to about 275,000 in 2001. Mexican apparel exports to the US rose from $199 million in 1983 to $8.1 billion in 2001, representing a growth in the Mexican share of US apparel imports from two percent in 1983 to fifteen percent in 2001. But if the Perot dynamic were the whole story, this book would be the simple and neat story of cost-cutting firms in the US and Canada moving operations south. The book is essential reading for those who want to understand why this simple version is not quite right, and certainly not complete.

The story is most interesting where the changes elude Perot’s great suck. And these deviations are many, from the growing sweatshops of New York, to the international organizing efforts of UNITE, to the demise of the border region economy, to the retention of considerable high value-added production and design in New York and Los Angeles, to the rise of full-package blue jeans pro-
ducers in Torreon, to the development of global sourcing strategies that leave even low-wage Mexico vulnerable. This volume brings together a wide range of expertise on the garment industry and group of valuable surveys and case studies of industrial relations that have evolved during the period of NAFTA. The book is nominally about the effects of NAFTA on the US and Mexico, but with the exception of the fate of the border region, North America’s apparel industry reflects broader and longer-run trends in global capitalism, including new, lean-production regimes, global production networks involving considerable international outsourcing, and significant shifts in the international division of labor and income distribution.

Most of the authors approach this broader dynamic through the lens of the global commodity chain, a concept useful in mapping the spatial shifts in global production and in analyzing the power dynamics across and with each of these spaces. The lead firms in most aspects of the apparel industry, those firms that wield most power within the apparel industry commodity chains, are retailers and designers. This characteristic (different say, from automobiles, in which producers themselves are the lead, powerful firms), has made outsourcing a long-standing feature of the industry. International trade and investment liberalization over the past fifty years has made international outsourcing the norm rather than the exception in this industry. How these new production regimes and governance structures play out in North America following the adoption of a regional trade agreement is the subject of this book.

The book is divided into parts, each focusing on a region in North America. The editors provide an excellent introductory overview and conclusion. Part two is on the United States, and the focus is on New York and Los Angeles. These two cities are the main centers of apparel production in the US, with New York the leader in design-intensive women’s wear and Los Angeles at the forefront in sportswear design. In both places, the industry is highly dualistic, with a high-end, well paying fashion design intensive sector and a low-paid, largely immigrant labor intensive sector producing more mass marketed apparel. Both cities experienced steady declines in employment in the 1990s. And in both cases these job losses were heaviest among low-skill workers whose jobs were going to even lower-skill workers in other places. In her chapter on New York, Florence Palpacuer shows the persistence of the dualism despite NAFTA, showing that high-end designers and retailers have maintained control over significant aspects of the global industry and low-skill, immigrant workers, mostly Chinese and Dominican, toil in sweatshop or near-sweatshop conditions. Robert Ross argues that in fact there has been a resurgence of sweatshops in the US since the 1980s, after a decline between 1950 and 1980, the result of the same global cost-cutting pressures that has driven much of the global outsourcing in the industry. Judi Kessler’s chapter on Los Angeles also finds the employment losses in the low-wage jobs such as cutting, trimming, warehouse work and, of course, sewing. While the California look in sportswear fashion does in fact emanate from Los Angeles designers, the Los Angeles industry is unique because of its proximity to Mexico which has made sourcing there, increasingly in full-package arrange-
ments (which include, importantly, textile production) a common strategy. Thus while the Los Angeles industry continued to grow long after the decline in the New York industry began (and in fact grew at the expense of the New York industry because of its low unionization rates compared to New York), the ease of relocation in Mexico (and Asia) has made the decline more rapid than in New York. The NAFTA further encouraged corporate strategies of Mexican outsourcing. Kessler also finds the NAFTA period to be one of declining labor standards in southern California, although she finds it difficult to blame Nafta per se for these trends, which like many of those described in the book, would likely have continued even in the absence of the regional trade agreement.

