The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation

MICHAEL PERELMAN, 2000
pp. 405, $55.00

Economic historians have long disagreed about the enormous changes that transformed traditional agricultural societies into modern industrial economies. Most would agree, however, that the transition from feudal subsistence agriculture to wage labor was a crucial development. Karl Marx contended that the starting point in the transition to capitalism occurred when peasant farmers were forcibly separated from the means of subsistence and left with no alternative but to work for wages—a process that Marx called the “Secret of Primitive Accumulation.” He scoffed that “bourgeois historians” and what he termed “the tender annals of Political Economy” had explained the outcome of this social transformation as the emancipation of peasants from feudal servitude. Such an “idyllic” portrayal obscured the tragedy of what really happened. This early episode in the history of capitalism was instead, Marx argued, a brutal expropriation carried out at enormous human cost. The actual history, Marx declared, “is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.”

The alleged discrepancy between the optimistic story and the sordid reality of capitalism’s origins in Britain is the subject of Michael Perelman’s The Invention of Capitalism, a revised edition of his 1983 Classical Political Economy. As his new subtitle indicates, Perelman dwells at length on the contrast between Marx’s grim notion of “primitive accumulation” and the sunnier interpretations advanced by the classical political economists, chiefly Adam Smith. Along the way, Perelman—an economist at California State University, Chico, and a prolific author—identifies and lauds those economists within the classical tradition who were more willing to identify the coercive non-market underpinnings of the idealized laissez-faire economy. The result is a lengthy, wide-ranging, insightful, and, at times, frustrating exploration of classical thought on economic development and the formation of the working class.

The first five chapters lay out the theory of primitive accumulation, which Perelman defines as “the brutal process of separating people from the means of providing for themselves” (13). Perelman aims to show that the political economists believed their professed faith in laissez-faire by their approval of state-sanctioned efforts to eliminate customary peasant rights to subsistence through devices such as game laws, enclosure evictions, and the prohibition of religious holidays. These “dark designs” (1), while conspicuously absent in the major theoretical works, were instead conveniently hidden away in private correspondence, diaries, and lesser-known policy-oriented texts. With echoes of Stephen Marglin’s well-known thesis on the artificiality of early industrial organization, Perelman resolves this dialectical tension in classical economic thought by noting that classical thinkers consistently supported “positions that would work to harness small-scale agriculture to the interests of capital” (11).

The centerpiece of the subsequent chapters discussing the origin and maturation of classical political economy is a comparison of the writings of James Steuart and Adam Smith. Perelman sees Steuart as “the theorist par excellence of primitive accumulation” (151). Drawing on Cantillon, Hume, and Harrington, Steuart openly sanctioned an active state role in facilitating the transformation of traditional agriculture. The vision of Steuart entailed the forcible “separation between parent earth and her laborious children” (148) so as to create more occupational specialization, forcing people “to labor because they are slaves to their own wants” (150). Perelman laments that Steuart is less well known than Smith, who did so much to replace the former’s frank acknowledgment of the coercive expropriation of peasant farming autonomy with a fanciful portrait of development through voluntary choice and self-regulating markets.

Accordingly, Adam Smith comes in for some rough treatment by Perelman for achieving “a charming obfuscation of class” (171) and the role of class conflict in shaping the preconditions of capitalist development. To prepare the way for his revisionist interpretation of Smith’s “project,” Perelman argues that the conventional portrait of the benign Scottish professor is at odds with Smith’s own more
malign intentions. The standard portrait of Smith has held that he harbored a humane sympathy for the laboring classes, believed that high wages spurred greater productivity, worried over the effects of repetitive factory labor on the minds and spirits of ordinary workers, and was skeptical of the collective power of capitalists to enforce their interests in ways that would promote the general good. Perelman counters that Smith held nothing but contempt for those who were dependent, that his ostensible concern for workers was driven by his militarism, and that he was hypocritical in his criticisms of capitalists, the state, and the aristocracy when he sought the assistance of all three in obtaining academic posts.

There are some problems with Perelman’s analysis. His attack on “the commonly accepted theory that classical political economy offered its unconditional support for the doctrine of laissez-faire” (11) is a bit overstated, considering that most scholars outside of Reaganite and Thatcherite ideologues long ago discarded what amounts to a neo-classical caricature of Smith and company. As a result, the straw man of “unconditional laissez-faire” stalks Perelman’s pages as the distorting, one-dimensional shadow of classical political economy.

At the same time, Perelman does a service to call attention to the darker side of classical economic theory. For all of the political economists’ approbation of the greater liberty for self-fulfillment afforded individuals by market arrangements, Perelman reminds us of the harsh and punitive attitudes toward poverty and working class leisure that flourished in the classical climate of opinion. He usefully categorizes such attitudes as a “laissez-faire authoritarianism” (20) that sanctioned coercive policies and disciplinary institutions, exemplified by Bentham’s infamous Panopticon, for those who appeared unwilling or unable to adapt to an industrial work regime. On the whole, The Invention of Capitalism is a clearly written, vigorously argued book that might fit well in an advanced undergraduate or graduate seminar on economic thought.

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Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing

DIANA CRANE, 2000
Chicago: University of Chicago Press
pp. x + 294, $45.00

In her study of fashion and clothing choices in France, England, and the U.S. over the last 150 years, Diana Crane focuses on the extent to which the upper classes in these countries over this time period have set the prevailing vogues in styles of dress. Her general conclusions are not startling. In the 19th century, she asserts, fashions were designed by Parisian couturiers, in tandem with Parisian elites and the haute demi-monde. From that base they moved downward in the class structure. Until the 1960s that system remained in place, with occasional deviations, such as the “alternative style” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which incorporated masculine features such as neckties and white shirts. By the 1960s, however, the fulcrum of fashion radically shifted. In that decade the “fragmented groups” and “consumption subcultures” of the modern social order, nurtured by a global economy and the power of youth rebellion and postmodern modes in the media, shattered elite control of fashion and decentralized the hegemony of Parisian couture.

Crane is a sociologist. From the methodological standpoint of a historian like me her work suffers from a sociological emphasis on “data sets” and “ theorization,” with limited attention to primary research in a variety of sources over time. Thus what at first seems to be an original argument on her part too easily turns into a gloss on what was already known, as in her discussion of the “alternative style” of dress, in which she focuses primarily on secondary literature as her source. Her discussion of the changes in Vogue magazine in the modern era is similarly too limited to be convincing, for it is based on a sample of three issues every 10 years. Her interviews of 100 fashion designers and fashion magazine editors seem to play a limited role in the text. They may, however, inform her discussion of the post-1960 period, for that discussion has a rich denseness too often lacking in her analysis of the 19th century.

She provides, for example, an insightful discussion of the changes in male dress in the recent era. Since the early 19th century the standard attire of men displaying middle-class respectability across the class structure has been the wearing of suits, but in recent decades there has been a substantial decline in this practice. Correspondingly, men of all classes have taken up wearing leisure dress for all occasions. The latter, she argues, is a multivariant symbol of identity, especially in vogues for T-shirts,
jeans, and leather jackets, with the last a symbol of both class and cultural rebellion as well as aggressive masculinity.

