

shaping of public policy while obscuring power relations between reformers and conservatives. In Illinois, Boris shows that successful homework policy development *and* enforcement in the 1890s depended on a broad-based coalition of progressive trade unionists, settlement house activists (especially socialist Florence Kelley), and labor organizers such as Mary Kenny, Elizabeth Morgan and Alzina Stevens. Here, Boris builds on the work of Kathryn Kish Sklar to argue that it took every ounce of this coalition's energy and vigilance to pass an anti-sweat shop bill that momentarily triumphed over the *laissez-faire* ideologies of homework employers and the Illinois Supreme Court. Yet, with the defeat of governor Altgeld in 1897, Kelley lost her position as factory inspector and tenement homework again proliferated.

While the wide scope of *Home To Work* contributes to the book's strengths, it also contains some pitfalls. At times, Boris's chapter organization is blurry. For instance, chapter nine ends with a discussion of the Fair Labor Standards Act while the next chapter opens with a newspaper headline from 1991. In addition, given the international growth in studies that focus on the intersection between women's history, labor and homework, the lack of a bibliographical essay is puzzling.

Nonetheless, *Home To Work* is an excellent monograph that simultaneously informs important debates in women's and labor history as well as public policy studies. In an era of global integration and the concurrent reemergence of homework as an international phenomenon, Eileen Boris has produced a most compelling and timely piece of scholarship; one that gives us, ironically, a clearer picture of homework than Hine or Riis were ever able to achieve.

Paul Ortiz

CHANDAVARKAR, RAJNARAYAN. *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India. Business strategies and the working classes in Bombay, 1900–1940.* [Cambridge South Asian Studies.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 1994. xviii, 468 pp. £40.00; \$69.95.

“Political action”, Chandavarkar writes in the conclusion to his book, “has often been most securely grasped in terms of given social categories.” Workers, in the typical tale, are assumed to be politically militant and anti-capitalist. “It is perhaps more important to recognize that these social categories were not given in the first place but politically constructed, and that the process of the social formation of the working class was shaped by an essentially political dimension at its core.” This book tells the story of the ways in which the Bombay workers made and unmade their various political identities. Central to this tale is the local forgings of the universal contradictions of global capitalism.

The casual reader might pick up this book and think of it as a dense empirical study of a diverse community of workers in a remote place (Bombay, India). That does not do it justice. The academic division of labor between historians (“empiricists”) and theorists (“abstractionists”) draws too wide a gulf between these two forms of academic practice. Chandavarkar has not written *mere* history, for that itself is to privilege the conditions of possibility of the writing of *mere* theory (which is able to stand apart from the concrete categories which restrain

consciousness). *The Origins* is a theoretical critique of the general theory of industrialization and the categories of industrial sociology. Far from being *simply* a study of the Bombay working class, the book grounds the rather ethereal theories of sociology in order to transform them.

For example, the typical story of industrialization says that capitalism in the colonial periphery is unable to overcome the rigid burdens of social customs and traditional social relations. Chandavarkar takes that story on and shows how the reliance on the extraction of surplus value (the so-called feudal relics which “make” colonial capital rely upon extra-economic force) is determined by the production process, particularly the need to facilitate a rapid turnover, to rely upon a low ratio of fixed capital and to operate at very narrow margins. Since capital was expensive, Bombay’s industry (specifically the dominant cotton textile industry) relied upon old machines, inferior materials, extended operation of machines above normal speeds and casual labor. The net result of this strategy was that an extraordinary effort was demanded from the workforce. When employers needed labor, they turned to jobbers who had at their command a pool of casual workers.