The place most clearly affected by the introduction of NAFTA is the US-Mexico border region, which is the subject of Part three of the book. Both David Spener’s chapter on El Paso Texas and Robine van Dooren’s chapter on Ciudad Juarez show that the vibrant apparel sector on the border resulted largely from the US policy that gave duty-free benefits to most of the value of Maquila operations in Mexico, leaving the border towns in the US ample business contracting and finishing and supplying inputs. The adoption of NAFTA effectively removed this special status, and production moved to the interior of Mexico and full-package production expanded in Mexico as well. This latter development, a highly promising one for economic development in Mexico, is the subject of the next section of the book, and especially the chapter by Gereffi, Bair and Martha Martinex on “Torreon: The New Blue Jeans Capital of the World.” The authors identify a NAFTA effect, which encouraged full-package production in Mexico, with branding and marketing remaining in the US as the core competence of American firms. The NAFTA effect meant an upgrading of the Mexican industry and an increase in the power of Mexican firms, who began establishing joint ventures with U.S. partners. Employment in Torreon expanded during the 1990s and wages and benefits also rose. Working conditions, the authors find, “often are better than those in similar factories in the United States.” The chapter by Enrique Dussel Peters, Clemente Ruiz Duran and Michael J. Piore also concerns full-package production, but adds a political dimension to the case for industrial upgrading in Mexico. The authors show that Mexican employment growth in apparel veils the decline of small-scale, labor intensive production and the rise of more large-scale, capital intensive operations. But even these larger-scale operations will only succeed, the authors argue, if industrial policy focuses on the promotion of learning best practice techniques and the diffusion of cutting-edge technology.

The extent of industrial upgrading in Mexico and the possibility of implementing industrial policies to further promote this, constitute an exciting development in the highly contested relation between liberalization and economic development. But the degree to which the Torreon experience can be sustained and spread to other Mexican sectors is very hard to predict. Mexico’s experience during the NAFTA period has been one of rapid export growth along with very slow real economic growth and declining real wages. Thus the Torreon experience, while clearly significant, is not obviously representative or replicable. The
overall evidence thus far does not lead us to reject the *maquilization* prediction of NAFTA's effect made by many on the political left.

Note that just as it would be wrong to credit NAFTA with causing the pockets of industrial upgrading, so too would it be wrong to see NAFTA as the cause of stagnation. These tendencies would likely have built up with or without NAFTA, the result of broader trends in the globalization of production. This issue of NAFTA's impact *per se* is further complicated by the Peso crisis that coincided with the adoption of NAFTA in the mid-1990s. A shocking reminder of the broader trends hit me as I was finishing this review: The US government announced that in the first month since the phase-out of the old Multifiber Arrangement (MFA January 2005) Chinese exports of major apparel products to the US shot up 546 percent over the previous year. The predictions that with the phase-out of the MFA that China would “clothe the world” appear to be borne out. The disruption in the global industry that will result is enormous given how many countries rely on apparel production and exports to provide their people jobs, income and foreign exchange. Poorer countries in South Asian and Sub-Saharan Africa will be severely injured by the Chinese gains in world market share. What about North America? Here the story is not as obvious. Trade diversion resulting from NAFTA had already injured Caribbean countries, as shown in the chapter by Michael Mortimore and in Dale Mathews’ chapter on Dominican Export Processing Zones. But the MFA phaseout trumps NAFTA as far as the apparel sector is concerned. Mexico’s industry will clearly be severely injured, and lead US firms in the global apparel commodity chain will continue to lead and are likely to profit nicely from the production shift. It is likely that two aspects of the market will remain in North America. The high-end, fashion intensive apparel that requires a close link between designer and manufacturer will likely remain. It is also possible, although not as likely, that a small but significant portion of North American and even Mexican production will continue in more mass-based, lower-priced apparel markets in North America. Even with its great cost advantages, the Chinese cannot completely dominate the market. In part, this is because with the never-ending effort to reduce inventory carrying costs, local suppliers will be essential in responding to unexpected shifts in demand. While such a “buffer” role may not seem significant, Abernathy et al (2000) have identified this aspect of the market as a possible source of growth in North American and even US production.

*Free Trade and Uneven Development* is an informative, well-researched and clearly-argued book. For an anthology, it is remarkably focused in its scope and unusually consistent in its methodology. It is a book of value to sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists and economists. What the book lacks most—an analysis of the North American apparel industry following the MFA phaseout—will be provided, this reviewer sincerely hopes, by a sequel volume from the same group of experts.

*Book Reviews 149*

Will Millberg  
*New School University*

With the relatively recent renovation of the American welfare system, the current dispute over faith-based organizations administering federal aid, and the wanton usage of the term family values in political discourse, few can deny that debate over the family, welfare, and the state remains heated. To add greater depth and nuance to this debate, Sherri Broder has delved into the complex relationships between the subjects and objects of social reform in late-nineteenth century Philadelphia. She explores how wealthy reformers, evangelical rescue workers, the labor movement, and laboring people “all drew on the discourse of the family”—which revolved around contested definitions of what constituted a tramp, unfit mother, or neglected child—“to define themselves variously as gendered members of different social classes, as respected family and community members, as political actors, and as people with claims on the state, the police, and public and private social services” (6). Utilizing local and national labor periodicals, the published works of charity organizations and individual reformers, and the institutional records of the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty (SPCC) and the pseudonymous “Haven for Unwed Mothers and Infants,” Broder moves topically throughout five chapters dissecting different components of Philadelphia’s discourse on the family.