For readers knowing little about the history of fashion, this book provides an excellent introduction to the subject. Her discussion of the era since the 1960s is admirable. I salute her for including an international dimension, although as with many U.S. fashion historians, she often winds up focusing on the U.S. She also includes a number of fascinating photographs, particularly of 19th-century factory foremen in middle-class dress.

Yet her interest in the history of labor is limited. She does, however, follow other analysts in noting that in the 19th century working-class groups both adopted and contested the styles set in Paris in ways more complex than traditional narratives suggest. In this section of the book, she bases her analysis on sociologist Frederick Le Play’s studies of 81 working-class families in France in the second half of the 19th century. These studies include data on fashion consumption in dress. Yet Crane does not address the important issue of the extent to which styles in dress have percolated upward in the class structure, beginning with simplified clothes for work and the flapper dress and behavior in the 1920s and continuing through many of the styles of the contemporary era. From the late 19th century onward, the corporatization of American society seems to have produced—especially among men—a romanticization of the worker, seen as tough and brawny and as working with muscle, not brain, power.

In the end, however, Crane is more interested in symbols and semiotics than in economic analysis. As interesting as this analysis is, one yearns for a dose of Foucault or even Marx in her postmodern pastiche. If she is right, what contemporary fashion tells us is that the traditional class structure has largely disappeared under the weight of gang wear and grunge culture. Still, one might wish that the exploited garment workers in places like Los Angeles, who make the fashions invented by designers, might emerge as a factor in the writing of fashion histories like this one.

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Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884
MARK WAHLGREN SUMMERS, 2000
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press pp. xv + 377, $35.95

Stories drawn from the election of 1884 have long enlivened lectures on Gilded Age politics. All the familiar incidents and individuals—Stalwarts, Half Breeds, Mugwumps, the scandals involving Grover Cleveland’s private life and James G. Blaine’s public record, and the bumbling Reverend Samuel Burchard’s line about Democrats being the party of rum, Romanism, and rebellion—are described here in great detail. However, Mark Wahlgren Summers aims at doing more. His goal is to dispute the widely held view of Gilded Age party battles as all sound and fury that signified nothing and to show that important local and national issues were being contested in 1884.

The antithesis of Summers’s perspective is found in Matthew Josephson’s classic account of Gilded Age politics, The Politicos, published in 1938. Although Josephson’s book probably is not widely read any longer, it set the tone for many textbook descriptions of the election of 1884. Josephson’s skillful use of colorful anecdotes, his caustic disdain for what he regarded as the ultimate meaningless of politics in the 1880s, and his condemnation of the supposedly near-universal corruption of Gilded Age politicians resulted in a dramatic picture of the period that captured the imagination of his readers, even though it was, as is shown by Summers and other careful modern scholars, something of a caricature of its subject.

Summers dismantles this traditional portrait of Gilded Age politics piece by piece. He argues that the practice of waving the bloody shirt of wartime wounds, far from being mere demagoguery, reflected deep-seated and still-unresolved feelings in the North and South regarding race, region, and constitutional rights. He goes on to say that the tariff policy, though viewed by Josephson and others of his persuasion as a trivial issue, was a matter of serious import to businessmen and workers in the 1880s. Moreover, in an age when a central purpose of winning elections was to capture control of patronage jobs for the party faithful, partisans interpreted calls for civil service reform as fighting words.

In addition to these national issues, local concerns that went virtually unmentioned in traditional histories of the era figure prominently in Summers’s account. His detailed exploration of Democratic and Republican responses to state and local debates regarding saloon license laws, prison contract labor, and bureaus of labor statistics gives his description of the 1884 campaign new depth. He also
provides deft sketches of how presidential campaigns were financed and organized, and gives numerous examples of the major party leaders’ alarm whenever defections by anti-monopolists, Greenbackers, Mugwumps, and prohibitionists threatened to undermine two-party control of the electoral process. Last but not least among Summers’s catalog of issues that were deeply felt at the time is a variety of contested cultural matters: Catholicism, Irish nationalism, prohibition, and race relations.

Nor does Summers neglect to mention the rhetorical excesses, corrupt bargains, and dirty campaign tricks that figured prominently in the 1884 election. Every important detail of the mudslinging that accompanied revelations of Grover Cleveland’s illegitimate child and the scandals involving James G. Blaine and John P. St. John (the Prohibition Party’s presidential candidate) receives thorough coverage. Summers also traces the behind-the-scenes payoffs by the Republican national committee to aid Benjamin F. Butler’s Greenback-Labor campaign, which was expected to draw votes from Cleveland, and a similar though ultimately unconsummated deal between Republicans and St. John that would have kept the Prohibition candidate from campaigning energetically in upstate New York, a GOP stronghold. The machinations of Democratic city bosses, Hugh McLaughlin of Brooklyn and John Kelly of New York, are covered as well. However, Summers’s point is less that these events colored the campaign than that the two major parties succeeded in maintaining their hegemony against all challenges and challengers.

Summers’s interpretation is not entirely new. Since the 1960s, historians of a revisionist persuasion have argued that real economic and cultural commitments energized voters in the 1880s. Summers’s special contribution to revisionism is that he demonstrates how even the election of 1884 fits into a revisionist framework. The case he makes will probably not dissuade those inclined to do so from continuing to entertain their classes with lurid stories from the 1884 campaign. However, anyone wishing to understand the broader context behind those stories will find Summers’s analysis of great value.

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Ties that Bind, Ties that Divide: One Hundred Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States
JULIÁNNA PUSKAȘ, transl. by ZORA LUDWIG, 2000
New York: Holmes & Meier pp. xix + 444, $45.00

This survey and analysis of the Hungarian experience in the U.S. by the doyen of Hungarian–American studies is published in the prestigious Ellis Island Series, edited by Ira Glazier and Luigi de Rosa. The organization of the book reflects the advances of ethnic history over the last 25 years. The story begins in Hungary with an analysis of society and economy between feudalism and capitalism and the reflection of macro-economic developments in relations between countryside and city. It also incorporates the village economies where men and women made their decisions as to whether to migrate or not.

The patterns of migration are outlined next and again are related to European transatlantic migration to the U.S. as a whole and to a particular village of origin. One village, Szamoszeg, played a particular role in the life of Julianna Puskás: it was the home of her family and a place in which most families had kin in America. Her father left in 1938 and later brought over her brother. The mother and Julianna remained in Hungary. Her socialization and her sensitivity to the life-projects of other migrants have made Julianna Puskás’s work an outstanding example of macro-level analysis combined with a description of the meso-level, regions with their particular economic patterns, social customs, and dialects, and the micro-level of families and individuals. Chain migration—human decisions—rather than vague economic push and pull factors are the driving force.

Next the author skillfully relates U.S. immigration policies and repercussions of emigration for Hungarian society to each other. She discusses individual motivations to leave and the image of a mythical “America.” This inclusive study of settlement patterns is comprehensive: work, in particular in mining and heavy industry; the establishment of communities with their own businesses, fraternal and other secular organizations, and parishes; and a Magyar-language press and intellectual superstructure. Its size permitted the Magyar community to reach “institutional completeness,” to function, self-contained, within the parameters of the receiving society.