The centrality of the jobber, Chandavarkar points out, has led to an overemphasis on the unequal power relations at the worksite and in the neighborhood. A fascinating chapter on the relation between the neighborhood and the shopfloor enables us to get a more nuanced notion of power and to understand the way in which the workers were able to struggle against (and sometimes alongside) the jobber. The neighborhood allowed the workers to share their work, to share their unemployment, to forge ties for industrial action as well as to fight amongst each other through various social contradictions. In order to offer us a view into the working-class neighborhood, Chandavarkar produces brief summaries of the problem of housing and of credit, the mechanisms for the forging of social identities (such as caste and community associations and leisure activities), the predominant position of the *dada* or neighborhood boss and the role of the jobber. The argument of *The Origins* is that history is not already made in primordial times and then repeated in the industrial ghettos of India, but it is made in the neighborhoods, the workplaces and in the relationship with the countryside which provides sustenance and family ties. Labor and Capital, therefore, are produced by such social phenomenon as the production process, the workers’ neighborhoods, by the process of migration, by filial and fictitious ties, by the global relations of profit and power: in sum, by the class struggle between Capital and Labor.

The obvious remark to such an argument is that it is banal: it simply says that many things happen and that people’s lives are complex and not as one-dimensional as sociological categories. The charge of banality is well taken, but I believe that there is something else being argued which is obscured by the fact that many things are happening. We are told that “Indian” capitalism or colonial capitalism must be theoretically constructed from its material realities and that the consciousness of the workforce is not primordial, but precisely modern. The first point is well taken and it has antecedents from the origins of historical materialism. In a pointed letter to the editorial board of the *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* in November 1877, Marx wrote that historical materialism must separately study different historical surroundings in order to understand the formation of the global capitalist system. “One will never arrive there”, he

wrote of that understanding, “by using as one’s master key a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being supra-historical.”¹ This is not to undermine the role of a series of universal contradictions which structure much of our local activity:² here we enter into the second problem, the issue of banality.

Theory is plagued by the twin problems of evolutionary thought and dichotomous categories. Dynamic social relations are relegated to the margins of academic theory.³ For that reason, theorists can produce texts whose relation to concrete categories are distant. We need to produce theory which emerges out of the contradictory realm of concrete categories. For that reason, we need to take seriously the forms of social consciousness and produce philosophy from them. The categories of philosophy and of theory fail to produce a theory which is adequate to its concrete objects. Any attempt to produce such a theory appears banal because it fails to reproduce the slogans of academic practice. Chandavarkar’s book argues that industrial capital in India relies upon extra-economic coercion because of a nexus of reasons, such as the high price of capital, the abundance of labor, the ability to forge a system of labor procurement which allowed society to bear the costs for the reproduction of the labor force. The limitations of Indian capital, in other words, are not an incomplete modernization, but the strategies of capital-in-general itself. Far from being a manifesto for the intensification of capitalism to solve the problems of the Bombay cotton textile industry, *The Origins* argues for a thorough reconstruction of production and of the social sphere; without such a reconstruction, the brutal structuring processes of colonial capital will continue unabated.

Vijay Prashad

GORDON, COLIN. *New deals. Business, labor, and politics in America, 1920–1935.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 1994. xii, 329 pp. £40.00; \$59.95. (Paper: £15.95; \$17.95.)

The unraveling since the 1970s of the mechanisms initiated by the New Deal for linking political and economic life has inspired historians to reassess the origins and nature of Franklin Roosevelt’s government itself. The most influential writers of the immediate postwar decades had depicted the New Deal as the establishment through the federal government of instrumentalities to counteract the previously dominant power of industry and high finance, which had been momentarily humbled by economic collapse, and to strengthen capitalist democracy by the pursuit of social justice. Among the first revisionist critiques was that associated with the concept “corporate liberalism”, which identified leaders of the business world itself as the key architects of New Deal reforms and stressed the continuities between the policies of the Roosevelt administration and those of its predecessors. That interpretation of twentieth-century history

¹ Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1975).

² Martin Nicolaus, “The Universal Contradiction”, *New Left Review*, 59 (1970).

³ Philip Corrigan, “Feudal Relics or Capitalist Monuments? Notes on the Sociology of Unfree Labour”, *Sociology*, 11 (1977).