The first chapter provides an overview of the terms of the debate between the labor movement and moral reformers as they quarreled over whom the dregs of nineteenth-century urban America were and who was responsible for their plight. Moral reformers viewed the widespread tramping of workingmen as the abandonment of domestic responsibility resulting from individual moral failing or intemperance. The labor movement countered that workers left their homes in a noble search for work to fulfill their manly obligations as breadwinners, but were forced into an involuntary idleness by the greed of industrial capitalism (17). The dispute over working women and children was similar, with secular and evangelical reformers casting them as victims of workingmen’s moral depravity. Debate focused on prostitution, and where reformers saw the result of feminine vulnerability in a masculine market labor saw the symbol of a condition affecting all wage earners. Such debate over the dysfunctional aspects of working-class family life implicitly constructed a normative model of the working-class family resembling the Victorian middle class. “The late nineteenth-century labor movement had a family policy” (13), Broder writes, and while grounded in an oppositional political culture it was formed out of subtle changes to a dominant discourse that privileged a “paternalistic familial metaphor” (49) as the grounds of respectability.

The remaining chapters are devoted to more honed case studies of these discourses between Philadelphia’s laboring communities and reform institutions. Chapters two and three explore the relationships between working-class communities and families with reform intervention, and Broder is here at her
best describing the “multiplicity of alternative working-class perspectives on the family” (5). She recounts how organizations like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC) believed it entered into worker’s lives on its own terms to investigate dysfunctional working-class families, when in fact SPCC entrance was conditional on the information working people provided. Therefore, instead of using the SPCC’s records as a catalogue of broken homes Broder views their investigations as open-air venues for the articulation, clarification, and defense of working-class family values.

Broder writes that a central component of working-class community life in the nineteenth-century was its self representation as respectable, and workers went to great lengths to define and enforce these boundaries of respectability. Internal mutual aid was the preferred route for hard pressed families, but when aid was abused by individual family members abjuring the normative roles expected of them the SPCC was called in to address the issue. Broder insists, however, that in these interactions reformers never “monopolize[d] either the representation or labeling of experience” (91). In their negotiations with the SPCC and each other, workers both produced and consumed narrative representations of tramps and unfit mothers that “worked to empower some people even as they targeted others for reform intervention” (124) in a process that determined who could claim the mantle of respectability as a working women or man. As a result, workers viewed the SPCC as both a “prying, intrusive group of meddlesome reformers” and an “effective ally of the respectable working class” that enforced normative gender roles. (85–86)

The final two chapters turn to explore unwed motherhood in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Chapter four follows the single mothers who entered the Haven for Unwed Mothers and Infants for aid, a pseudonymous Protestant mission home largely staffed by women. The Haven’s social programs, Broder writes, reflected the ambiguous position of unwed mothers in the Victorian moral code, lying somewhere between a dangerously sexual prostitute and the victim of male predation. Reformers made their ideal paternal households impossible to attain with a condemned father and suspect mother, which forced the children of these illicit encounters to become the “key to maternal religious as well as social redemption.” (135) This “redemptive maternity” (125) emphasized the outcome of a condemned sexual encounter to be both a symbol of the mother’s sin and agent for her deliverance which forever stigmatized single motherhood and thereby policed the line between illicit and legitimate sexual expression for all of Philadelphia’s women.

The book concludes with a candid and sometimes graphic survey of child abandonment and baby farming, a term that described both the boarding of infants by poor women for a fee, or women who carried out infanticide of unwanted children for cash. Broder writes that baby farming was by in large “a legitimate occupation that merely formalized the informal childcare arrangements” (159) of laboring women, but also deals frankly with the high incidence of child abandonment as “reproductive strategies” (166) for women who believed they had no viable alternative to provide adequate childcare. Broder con-
tends that the clandestine nature of both these practices highlight the pervasiveness of Victorian ideals among the working class and their willingness to self-enforce them, while underscoring the precarious nature of urban working-class single motherhood. A short epilogue closes the book in which Broder makes explicit connections between the nineteenth century’s discourse on welfare and the family with America’s current political dialogue.