However, while migrants cherish their cultural practices, they left their societies of origin because of
specific problems or deep-seated discontent with social structures. Thus interaction with the host society on the job, in a particular branch of industry, and in politics changes the immigrants into hyphenated Americans or into ethnics who consciously fashion an image of themselves. Puskás relies on the interpretive framework of “invented ethnicity” and of gradual transformation of local affinities into a national consciousness. However, in this reviewer’s opinion, ethnic groups do not “invent” themselves at the drawing board but consciously or unconsciously shape their views of themselves and the image they want to present to neighboring ethnic groups and the host society. Thus an interactive process rather than an invention explains particular expressions of ethnicity.

Hungarian immigrants, like most newcomers from eastern and southern and, to a considerable degree, from northern and western Europe, came as workers. They transferred peasant struggles against feudal lords and state to relations with industrial bosses. Contrary to opinions in the AFL, they organized—in their own frame of reference and not automatically along lines of American labor unionism. Had native-born English-speaking labor leaders studied their cultures as modern scholars do (and as their competitors from the IWW tried to do), the organization and accommodation of different cultural frames of reference might have been easier to achieve since experiences on the job in the industries were shared.

At this point the one weakness of this study appears. The Hungarian immigrants’ interaction with other groups is hardly discussed. In Cleveland—or in Pittsburgh, or in New Brunswick, NJ—the immigrants lived in conflict or cooperation with other ethnic groups; Slovaks, Rumanians, occasionally Croats, Slovenes, and Poles had been neighbors in the multi-ethnic history of Hungary. Budapest was Magyar–German–Jewish. The author refers only to political conflicts carried over from the old world or articulated more explicitly in the new society. This unfortunate decision makes the book an ethnic group history rather than one of cultural interaction, of a process of becoming part of the new society and changing that society, if only moderately, to accept and perhaps respect some of the cultural practices and patterns of work of the “others.”

The study concludes with a discussion of “assimilation” in the inter-war years, thus emphasizing pressures of the host society. When the second generation formed its own identity (chapt. 23), it mediated between cultures rather than simply assimilating. Puskás, who was one of the first scholars to develop the concept of immigrant generations or a succession of cohorts of arrival of the same ethnico-cultural background that diverge in social characteristics, analyses the post-1945 period: from 1948 to 1952 displaced persons from Hungary arrived and 4 years later, in 1956–57, the freedom fighters from the uprising in Hungary quelled by Soviet troops. Puskás’s study is a comprehensive social history of ethnicity and acculturation at its best.

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**Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America**

**MARC DOLLINGER, 2000**
pp. xi + 296, $35.00

Marc Dollinger begins his ambitious book by quoting two famous witticisms about American Jewish political behavior. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Yiddish saying went, Jews had three veltin (worlds)—di velt (this world), yene velt (the next world), and Roosevelt. Up to then, Jews had divided their votes among the Democrats, Republicans, and Socialists. Now they cast more than 90% of their ballots for FDR, thus beginning an enduring commitment to the Democratic Party and to mainstream liberalism. By the 1950s, Jews had become one of the most economically well-off social groups in the country. Yet even as the Jewish working class dwindled, the community as a whole remained solidly Democratic and liberal. Jews, it was said, “lived like Episcopalians but voted like Puerto Ricans”.

*Quest for Inclusion* seeks to explain this apparent contradiction. It argues that Jewish liberalism stemmed neither from religious tradition nor from historical experience. Rather, American Jews settled on liberalism as their “strategy of choice” to promote their own integration and acculturation into the broader society. Inclusion was the real aim of Jewish politics, and Jews maintained liberal positions only so long as they furthered that aim. When liberal positions threatened to obstruct Jewish social advancement, they were quickly jettisoned. Dollinger thus suggests that Jewish liberalism was more opportunistic maneuver than deeply held conviction.
The book focuses primarily on the organized Jewish community, particularly on a handful of national Jewish organizations including the American Jewish Committee (AJCommittee) and the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress). Dollinger argues perceptively that the meaning of liberalism has changed over time, and he therefore concentrates on a different cluster of issues for each period between the 1930s and 1975 (with an epilogue that carries the story to the end of the century). In his discussion of Jewish support for the New Deal, he emphasizes the views of Jewish social workers and the ways in which the government’s assumption of responsibility for basic relief influenced the agendas of Jewish social welfare agencies. At the same time, events in Europe forced the Jewish community to take an avid interest in foreign policy. In this regard, Dollinger examines the internecine disputes over strategy between theaccomodationist liberals of the AJCommittee and the pluralist rebels of the AJCongress.

During the early Cold War, Jewish organizations purged themselves of Communist associations and vocally proclaimed their opposition to the Soviet Union and to Communism. At the same time, however, they bucked the prevailing mood by speaking out boldly against McCarthyism. Likewise, during the 1950s and early 1960s, the organized Jewish community took an active role in the movement for African American civil rights—as long as that movement was in its integrationist phase. When, in the late 1960s, the movement adopted the slogan of Black Power, Jews turned inward, and many—including some important intellectuals—broke with liberalism altogether. But while the rise of neoconservatism should have signaled the end of Jewish liberalism, Dollinger argues that it did not do so. Jews continued to support the Democrats and liberal causes disproportionately through the 1990s.

The book is best at exploring the “limits of American Jewish liberalism” and at reconciling “the apparent contradiction between Jewish liberal strength and its [sic] serious failures.” Most of these limits and contradictions stem from what Dollinger sees as the ultimate aim of Jewish liberalism: social advancement. And many of them have to do with race. For example, Dollinger shows that even as the national Jewish organizations were fighting for racial integration in the South, Jews in many Northern neighborhoods were resisting it—going so far as to ban blacks from Jewish-run recreational facilities. Similarly, it was the issue of affirmative action that divided the Jewish organizations from their erstwhile allies in the civil rights movement and threatened to put an end to the Jewish liberal tradition.

In some ways, however, the book delivers less than it promises. Since the discussion is limited to the positions taken by a handful of explicitly Jewish organizations, for example, the book never seriously attempts to assess the “contributions of Jewish liberals to American political culture”. Moreover, Quest for Inclusion fails to explain adequately the sources and persistence of Jewish liberalism. How did such disparate sectors of the Jewish community—Eastern European workers and radicals, bourgeois acculturationist Central Europeans, and nationalist second-generation Americans—all end up in the liberal coalition?

More attention to issues of class and gender might have helped answer that question. Except for some passing references to the Jewish Labor Committee and the Workmen’s Circle, there is no discussion of the roots of Jewish liberalism in the Jewish labor movement or in Jewish socialism. Even the chapter on the New Deal era, when the Jewish working class was still a very active political force, fails to mention David Dubinsky, Sidney Hillman, or the garment unions they headed. Likewise, a look at Jewish positions on such gender-related issues as equal rights for women, abortion rights, and gay rights might have helped Dollinger explain why the majority of Jews have remained in the liberal Democratic coalition over the last quarter century, despite misgivings on racial and economic issues.