Ultimately, Broder has written an insightful study which uses sources imaginatively to tease out voices in a discourse that have historically been hard to hear. Unfortunately, this talent is at times narrowly applied. The intense discourse analyses on sources like the SPCC’s are made at the expense of providing other sorts of necessary context. Philadelphia as an evolving city and the study’s backdrop is swiftly dealt with and then set aside leaving many of the stories she tells to be detached from any real sense of place. Moreover, no thorough examination is made of those who funded or ran institutions like the Haven or SPCC and for what purposes, although in the case of the Haven this may have been for reasons of privacy. More troubling, however, is that these organizations are referenced to have ties to municipal institutions like the police, but rarely does any sort of local or regional government factor into the study. Nonetheless, Broder’s analysis of what she does include is both provocative and sound, and her insights should be integrated into larger, more contextual studies of urban workers and social reform. Historians of poverty, urban welfare, or philanthropy will want to be sure to add this book to their personal libraries while scholars of urban, labor, or gender history should make a point to give it a careful read.

Christopher D. Cantwell
Cornell University


Back to the shop floor! This book is a welcome addition to the literature of American labor in the mid-twentieth century. Through meticulous analysis of steel workers at the workplace in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, James D. Rose explains the emergence and eventual victory of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), a part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in all its complexity. In doing so, he reveals the inadequacy of Lizabeth Cohen’s culture of unity as well as Staughton Lynd’s militant alternative unionism to explain the labor history of the 1930s. In addition, he reintroduces the idea that the federal government’s role in industrial relations was crucial to the success of the CIO.

Rose uses newly available records of the US Steel-Duquesne Works, especially its personnel department which included its employee representation plan (ERP), records that were discarded by the company when it shut down the Works in the 1980s and were rescued by the UE/Labor Archives at the University of Pittsburgh. This has allowed him to enter the little-known world of the
ERP. In fact, the ERP, which US Steel had rejected in 1919 when other major companies instituted them as a bulwark against unions, was established by the company after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in 1933 as an answer to the growing dissatisfaction of its work force and the organizing activities of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliate, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers. The book traces the attraction of various workers to these two organizations from 1933 to 1935 and finds deep divisions at the Duquesne Works. The Great Depression, rather than drawing workers together across skill and ethnic lines, exacerbated these divisions. Rose discovered that the ERP attracted skilled and semiskilled tonnage workers who worked in groups as well as the traditional skilled tradesmen, all of American or Northwestern European backgrounds. The Amalgamated drew its strength from the unskilled hourly workers, both foreign-stock (southern and eastern-European immigrants and the second generation) and Black. Each had specific grievances that were addressed by the respective organizations. The tonnage workers found that the ERP dealt rather effectively with their rate grievances and safety issues. The Amalgamated’s Fort Dukane Lodge attracted immigrant and Black workers who bore the brunt of the depression’s downturn and who responded to the NIRA’s apparent support for worker representation. They faced layoffs and reduced hours, thus bringing these low-wage workers to the brink of destitution.

The excellent and unique chapter on the ERP reveals the extent to which skilled workers used the ERP to press the company for correction of antiquated wage structures, restraint of the arbitrary power of foremen, and the improvement of overall working and safety conditions. Rose claims that the ERP leadership evolved from the 1933 company loyalists to more militant representatives who by 1936 “had developed a sophisticated shop-floor bargaining structure and grievance procedure.”(102) This story, in all its nuance, is well worth reading, for it reveals the extent to which ERP militants ultimately tried to build a central committee of all US Steel ERPs to deal with the company on a united basis. The company management would stand for none of this. Ironically at this point in late 1935, with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA or Wagner Act) and John L. Lewis’s announcement of the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization, US Steel began resisting their own ERPs.

Having effected an agreement with the Amalgamated, Lewis announced the formation of SWOC. In January 1937 in hearings before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), ERP leaders from the Duquesne Works revealed that they had joined SWOC as organizers. The following month SWOC established a Duquesne local with a coalition of ERP and Amalgamated leaders. But this did not signal unity with Amalgamated members at Duquesne, as the rift between the two groups of workers remained wide. SWOC had to overcome the legacy of depressed conditions and the Amalgamated’s failures of the NRA years. The ERP loyalists, at the same time, were forced as a result of the NLRB hearings to choose between the ERP and SWOC. What galvanized both factions to unite was the firing of a prominent SWOC leader, and popular SWOC issues
were seniority and protection for union members. In time, SWOC built a local whose leadership had a strong foreign-stock character, though Black leadership declined. Moreover, some ERP loyalists had not been won over and threatened to evolve into an independent union.

When in March 1937, US Steel president Myron Taylor announced he was recognizing SWOC as a collective bargaining agent, he refused to recognize SWOC as the sole bargaining agent but limited only to its own members. SWOC adopted many ERP practices and policies; Taylor even initialed the ERP grievance procedure as part of the SWOC contract. This continued brake on SWOC power took its toll as the “Roosevelt recession” of mid-1937 led to lay-offs that SWOC could do nothing about. The victory of SWOC leader Elmer Maloy as Democratic mayor of Duquesne in the Fall 1937 elections, a victory repeated throughout the Monongahela Valley, belied the fact that the local was split along political lines, with many tonnage men remaining Republican. The Democratic victory was soon undercut by Republicans retaking the City Council the following year.

Chapter 6, which discusses the consolidation of the union in the late 1930s, is an important reminder to historians that the CIO barely hung on to its membership and its contracts in 1938 through 1940. The declining economic conditions, the continued antagonisms among racially and ethnically diverse work forces, and the continued resistance of employers might have spelled the end of the CIO if the wartime boom had not breathed new life into the economy. Still, only the decisions of the National War Labor Board (NWLB) consolidated SWOC (and other CIO affiliates) in their roles as sole collective bargaining agents for their workers. As Rose notes, SWOC’s overwhelming victory in the 1942 NLRB election at the Duquesne Works obscured the fact that one in four eligible voters either did not vote or voted against the union; SWOC continued the monthly struggle to collect dues from the rank and file. Here Rose takes on those historian detractors of the New Deal who see only bureaucratization in the CIO’s acquiescence to the federal government’s industrial-relations mechanisms like dues check-off and maintenance of membership (NWLB contract decisions that ordered companies to deduct dues from workers’ paychecks and required workers to remain members of the union for the duration of the contract if they chose to join it). In contrast, he states that these NWLB decisions “artificially strengthened an inconsistent and fragmented rank-and-file and masked the internal weaknesses of the union.”(217)

Finally, Rose argues that only by deeply investigating 1930s unionism in all its instabilities and limitations can we begin to appreciate how the labor movement came to its weakened state in the latter part of the twentieth century. Case studies such as this still have their place in the study of an era that seems to have had its history already settled. All labor historians of the twentieth century will want to read this book.

Cecelia Bucki
Fairfield University

A few years ago I began researching the evolution of the physical design and planning of the three greenbelt towns that were initiated in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Administration. While I was quite familiar with the context and social milieu of one of those towns because it was close to my home, I had never before visited Greenbelt. On my first trip there, I arranged to meet a University of Maryland professor at a local café. Since she and her students had been conducting material culture studies of Greenbelt, I thought meeting her first would be a good way to introduce me to the town. While we talked over dinner, I learned she was also a Greenbelt resident. After dinner, she told me she was on a Greenbelt committee that was making a presentation to the City Council that evening, and she had arranged for the committee to join us in the café so they could plan their presentation. Shortly, three people arrived and joined us at the table, brainstorming ideas for the upcoming council presentation. After being in town less than two hours, I was in a Greenbelt committee meeting.

As I was to learn later, it was a most fitting introduction to this particular city. The pioneer Greenbelters who moved into their community in 1937 felt most strongly about aspects of the physical design that affected their social relations with each other. But the Greenbelt idea, a steadfast belief in a planned cooperative community, is embedded not simply in its physical design (although that certainly plays a role) but in its most basic democratic organizational form, the committee, as documented in Cathy Knepper’s book, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal*.

Knepper exposes us to the life history of Greenbelt, from the 1930s to today. When visiting Greenbelt, one wonders how this community has retained its strong cooperative ideology over the years. By continually posing and focusing on this question throughout the book, Knepper gives us an in-depth, insightful examination of the changing nature of social and economic cooperation in this very unique but still very American small city: how it has evolved and transformed, how it has been challenged, and what forces and conditions foster its sustainability. Three C words—cooperation, community, collective—are intertwined in Greenbelt’s identity and nature, but not that of consensus. As Knepper (xiv) duly notes, Greenbelters view cooperation as “a way to achieve the long-term continuation of their communal goals. They did not see it as meaning everyone had to agree with everyone else at all times . . . . Ultimately, to Greenbelters cooperation meant a devotion to organizing and running their own town.”

Given the larger political and regional growth context in which the city is embedded, this has never been an easy path. Indeed, the chapter titles of her book often epitomize the continuing confrontation that the community has faced over the years: “The Government versus Greenbelt,” “Developers versus Greenbelt,” “Overcoming Difficulties in Cooperation.” To understand the continuous struggles to maintain and redefine the cooperative ideology of Green-
belt, one must look outside the city as well. Knepper describes how policies and agendas of state, county, and metropolitan political bodies, land developers and development growth patterns of the greater Washington D.C. region and, to a certain extent, the demographic and economic patterns of Prince George County have challenged the social and economic cooperative tenets of Greenbelt, and how the community has faced them.