Quest for Inclusion covers a lot of ground, both chronologically and thematically. It does a great service by identifying the critical issues that engaged both liberals and the organized Jewish community for much of the 20th century. Moreover, its conclusion—that Jewish liberalism was merely a strategy for furthering the community’s integration in mainstream American life—is provocative enough to stimulate further research and debate. Discussion on the origins and persistence of American Jewish liberalism is sure to continue.

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Race, Jobs and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941–46
Andrew Edmund Kersten, 2000
Urbana: University of Illinois Press
pp. 210, $37.95

In recent years, increasing numbers of “new” labor historians have shifted away from writing in-depth community studies, detailed workplace analyses, and social history “with the politics left out” and
re-engaged the state, politics, and public policy. In *Race, Jobs and the War*, Andrew Kersten analyzes the history of a path-breaking government agency where the public pursuit of civil rights in the workplace collided with the entrenched private interests of employers and workers. To the extent that minority workers and government made gains, and according to Kersten they did just that, they did so with the assistance of labor and/or community activists. Kersten argues that the federal Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) (in both its incarnations) helped promote a measure of industrial desegregation, and paved the way for subsequent local, state and federal intervention in the post-World War II period.

Historians have long understood that the records of the FEPC provide a rich source of material for understanding the dynamics of racial and gender inequality, and challenges to it. Furthermore, the FEPC rose and fell at a unique point in the evolution of the New Deal state, and the CIO unions that formed in the 1930s or the AFL unions that were revitalized by World War II. Kersten argues that in recent years historians have misunderstood the FEPC, a largely toothless agency, attributing gains made by black workers during the war to the pressure of tight labor markets. While Kersten acknowledges the real limits of the power of the FEPC, he argues that when bolstered by labor and community activists, the agency did persuade, pressure, and harangue employers to open up job markets as a result of public hearings. Kersten focuses his attention on Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and St. Louis in order to better lay out the ways that regional variations in power affected the making of public policy.

Kersten is a good writer, a painstaking researcher, and, not surprisingly, sympathetic to the liberal aims and methods of the FEPC. The author ably engages a number of historiographical debates on the FEPC itself, civil rights, labor history, the home front during the war, and the nature of the New Deal. Kersten also argues that the history of the FEPC reveals a more theoretical point about the workings of the state, which he argues functions as an arena in which various actors, “employers, labor unions, civil rights groups, or minority workers”6, struggled. Kersten is on solid theoretical ground in terms of the result of the FEPC’s policies, whose funding, staffing, and internal struggles and relationships with various groups he carefully documents. But it is a larger leap from the history of one stepchild agency to a theory of the state, and Kersten will probably fail to sway Marxists or other theorists from their views.

But the heart of the book is a series of richly detailed studies of the process of federally supported civil rights activism in different states and cities. Born of the activism of the March on Washington Movement, led by A. Philip Randolph, the FEPC did best where liberalism, the labor movement, and civil rights organizations had made the most headway. Thus the agency succeeded relatively well in urban areas such as Chicago and Detroit, northern Indiana, and much of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Yet even here many white workers, even those in the CIO, resisted the full integration of the workplace. Unfortunately, Kersten sometimes credits workers and unions with considerable power over the hiring and promotion policies of companies, although managers readily blamed workers as the reason why they could not hire or upgrade minority workers. Kersten reveals that the resources of the agency were stretched quite thin, and numerous workers (chiefly African-American women) and territory (for example, most of Minnesota for most of the war) were often ignored. The FEPC found its toughest fights, and made the least progress, in regions bordering the Ohio River and in St. Louis. Here Southern mores, a much weaker CIO and civil rights groups, and more recalcitrant employers, stymied the FEPC.

The FEPC ultimately succumbed to the budgetary axe wielded by political conservatives, even though in the mid-1940s labor and civil rights groups joined together to try and save the FEPC. Once that battle was lost, civil rights activists, labor organizations, and liberals extended the fight for an FEPC into states and cities. Here workers learned a lesson in the limitations of thinking globally but acting locally, as these even weaker civic and state organizations rarely accomplished anything on the scale of the federal FEPC. Yet the idea of the FEPC proved harder to kill, and a generation later it was finally reborn, although like the FEPC, such efforts and agencies were also methodically starved of political support and resources.

Kersten deserves praise for his contribution to the history of civil rights, liberalism, and public policy in a crucial agency of government.

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**Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–49**

VICTOR SILVERMAN, 2000

Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press

pp. xiv + 194, $39.95

This is a book about failure. Victor Silverman has examined the failure of the social democratic promise to embed itself as the reality of the lives of people in the post-World War II world.
The subject itself is large and unwieldy but Silverman sharpens his focus by concentrating on the international diplomacy of labor, both American and British, as expressed through the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). He shows all too well both the promise and demise of the WFTU, and the reasons for British and American support of the organization, and for their subsequent withdrawal. In doing so, Silverman nicely articulates the differing political cultures of the two labor movements and thus the differing reasons for the convergence of their actions in the WFTU. Silverman makes great claims for the WFTU. In his introduction he argues that “The formation of the World Federation marked a high point of the world working-class movement ... [it] was, in a way, the last chance for a worldwide social transformation created by the working class” (13). To justify such claims he points to the WFTU as the extension of the Popular Front and Grand Alliance, labor’s equivalent to the United Nations.

The work is divided into three sections. In the first, Silverman explores the history and context of labor internationalism. He identifies the uneasy relations between the three major ideological approaches to labor internationalism represented by the liberal, Socialist, and Communist traditions from the beginning of the 20th century to the mid-1940s. He explains how, by 1945, labor internationalism had become all-inclusive. Under the influence of the common defense against fascism and the requirements of World War II, notions of free trade unionism that had developed to distinguish liberal and Socialist unions from their Communist rivals in the 1920s were transformed. As Silverman tells it, the concept of free trade unionism evolved to the point where any organization fighting fascism or outside aggression was included (29–30), a development that allowed for the rapid inclusion of the All-Union Central Council of Soviet Trade Unions and other Communist-led labor centers after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in 1941. Ideological consistency was thus overcome by the desperate need for cooperation against the common foe. Under the impact of war and exile, the new internationalism was tested, particularly in Britain, enabling Silverman to identify not only its glorious potential but also its limitations.

In the second section, the British are examined. It is not a pretty sight. While Silverman is diplomatically restrained in his commentary it becomes obvious that British labor internationalism was delusory at best (a projection onto the Soviet Union of the idealized workers’ state that had more to do with juxtaposing contemporary British conditions than any Soviet reality) and reactionary at worst, infused with racism, nationalism, and fears of economic competition. Paralleling this popular approach to internationalism by the vast majority of British workers, the leadership of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) echoed the dictum of the 19th-century French Prime Minister who is said to have proclaimed “I am their leader. I must follow them!” Despite considerable misgivings, TUC General Secretary Sir Walter Citrine embraced the WFTU to become its first President, a role he had filled for the pre-war, less-inclusive International Federation of Trade Unions. Citrine was a labor statesman with dreams of becoming a world power broker. The wartime Grand Alliance appeared to be a firm basis for post-war labor influence, offering an enormous potential role for the British as honest brokers between the Americans and the Russians. And with the Labour Party in government, the TUC leaders identified closely with perceived national interests. It was a situation not without irony. As Silverman notes, “The TUC’s leaders placed themselves in a paradoxical position. They believed in Britain’s role as a great imperial power that was confronting a dangerous European continent while preserving the British empire. Contradictorily, the union leaders supported the constitution of a world system that proposed the elimination of imperial power and the toleration of Soviet preeminence on the continent” (48). And they pursued close cooperation with foreign Communists of whom they were deeply suspicious (though not as suspicious as they were of domestic Communists).