Planners and architects have read about the origins of the greenbelt towns in textbooks, but often do not realize that they continue to be viable, self-sustaining cities and villages today: Greenhills, outside Cincinnati; Greendale, outside Milwaukee; and Greenbelt, outside Washington, D.C. While many of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal programs promoted housing development for the poor in rural areas and government sponsored urban housing, unique among these housing related programs was the greenbelt towns of the Resettlement Administration. It differed from other public housing in that they were outside cities; involved extensive acreage; and were complete community developments, with schools, parks, libraries, shops, recreational facilities, and the like. At Greenbelt, curvilinear streets formed superblocks of fourteen to eighteen acres in size, which were the fundamental unit for the residential neighborhoods. Homes, mostly row houses and apartments, face the center of the block which encompasses a large green space called a court. Pedestrian walkways surrounded these courts, as well as connected the different superblocks to each other and also to the town center. Pedestrian underpasses were incorporated where walkways cross major traffic streets. All of this was surrounded by a half mile wide greenbelt.

The greenbelt town program was the brainchild of Rexford Tugwell, a former Columbia University professor, who believed that an outdated individualism had to be replaced by a cooperative mentality and a collectivist economic policy. He persuaded FDR in the spring of 1935 to create the Resettlement Administration under Executive Order, using money set aside for unemployment.

The towns were originally intended to be exclusively for low-income residents, but because of mounting costs only modest- and moderate-income families moved in. One of the most crucial aspects of the planning of the towns was the selection of the residents. Families were favored for positive attitudes towards community life and participation. While religious diversity was fostered somewhat, racial discrimination was strictly practiced in all three towns, during the original tenant selection and for many subsequent years.

While the program did not allow for home ownership, it tried various means to foster a sense of town ownership, an important key in understanding the heritage of Greenbelt. The towns were unique for their cooperative institutions. All commercial ventures (e.g., food store, gas station, drug store) were established as cooperatives. Also, each town was a self-governing entity through the charters of incorporation in each of their respective states. The newness and experimental nature of the towns sparked the formation of self-help organizations and committees that operated vis-à-vis the government landlord. During the first year at Greenbelt, for example, approximately thirty-five organizations and ad-hoc committees were operating.
The pioneer residents of the towns may have felt a somewhat split identity. On the one hand, they had to go through a rigorous selection process to be able to live in a relatively high-quality environment, so they may have come to see themselves as quite special. On the other hand, they were often stigmatized, or at the least constantly scrutinized, by outsiders. The Washington press was particularly ruthless in depicting Greenbelt and its residents in its first few years. But their small size and pioneer spirit, coupled with a common vulnerability, may have further strengthened Greenbelters’ feelings of community identity and cohesion.

The changing nature of Greenbelt, in terms of physical development, demographics, and particularly its social and economic cooperative ideals, are well documented by Knepper in several chapters. Her accessible narrative style is grounded in extensive historical and ethnographic research. Knepper covers major events in the town’s history, such as the federal divestment of the town; construction of the Capital Beltway, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, and abutting commercial and residential development that essentially cut the city in thirds; the efforts of developer Charles Bresler to intimidate and force the town to bend to his development proposals, resulting in the small community newspaper facing down this Goliath in the U.S. Supreme Court; and the red-baiting Chasanow case of the 1950s. But besides these significant events, there also remains the incremental, everyday conditions of life of this community. Knepper does address these latter conditions, yet not to the extent of some of the news-making events. Given its discriminatory history, for example, one wants to know more about its changing racial context over time. Greenbelt today is more diverse than its two sister greenbelt towns, but this racial diversity varies across Greenbelt. My own calculations of the 2000 Census show that sixty-three percent of residents of the west side of the city are African American; about twenty-five percent of residents in the original settlement and surrounding 1950s post-war residential area are African American; and forty-nine percent of Greenbelt East residents are African American, which is the highest income area of the city. This is a most intriguing pattern, and one which demands its own story—not simply of demographic counts over time, but the context in which such demographic and racial/ethnic change has happened in this city, and how such demographic and social trends have affected its cooperative identity and ideology across and within certain sections of Greenbelt. Knepper does touch upon this (e.g. she discusses how Greenbelters responded to fair housing initiatives), but not to the extent to which the topic deserves, given its prominence and potential lessons. Granted, one can not address everything in a single volume; this could be a topic for a separate book itself.