The most original contribution made by Silverman in this book is in his use of the in-depth qualitative analyses of worker opinion conducted by Britain’s Mass Observation Unit under the leadership of Tom Harrison. There is no equivalent opinion polling information for the U.S., where class was overlooked as a prominent factor in social analysis and the assumption was that there was little difference between middle class and worker outlooks. The result is that, unusually, we have a very good idea of popular opinions among British workers in a multitude of industries, and how they converge with or differ from one another and the opinions of union activists and leaders (the voices we usually hear).

Under the pressures of the developing Cold War, the ambiguities of British labor internationalism were exposed. British workers followed their leaders even though, as Silverman points out, they became disillusioned with the Labour government after 1945. With few exceptions, they were unwilling to oppose their leaders in matters of foreign policy and became increasingly apathetic. Even so, the anti-Communism of union leaders like Citrine, Deakin, and Tewson (and of former union leader Ernest Bevin, Labour’s Foreign Secretary) failed to spark popular support and forced them to tread carefully.
Silverman’s work on American labor internationalism is less impressive, if only because there is no American equivalent to the Mass Observation Unit. After stating that there was widespread cynicism about World War II and that enthusiasm for the war was influenced by ethnic and generational considerations, he concludes that by 1945 “The ideas of the working class about foreign relations remained unclear and contradictory—hardly a strong basis for internationalism” (126). In a neat inversion, Silverman argues that whereas British labor internationalism was driven by the pro-Soviet feelings of workers themselves contrary to the thinking of their leaders, in the U.S. internationalism was driven by union leaders over the indifference of their members. The great divide between the AFL and the CIO reflected not only a conflict of styles and programs but also ethnic and racial divisions (127). For Silverman, what bound American workers together was patriotism. By 1945, under the influence of the New Deal and the Grand Alliance, Americanism encompassed the values of cultural diversity and the radical democratic elements of the American political tradition. Cultural pluralism, he emphasizes, was applied to the world at large and became the basis of American labor internationalism. Just as in the British case, American labor internationalism had its limitations. As Silverman notes, “The CIO’s foreign policy never resolved the contradiction between spreading the politics of productivity based on U.S. economic power, which reproduced worldwide the economic and social divisions the unionists decried at home, and building a democratic world order” (151). Together with a shallow base of support for internationalist activism, it was the shift in the definition of Americanism and patriotism brought on by the developing Cold War that made continued CIO commitment to the WFTU increasingly impossible after 1948. In this, Taft–Hartley proved a milestone.

Silverman is anxious to demonstrate the independent basis of CIO foreign policy and, while acknowledging that much of its success depended upon a close relationship with the U.S. government, he is at pains to show how reluctantly and slowly the CIO abandoned its commitment to the WFTU. He makes the charge, for example, that “For the world of labor the cold war started even later, in the fall of 1948, with the structural failure of the World Federation” (168).

The concentration on the WFTU has great advantages in giving sharp relief to the subject but can also obscure developments that are less easy to categorize. For example, we get little understanding of how important the international diplomacy of the labor centers was to their respective trade union movements. What kind of resources were expended? How important were these international activities to what C. Wright Mills termed “the new men of power” and to their relationship to their governments and members? What really was the role of the AFL in undermining the success of the WFTU and what was its relationship with the U.S. government in doing so? In fact, the CIO had little presence in the international field apart from the WFTU. The AFL, on the other hand, maintained a kind of shadow world organization of labor in the International Trade Secretariats, had strong influence among the U.S. embassy labor attachés throughout Europe and beyond, worked closely with the OSS and its successor the CIA, and operated on a freelance basis, quite well funded, to foster anti-Communist labor strength throughout the continent. In any consideration of labor internationalism after 1945, the AFL cannot be ignored.

This is an extremely rich and suggestive work. It adds much to a developing small field that considers the international activities of the American labor movement in Europe during the Cold War. Beginning with Ronald Radosh, American Labor and U.S. Foreign Policy (1969) and Philip Taft, Defending Freedom: American Labor and Foreign Affairs (1973), the field lay relatively dormant until the last several years when Ronald Filippelli in American Labor and Postwar Italy (1989), Federico Romero, The United States and the European Trade Union Movement (1992), and Stephen Burwood, American Labor, France, and the Politics of Intervention (1999) opened new avenues of analysis with the end of the Cold War. Silverman’s contribution is in illuminating the role of the TUC and the CIO while paying close attention to the relationship between the rank and file and international relations in the two countries. As such it is a welcome and rewarding addition to the literature.

STEPHEN BURWOOD, Associate Dean State University of New York College, Geneseo

Sick Not Dead: The Health of British Workingmen during the Mortality Decline
JAMES RILEY, 1997
Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press
pp. xvii + 349, $49.95

While most labor historians interested in the modern erosion of workers’ control have steered clear of the working class experience with disease and medicine, a growing contingent have insisted on its
importance. Heretofore, they have done so mostly in the manner of the muckraker, by emphasizing diseases that were both deadly and work-related. James Riley’s new book *Sick, Not Dead* suggests that when it comes to the history of English workingmen, this approach has only grazed its mark, even as it has been right about how central health issues were to the working class. Riley demonstrates that concerns about health and sickness stood uppermost on the agendas of the friendly societies—those associations through which workers asserted a measure of agency over their and their families’ fate in the decades before unionization rates soared, and a national insurance system was put into place (in 1911). These friendly societies’ own concerns about physical ailments nevertheless departed markedly from what historical demographers and many sociomedical historians have emphasized for this period. Workers themselves were less worried about the deadliest or most “occupational” of diseases than about those that rendered them merely sick—and out of work.

The power of Riley’s argument derives largely from the sweep and character of the evidence he has amassed. More universal than unions and more popular in some areas than churches, friendly societies provided what was arguably the most common organizational fulcrum for the British working class from the 18th into the late 19th century, when unions overshadowed them. The draw of friendly societies lay precisely in the security that sickness or death and medical benefits provided, in a society with minimal fiscal commitments to the health and well-being of its workforce. So important were these provisions to the membership that many friendly societies kept meticulous records of their members’ health benefits over long periods of time. Riley’s mining of these records opens up a huge chunk of working class experience whose history has remained largely speculative. In contrast to doctor and patient records, these voluminous records reflect the extra-medical viewpoints on illness that many labor and medical historians have long sought, in ways that also allow us to assess their representativeness. That is, figures also exist for the denominator of society membership from which these recorded experiences are drawn. Riley’s evidence enables an account of working class illness and medical experience that is both at the population level and from the workers’ perspective.

Yoking the heavy statistical hand of an older social history together with a more recent preoccupation with day-to-day worker resistance may well strike readers as odd. But in many ways, the strategy works. It adds extra dimensions to a familiar tale about how workers started to visit doctors more regularly over the early 19th century, and acceded to medicine’s cultural authority by the early 20th. Riley shows clearly how workingmen judged sickness by the inability to work, and doctors by the attentiveness they showed. Friendly society members thereby took on not just apparent malingerers but, with surprising confidence, the doctors they hired. Riley finds that workers commonly took to monitoring and upbraiding their doctors and negotiating with them over the terms of service as well as appropriate fees, at least into the 1890s. Thereafter, however, he discerns a worker “loss of nerve,” an acquiescence to doctors’ contract demands and to expert claims to knowledge that anticipates the eclipse of friendly society control over worker–doctor relations through the 1911 Health Insurance Act.

Many of Riley’s contentions with medical and demographic historians should also whet labor historians’ curiosity about workers’ experience with health and sickness over this period. Showing that a mortality transition from infectious to chronic causes of disease was underway among workmen even prior to 1900, Riley also fleshes out the complimentary notion of a “sickness” transition. Workers who lived longer were also sick more of their lives. Population-wide increases in sickness time, meticulously documented here as following rules and patterns independent of those for lower mortality rates, meant that illness itself acquired a greater prominence in working people’s consciousness and culture. Riley demolishes Edward Shorter’s speculative assertions that those stricken with symptoms prior to the mid-20th century were much more likely to ignore them. Indeed, the deadly diseases singled out by demographic and social historians had a surprisingly low profile in these records covering much of the mortality transition period. Even by the mid-19th century, most ailments with which friendly society members and doctors grappled were “minor” and non-life-threatening. Once we step out from our own medicalized assumptions about what was important to them, and more deeply into records workers themselves kept, their experience of sickness turns out to look surprisingly like our own.

The nature of Riley’s evidence as well as his method mean that his book is more attentive to the social than to the cultural dimensions of sickness, and it remains an open question just what workers’ conceptions of their bodies had to do with their evolving judgments about sickness and doctors. Labor historians may also have less patience with Riley’s arguments with demographers about “how to promote circumstances in which people are sick less often and for a shorter time.” But here as elsewhere, Riley raises questions about established approaches to the history of working class health—most pointedly, that of neglect. His book suggests an unexamined prominence, perhaps even “postmodernity,” to the experience of sickness in the modern working class. *Sick, Not Dead* thereby
points the way towards a fuller appreciation of the importance of bodily and medical experience of working people, one that will be ever more enhanced as we learn more about the terms as well as the relationship through which they apprehended it.

CHRISTOPHER SELLERS, Associate Professor of History, State University of New York, Stony Brook

Engendering the State: Family Work, and Welfare in Canada

NANCY CHRISTIE, 2000
Toronto: University of Toronto Press
pp. 459, $45.00

This is the most labor-intensive book review I have ever done. Reading Christie’s book sent me scrambling back to my own book about the moral regulation of Single Mother in Ontario and even research notes to compare my evidence and arguments against those of the author. Christie’s book is an ambitious project which involves a historical analysis of several early Canadian social programs (most particularly mothers’ allowance and family allowances). She examines the policy environment during the first four decades of the 20th century, exploring the discursive arena surrounding the implementation of these policies. She argues that these early Canadian social programs were rarely established to alleviate poverty or promote women’s economic autonomy. Rather, these policies had very conservative purposes: to promote capitalist aims; to maintain social stability; and, most importantly, to reinforce distinct gendered roles for men and women within the home and the workplace.

Through her analysis of how these policies affect family and gender roles Christie claims that the early 1900s is a maternalist era. By this she means that policy discussions focus around the belief that the mother is the moral head of the family and that her role as mother and caregiver must be supported by social policy. During the Depression Christie believes this maternalist discourse fades and attention focuses on the needs of the male breadwinner. Family allowance and unemployment insurance policy of the mid-20th century pays little attention to the needs of women—ignoring their role as paid workers and paying mere lip service to their role as mothers and wives. Christie provides ample evidence to demonstrate that these later policies were created to shore up the male breadwinner, whose role as economic head of the household had been greatly diminished by the ravages of the Depression.

While Christie raises some important questions about the nature of the early Canadian welfare state, there are three issues which I would question. The first is the argument that the early 1900s was a maternalist era until it was usurped by the interests of the male breadwinner. My own understanding of this period does not provide such a clear sense of progression. It is interesting that Christie does not address the introduction of workers’ compensation, a policy which preceded mothers’ allowance and enforced the interests of the male breadwinner. If this policy were included in her analysis I believe it would lead the author to argue that there were two tiers of the early Canadian welfare state One tier was premised on notions of charity which provided miserly benefits through intrusive administrative practices to the poor, including single mothers. A second tier used a rights-based discourse and provided more generous benefits to those who had a strong attachment to the workforce, namely white men. I believe this two-tiered argument made by Barbara Nelson, Linda Gordon, and other American scholars has merit in describing the early years of Canadian social policy. Second, Christie argues that mothers’ allowance was initially established as a rights-based program for poor single mothers. It was only during the Depression that mothers’ allowance lost its cache and became indistinguishable from general relief. My understanding of the history of mothers’ allowance is considerably different. While I would agree with Christie that some of the lobbyists argued for a rights-based policy which would be available to all needy single mothers, the majority did not hold this view. During the Ontario lobby most of the interest groups (church, women’s social agencies) promoted a policy which would distinguish between worthy and unworthy single mothers and which would require intensive and intrusive scrutiny. Labor, which clearly wanted to discourage women from working, promoted a more inclusive, rights-based policy. When I explored the early mothers’ allowance policy in British Columbia I was initially surprised to discover that it permitted all needy single mothers to apply. Upon closer inspection I found that racial concerns trumped moral concerns in this instance. Mothers’ allowance lobbyists and administrators in British Columbia were deeply concerned about the Asian and Aboriginal populations and granted all white needy single mothers the allowance to bolster the white population. Within a decade even the British Columbia policy restricted eligibility to white widows and deserted mothers. Consequently my research does not support Christie’s claim that mothers’ allowance was initially a rights-based program.
Closely related to this second argument, Christie also diminishes the importance of moral regulation in the administration of mothers’ allowance. In fact she claims that mothers’ allowance administrators were much more concerned about labor issues than moral issues. Perhaps Christie’s misunderstanding of the importance of moral issues in the ongoing administration of mothers’ allowance is the result of her discourse analysis. A close examination of the everyday administration of the policy through a case-file analysis would have provided ample proof that mothers’ allowance administrators, neighbors, and community leaders were extremely preoccupied with the moral character of mothers’ allowance recipients. My analysis of Ontario mothers’ allowance (OMA) case files revealed that the majority of correspondence in these files demonstrated that OMA administrators spent the vast majority of their time on moral issues (i.e. sleeping arrangements, the presence of male visitors, the social habits of the mother, the cleanliness of the home). I am not suggesting that they did not pay attention to labor issues. OMA administrators were quick to suggest what types of paid work a single mother could do and still receive mothers’ allowance. These same administrators would disqualify a woman if her children were not attempting to work and provide some extra income. But these employment issues were relatively straightforward, whereas the determination of whether a mother was “a fit and proper person” was more arbitrary and required a great deal of intrusive and ongoing investigation.