Unique to its sister towns, Greenbelt maintains many of its original co-ops, such as the grocery store, as well as new ones. Greenbelt Homes, Inc. (GHI), which purchased nearly all 1600+ homes at the time of divestment, still thrives and is one of the largest housing cooperatives in the US today. Also characteristic of Greenbelt, as mentioned previously, is the large number of committee-induced initiatives.
The question looms of how Greenbelt has managed to maintain its cooperatives and its intense civic/community engagement over the years. Knepper suggests that city traditions are one factor that holds Greenbelters together. However, the most convincing argument she constructs is that Greenbelt community and civic engagement is also sustained through authentic, community-generated material artifacts as well, particularly the *Greenbelt News Review*. Since 1937, it has been written and operated by volunteers, delivered free to every household, every week. It is filled with community news, reported and researched by Greenbelt residents. As she (201–202) claims, “...the importance of the community newspaper in the maintenance of Greenbelt’s original goals and ideology can hardly be overstated. The paper reminded readers of town history and traditions and provided both communication among the increasingly far-flung residents and information on significant current events.” I personally have gone through hundreds of back issues of the paper and have been a subscriber for the last two years. In this day in which community papers are generally driven by corporate advertisers, high school sporting events, and the twisting tentacles of major newspaper holdings, there are few such surviving examples of trenchant, high caliber reporting and analysis of local events and conditions as framed, witnessed, and reported by local citizens.

Still, I was left wondering if it was simply city traditions and the tenacious local newspaper that continues to rekindle the cooperative spirit of many sections of this town. Other internal factors also need exploration and teasing out. It is a strongly Democratic community: the most recent voter registration figures show a five to one Democratic lead over Republicans. It also has more renters than homeowners, unlike national or state-wide patterns. But I think we also have to look at the greater context in which Greenbelt resides, its unique situation in its county and metropolitan region. As Knepper duly describes, there has been a continuing onslaught of outside interests that have stigmatized and at times tried to overwhelm this rather modest community, with its heritage of New Deal Democrats. Unlike the other two greenbelt towns, Greenbelters has never had control over their own land use and zoning matters which is controlled by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Because Greenbelters see themselves as unique, they resent those who control their town’s planning not recognizing their uniqueness in tangible form. Greenbelt residents have fought two major court cases that were eventually decided by the US Supreme Court, and in so doing, many residents have learned a lot about due process, large-scale civic collaboration and community cohesion. This dynamic perhaps has fostered a generational passing-along of community resistance and internal cohesion.

A number of architects, planners and policy makers today—particularly those associated with the Congress of New Urbanism—are striving to emulate design principles and social goals reflected in the origins of the greenbelt towns. But they often overlook the lessons emanating from the interwoven physical and social evolution of the distinct places themselves. Knepper’s book is a gem, one that continuously reminds us of how our desire for community is not found sim-
ply in a city’s plans and buildings, but in those social structures that support continual personal and social struggle to maintain an ideal.

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Robert Rodgers Korstad’s dramatic story of tobacco workers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, during the 1940s and 1950s, reveals the intricate connections between a local struggle for better wages and working conditions and the broader fight for racial democracy and civil rights. On June 17, 1943, a group of black women at the Reynolds Tobacco plant stopped work, rejecting the authority of a dictatorial white foreman and expressing long-simmering anger over speed-ups, dangerous working conditions, and unjust wages. With the help of organizers from the left-leaning United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), hundreds of black (and a few white) workers at Reynolds built Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA-CIO). Korstad eloquently tells us how the FTA succeeded. He points to the temporary convergence of factors, an active federal government in labor relations, the labor movement’s aggressive Southern Front, and the move in the urban South toward white supremacy with “a lighter touch” (376) that created a moment of extraordinary opportunity for “working-class blacks [who], through their participation in the labor movement, were in the vanguard of civil rights efforts of the 1940s.”(422)

Korstad brings a deft touch to both historical description and analysis. From interviews, newspaper accounts, and records of unions, government agencies, business associations, and community organizations, he reconstructs the immediate circumstances that sparked two hundred black women in the stemming department to rebel against race and class privilege on the shop floor. He captures the ingredients that added to the confrontation’s intensity, including the tragic death of a black worker and details like the weather, factory layout, and the demands workers made based on their rights under wartime collective bargaining agreements.

Stepping back from the narrative, Korstad describes the Reynolds Company’s rise to the pinnacle of the American tobacco industry and its formative influence on Winston-Salem. He describes how an all-white planter-industrial oligarchy, segregation, and taboos against social equality determined the contours of daily life. Korstad also highlights employment relations on the shop floor where a “racial and gender division of labor . . . both structured and reflected social relations in the larger society.”(94) Since the antebellum era, Korstad explains, black women had performed the sorting, picking, and stemming
work, while black men did the heavy lifting. White workers entered tobacco production in the 1870s, just in time to claim the more desirable work of cigarette manufacturing. The company protected these customary racial privileges and gender divisions by segregating the workforce and reserving promotions only for white workers.