There is also one serious omission in Christie’s account of these first four decades of Canadian social policy making in the 20th century. Christie underestimates the importance of race. This was an era when there was enormous anxiety about “race suicide” and “race degeneration” and when people feared that ethnic minorities would overwhelm the Anglo-Saxon population. The author is correct to note that the percentage of ethnic minority OMA recipients was similar to their overall provincial representation. But what is interesting is the fact that these statistics were calculated and publicly circulated in the first place. Also, an examination of the OMA case files reveals that ethnic minority single mothers experienced much closer scrutiny from OMA administrators, neighbors, and friends. When an ethnic minority mother was accepted for OMA she received extra attention/advice from the administrator to ensure that the mother’s living, eating, and socializing habits were becoming anglicized.

All of this is not to suggest that Christie’s book is without merit. In fact, Christie makes an important contribution to an ongoing debate about the purpose and nature of the Canadian welfare state. In particular, Christie’s attention to the role of religion in this formative period of Canadian social policy is important and often neglected by welfare state and labour scholars, including myself. She provides compelling evidence that the establishment of early social welfare programs in Canada was very much a Christian project.

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More with Less: Work Reorganization in the Canadian Mining Industry
BOB RUSSELL, 1999
Toronto: University of Toronto Press
pp. xv + 251, $21.95

This is an ambitious attempt to apply theoretical argument and grounded research to a study of contemporary work relations in the resource sector of an advanced capitalist economy. The theoretical terrain explored is the character of the late-20th-century moment of post-Fordism. While Fordism is understood here as a combination of accommodations, including “Taylorism at the workplace, Wagner-ism in the sphere of industrial relations, and Keynesianism in the labour market” (14), post-Fordism is presented as a more uncertain formulation whose significance is summarized in the following alternatives: “reskilled jobs in more participatory work environments, where unionization may, at best, become a secondary or even redundant concern for workers; or leaner, more stress-laden production systems, embodied within a new authoritarian corporate culture that, at most, is prepared to come to terms with new forms of enterprise unionism” (20–21).

The territory under discussion is the mining industry of contemporary Saskatchewan, which includes both potash and uranium mining and involves multinational corporations that bridge the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, when post-Fordist initiatives began to appear in the workplace. Initially, Russell had proposed a study of changing industrial relations in the uranium sector, but Cameco Corpor-
ation—the world’s largest uranium producer—turned down his request for cooperation in such a study; however, he was more successful in securing the cooperation of the United Steel Workers of America locals that represented the workers in this sector and, with the union’s encouragement, expanded the research plan to include four potash operations in northern Saskatchewan that were also experiencing the challenges of work reorganization. Accordingly, the study acquired an enhanced comparative dimension that adds to its general interest, and the interactive interviews with workers and management that formed much of the research strategy will be of some assistance to unions in formulating their responses to ongoing innovations in the organization of work.

The resulting book is a stimulating contribution to the debate on the claims for the emergence of post-Fordism as a distinct stage in the history of contemporary work relations. Successive chapters review the prevailing political economy and labour market conditions in the uranium and potash industries of the late 1980s and early 1990s and then proceed to examine the evolving employment relations in each of the firms under discussion. Russell finds that only one of the firms can be said to have committed fully to a post-Fordist strategy, while others have pursued ad hoc initiatives or relied on more traditional forms of workplace control.

Interestingly, one of the more “traditional” firms in this analysis is the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, originally created as a public corporation by the New Democratic government in 1975 but privatized by its successors in 1989; one result has been a reduction in employment security and an increase in seasonal layoffs. The uranium producer Cameco was also the product of privatization in 1989, but its principal employment strategy has remained a fly-in/fly-out policy that enforces radical spatial and temporal (as well as residential and racial) divisions within the workforce. Russell finds indications of a “passive post-Fordism” in the operations of Central Canada Potash, but it appears that only the potash operations of Agrium Ltd. had actively adopted such post-Fordist initiatives as a relatively flat job classification system and a significant gain-sharing element in remuneration; even here there were inconsistencies, and the union was involved in struggles against job losses and for acceptance of collective agreements.

In respect of labour process, which is described in useful detail based on his site visits and interviews, Russell finds that the record of skill enhancement in these industries runs through the several firms under study and appears to be the result of the demands of continuous process work rather than more general managerial initiatives. In another revealing chapter, Russell examines the existing “production politics” at these unionized work sites. Under post-Fordist conditions, it is generally expected that unions will be asked to sacrifice traditional forms of workplace control, that union leaders will become active in participatory forms of management, and that sources of conflict will be reduced if not eliminated. The survey data presented here reveal a less harmonious picture, in that levels of informal sabotage and work injury remained relatively consistent between the several sites. In the case of the most developed post-Fordist site, the reported level of supervisory harassment was the lowest (19.4%) but this site also featured the highest level of willingness to accept unsafe work requests (42.4%). Observes Russell: “Apart from less rough treatment at the hands of supervisory personnel, however, the differences between the mines on real empowerment issues are marginal at best. Certainly, they make it questionable as to whether old protections ought to be cashed in for new ‘rights’ (194).

Clearly, Russell remains unimpressed by the claims of post-Fordism, at least as demonstrated in the record of one sector of the Canadian resource economy. It is one of the strengths of this book that it takes the ongoing reorganization initiatives in the workplace seriously and attempts to explain the nature of several programmes in detail and place their achievements and limitations in context. As such this study will be a useful corrective for specialists in labor studies and for union members who want to measure managerial strategies against workplace practice. A dedication at the front of this book to the victims of the 1992 Westray Disaster in Nova Scotia raises more questions about work relations in the mining industry.

That episode is beyond the scope of this book, but it is a reminder that the mining environment of the 1990s included not only the leading corporations discussed in this study but also a variety of lesser operations with no claims to best practice, Fordist or otherwise. Finally, this review must conclude with a note indicating that this book has hardly benefited from contemporary best practice in the world of publishing. As presented to readers, the book lacks a title or subtitle (or other cover information) that would draw it to the attention of those interested in the potash and uranium industries or the relations of labour and capital in Saskatchewan. Moreover, the text is laden down with difficult prose and lapses in copy-editing. I do not think I have ever seen the term “eluded to” in a scholarly book before. Published in a prestigious series by a major university press, this book accordingly raises questions about what has been happening to the labour process in scholarly publishing as well.