The main focus of *Civil Rights Unionism* is on black workers and the connections between union and community. Winston-Salem’s black neighborhoods were both a refuge and a resource for organization and leadership. In a segregated and tightly knit world, black workers worshipped, worked, relaxed, and organized together. In daily resistance against foremen’s arbitrary authority, black workers created “an ethic of mutuality.”(115) Moreover, they learned about the shortcomings of top-down unions interested only in organizing white workers during previous efforts—after the First World War and in 1937 and 1941—to organize the tobacco plants under the American Federation of Labor. Additional events such as the Communist defense of the Scottsboro Boys, public hearings of the National Recovery Administration, and local voter registration drives opened workers’ eyes to new allies and opportunities to challenge Jim Crow. By 1943, Winston-Salem’s African-American community was primed to take up the fight alongside UCAPAWA’s leftist organizers.

Local 22’s rise, Korstad contends, represented an “institutional flowering and political expansion [that] flowed directly from the efforts of local people” and brought tangible success.(399) The FTA’s first contract with Reynolds gave workers improved wages, a grievance procedure to check the foremen’s authority, a seniority system, and even unpaid maternity leave for women. Success in the workplace created momentum for a larger political movement. Local 22 was the driving force behind increased voter registration drives and Kenneth Williams’s 1947 election to the Board of Aldermen, which marked the first time an African American defeated a white opponent in an election held in the South since the late nineteenth century.

Local 22 and its wider social movement did not last into the 1950s, and, Korstad argues, its demise reveals the potent combination of white supremacy and “an extraordinary feat of political repression.”(9) After 1943, with the union’s increasing power and the growing influence of racial liberalism, Winston-Salem’s white business and political elite resorted to corporate welfare and employee representation plans to moderate white workers’ militancy. Similarly, white politicians in the city could not stop the union-led political campaigns; instead they limited black political power by annexing white suburbs and gerrymandering districts. At the same time, Reynolds managers, the local white media, and competing unions waged a devastating red baiting campaign reinforced by the House Un-American Activities Committee’s investigation of Local 22. Significantly, Korstad points out that Local 22’s own “strategic blunder[s]”(352) made the union vulnerable to this “redwashing.”(417) When union leaders refused to sign anticommunist affidavits required by the Taft-Hartley Act and backed Henry Wallace’s presidential campaign, he argues, they isolated Local 22 from both the CIO and Winston-Salem’s black middle-class. In 1950, Local
22 lost a National Labor Relations Board election to a no union vote by only sixty-six ballots. For Korstad, the fact that almost half of Reynolds’ employees still supported Local 22 reveals the most tragic implication of his story: that surviving grassroots radicalism would be stunted by the “narrow . . . range of ideas and leaders” in the second half of the twentieth century. (417)

Korstad’s explanation of the immediate and long-term causes and consequences of the civil rights unionism in Winston-Salem is exceptionally convincing and comprehensive. There remains, however, a lingering question as to the roles white workers played inside or outside the movement. Korstad does not focus on white workers because, he contends, their attitudes were not central to the union movement’s defeat. Yet, the reader finds little illustration of white workers’ roles in maintaining their privileged access to the highest-paying skilled jobs, or explanation of why the few white workers who joined the union did so. Additionally, in his celebration of a short-lived civil rights unionism, Korstad draws a distinct line between “uplift” and “social change.” (377) Concerned more with the decline of radical potential than with the contours of pragmatic racial politics, Korstad implies that an absence of class solidarity limited the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Korstad effectively shows why, during the later movement, “the key institutions . . . were not the trade unions but the black church and independent protest organizations.” But this does little to prove his claim that movements for economic equality after 1965 would have been more successful if not “hamstrung by the institutional and cultural rifts between the civil rights and labor movements and by the divisions between the haves and have-nots within the working class.” (12)

Local 22 represented the potential for civil rights unionism led by black workers to extend the aspirations of the New Deal era into the Second World War and postwar years. Korstad’s work reinforces the conclusions of historians such as Robin Kelley, Michael Honey, and others who show that the labor movement’s Southern Front did indeed create “the ‘free spaces’ in which the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s would grow.” (9) In the end, though, qualitative changes in the tobacco industry’s “racial capitalism” and the practice of white supremacy in Winston-Salem were more important than the union’s roller coaster ride through collective bargaining. Korstad’s careful and riveting history recovers “the alternate social vision of the 1940s” (12) destroyed by institutional racism, anticommunism, and corporate power.

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