DAVID FRANK, Professor of History, University of New Brunswick
In the Lap of Tigers: The Communist Labor University in Jiangxi Province
JOHN CLEVERLEY, 2000
Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield
pp. xiv + 249, $65.00

The Communist Labor University (CLU) was founded in June, 1958, during China’s ambitious, and ultimately disastrous, campaign known as the Great Leap Forward. The goal of the campaign was to overtake Britain in economic output, and the Soviet Union in the development of Socialist institutions and ideology, within a few years. Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Communist Party and, at that time, President of the People's Republic of China, was confident that that goal could be accomplished by liberating the creative energies of the common people through mass campaigns emphasizing collective endeavor and the denigration of elite expertise. The vast majority of the Chinese people (over 75%) lived in rural areas and farmed for a living. They were undereducated and their innate talents were underutilized, held back in part by institutions that favored elites and gave priority to urban over rural development. Among the most egregious of those institutions were urban universities, regarded by Mao, and those of like mind, as vehicles for perpetuating privilege. The CLU was conceived of as an alternative institution, one that would directly serve the needs of the common people.

Planning for the CLU was initiated by Wang Dongxing, Mao's sometime bodyguard and intimate (a man with a third-grade education prior to attending a Communist Party school). Land provided for the campus was located in a remote area of Wang's home province, Jiangxi, one of the poorest in China. Students were recruited from throughout the country, and although a few came from large cities like Shanghai, most were from rural Jiangxi, as were most of the faculty. The majority of the students had no more than an elementary school education, and few of the faculty, including the first president of the school, had university degrees. The emphasis was on student acquisition of practical knowledge imparted by people with practical experience (“let those who know, teach”).

Students and faculty for the first academic session arrived in a wilderness where they had to build their own campus and clear land for growing crops. From the beginning, the curriculum was designed to combine work and study, but for the first few years, the main occupation was physical labor. Academic courses included political study, accounting, horticulture, forestry, fisheries and small-scale industry for rural areas. Emphasis was placed on experimentation to improve yields. The main campus provided a resource for small branch campuses throughout the province, the number of which eventually exceeded 100, with an enrollment at one time of more than 45,000. Most of the students were enrolled in short-term technical and vocational courses. Those who completed a 4-year course of work and study were awarded university degrees. Graduates were expected to return to their home villages and contribute to the local economy.

The history of the CLU, from its founding in 1958 to its closure in 1980, recapitulates in microcosm the political struggles and ideological debates that raged throughout China in those years. Launched with great acclaim in the optimistic early months of the Great Leap Forward, the school was criticized as a wasteful and spescious utopian scheme by the followers of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during the period of famine that followed the disastrous collapse of that campaign. Most of the branch campuses were eliminated as a poor investment of scarce resources while the main campus and major branches struggled to survive on a greatly reduced budget. A reprieve came in 1963 when the consummate diplomat, Premier Zhou Enlai, arranged a compromise between the supporters of Mao’s vision and those of Liu Shaoqi’s: the institution would be refounded, but would become more orthodox, with study taking precedence over labor, and theory playing a greater role in guiding practice; and the name would be changed to Jiangxi Communist Labor University to emphasize its (merely) local character.

During the following 3 years, the number of branch campuses again grew to exceed 100, and the institution was hailed as a model for emulation, only to be criticized as a reactionary institution by Red Guards during the early, destructive phase of the Cultural Revolution! Faculty were humiliated and paraded through the streets in dunce caps, and the senior party official was “persecuted to death.” In the recovery period beginning in 1969, the main campus absorbed a more orthodox institute of higher education, Jiangxi Agricultural College, and once again it was praised as a model of Mao’s educational thought.

The final chapter was written after the death of Mao and the ascent of Deng Xiaoping to political dominance in the late 1970s. Deng’s administration again criticized the CLU as a superficial expression of an irrational utopian agenda. Jiangxi Agricultural College became a university and, in conformance with other institutions of higher education, required entrance examinations and taught a standard
curriculum that excluded physical labor. In 1980, with the reforms of Deng Xiaoping triumphant, the very name of the original institution was excised.

In researching the history of the CLU, John Cleverley interviewed 45 of the former staff, students and graduates of the institution, including Wang Dongxing, and had access to rich documentation. The book is engagingly written, and intended for the general reader. There is little reference to other scholarly works. Cleverley’s analysis throughout the volume is more implicit than explicit. He reports the arguments of supporters and detractors of the institution with little comment of his own. But it is clear that he was affected by the dedication, idealism, and enthusiasm of those he interviewed who remain loyal to the conception behind the institution, and to the mission it sought to accomplish. His sentiments echo theirs and those of other critics of the Deng era reforms when he writes (210): “no certain remedy exists for overcoming the lack of opportunities for rural schooling in situations of small-scale agriculture, isolation and poverty. Although two decades have passed since the Communist Labor University experiment was abandoned, its educational object remains unalleviated.”

PETER J. SEYBOLT Professor of History, Director of Asian Studies, University of Vermont
Steuart's Secret History of Primitive Accumulation -- 8. Adam Smith's Charming Obfuscation of Class -- 9. The Revisionist History of Professor Adam Smith -- 10. Adam Smith and the Ideological Role of the Colonies -- 11. Benjamin Franklin and the Smithian Ideology of Slavery and Wage Labor -- 12. We also discover that classical political economy has been so instrumental in guiding these strategies. The book leaves us to wonder how the same mechanisms are reproduced today. This critical question pervades the book."-Massimo De Angelis, University of East London "This study is to be admired for its comprehensiveness, scope, and the amount of unearthing and excavation Perelman provides. Historians of political economy and Marxist thought will find that this book broadens their understanding of how capitalism took hold in the industrial age.Â 92. The Dawn of Political Economy. 124. Sir James Steuarts Secret History of Primitive Accumulation. 139. Adam Smiths Charming Obfuscation of Class. 171. Adam Smith and the Ideological Role of the Colonies. 229. Benjamin Franklin and the Smithian Ideology of Slavery and Wage Labor. 4 Primitive accumulation and privatization. 5 The social relations of capitalism.Â This primitive accumulation plays in political economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past.Â Perelman, Michael The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation Published by Duke University Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8223-2491-1, ISBN 978-0-8223-2491-1. Tom Brass (2011) Labour Regime Change in the Twenty-First Century: Unfreedom, Capitalism and Primitive Accumulation. Published by Brill (Leiden), ISBN 978-90-04-20247-4. Please also list any non-financial associations or interests (personal, professional, political, institutional, religious or other) that a reasonable reader would want to know about in relation to the submitted work. This pertains to all the authors of the piece, their spouses or partners. Yes No. More information *.Â Please tick the box to confirm you agree to our Terms of use. * Please accept terms of use. Please tick the box to confirm you agree that your name, comment and conflicts of interest (if accepted) will be visible on the website and your comment may be printed in the journal at the Editorâ€™s discretion. * Please confirm you agree that your details will be displayed. Historians of political economy and Marxist thought will find that this book broadens their understanding of how capitalism took hold in the industrial age. ...more. Get A Copy.Â Start your review of The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation. Write a review. Aug 13, 2017 Adam Kiehl rated it it was amazing. The birth of capitalism (defined here as one in which a small group of people are capital owners and most of the population has to rent themselves to capital owners to survive) is one of the most horrific events in human history.