

nonexistent and the principles of political equality fully institutionalised in the centre, the tendency to such political expression of even wide class consciousness is very weak, as Werner Sombart has already noted at the beginning of this century” (p.130). The sentence reads like a literal translation from some other language – or amalgam of languages — than English. Perhaps it would all make more sense in the original. Here in the English-language maze, in any case, we readers hardly know what to fear most: drowning, starvation, or abstraction-induced claustrophobia. Let us out!

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**Working-Class Formation. Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States.** Ed. by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg. Princeton University Press, Princeton (N.J.) 1986. vii, 470 pp. \$ 55.00. (Paper: \$ 15.50.)

Most European countries and North America now have a rich historiography covering each region, industrial sector and, indeed, the major cities. Hitherto lacking has been the bold comparative survey into the origins of the working class. A possible reason has been the desire to avoid the theoretical and empirical poverty of earlier schemas, particularly those based on a mechanical “Marxism-Leninism”. Though understandable, the “new” social history could fall into an opposite particularism which isolated its subject from the broad sweep of history. This particular volume – *Working Class Formation* – is in part a set of essays on France, the United States and Germany, reflecting some of the best recent work in each country. It is also however, in its introduction and conclusion, but also in its overall methodology, an attempt to provide the necessary comparative perspective alluded to above. The only proviso being its complete lack of reference to the areas of the globe commonly known as the Third World.

Ira Katznelson in the introduction ranges across the debates on class formation, rejecting the earlier purely “objective” views which focused primarily on economic conditions, to emphasize the “subjective” dimension whereby working people altered their world views to speak and think of themselves as workers. The backdrop of capitalist development and its inevitable corollary, proletarianization, is still there, more so than in E. P. Thompson’s classic work for example, but our attention is constantly directed towards other dimensions. As Katznelson notes, “the case studies inevitably are drawn to extra-economic factors of explanation [of differences], such as those concerning space, religion, and, above all, the organization of the state and its public policies” (p. 23). It is at this point, when setting out the major coordinates of working class formation, that we could have expected some attention to the dimension of imperialism, or, more precisely, the particular path of proletarianization in non-capitalist areas where the new mode of production was “imported” from abroad. If we are looking at the broad clusters of factors explaining the diversity

of class formation – in this volume the clusters are economy-centred, society-centred, and state-centred – we need to include that broad division between the advanced capitalist countries and the “Third” or underdeveloped world.

William Sewell begins his chapter on French artisans and factory workers between the 1789 and 1848 revolutions thus: “Viewed from the standpoint of Britain, the history of French working class formation is paradoxical. Britain was the homeland of the industrial revolution; the French economy remained predominantly rural and artisanal until the twentieth century. Yet the French were the unquestioned leaders in the development of socialism and working class consciousness” (p. 45). Sewell, with his emphasis on political discourse, helps us move beyond a mechanical relationship between class consciousness and the development of industry. In particular he directs our attention to the layer of discontented artisans who were the backbone of the early labour movement not only in France but in many Third World countries as well. Michelle Perrot, for her part, stresses the complexity and difficulty of the process of class formation, warning that “in no way does it resemble a victory march” (p. 71). Finally, in this section, Alain Cotterau examines the distinctiveness of working-class cultures in France between 1848 and the turn of the century. With a “history from below” perspective, Cotterau provides a powerful antidote to earlier historiography, finding for example, that “Every workers community reputed to be unorganized and apathetic that I have studied has revealed the existence of collective control practices” (p. 132).

For the United States, Amy Bridges explores the pre-Civil War “Becoming American” of the working classes. This complex story of how diverse immigrant groups became a working class is of more than local interest. Class and ethnicity are seen as loyalties which were not usually in competition with one another. One case was the New York Irish workers who reputedly voted Democratic because it was the party which protected their “right to drink”. This analysis is complemented by that of Martin Shefter on the relationship between the trade unions and “political machines” in the late nineteenth century. As elsewhere, there was an uneasy settlement between these two types of organizations, with workers asserting claims against their employers through the unions and against the state through the political parties. It was this accommodation which largely defined and delimited the politics of American labour into the twentieth century. However, as Shefter points out, “This accommodation embodied a number of tensions and was subject to persistent challenges from above, from below, and from without” (p. 273). Between them, Bridges and Shefter map out the main coordinates in the making of the American working class, with methodological pointers for other national case studies.

The chapters on Germany do not have quite the same verve and methodological richness of those on France and the U.S., no doubt reflecting the different historiographical traditions. Jürgen Kocka reminds us that “the concept of ‘class’ has not been a major conceptual tool for West German historians” (p. 279). In East Germany, conversely, the problem has been more frequently a reliance on a “literal” Marxism which sees no problems, contradictions or lacunae in that particular theoretical tradition. Kocka does provi-

de us with a solid review of working class formation in Germany between 1800 and 1875. To the self-imposed question: “Did a working class exist in Germany in the 1870’s?” (p. 349). Kocka answers with a non-committal “yes and no”. Part of the problem, to my mind, is an over-reliance on concepts such as tradition and modernization, which beg more questions than they answer. Mary Nolan, for her part examines the period between 1870 and the turn of the century, to answer why Germany produced the largest and best-organized workers’ movements of the period. Against a “heroic” reading Nolan stresses how the same economic and political factors which accounted for the success of social democracy “also limited it as a social movement, a political practice, and a theory of revolutionary transformation” (p. 390).

It is left to Katznelson’s co-editor, Aristide Zolberg to provide a conclusion to this volume entitled “How Many Exceptionalisms?” his argument being that there are too many. He asks why: “If capitalism is of a piece, why is the working class it called into life so disparate?” Again we find no consideration of imperialism or colonialism – which do not even merit an entry in the index. Zolberg does, quite rightly in my mind, reject an approach to working class formation which posits one particular national pattern (usually Britain) as the norm with other cases being seen as “deviant”. Yet there is an insidious “ideal type” running through these essays which treats the advanced capitalist countries as the norm with those areas conquered by colonialism and dominated by imperialism not only deviant but unworthy of attention. The assumption would be presumably that they simply followed the pattern of the dominant power, an attitude shared by the implicitly colonialist Marx and Engels and the liberal establishment. Zolberg ends his contribution by stressing that a research strategy to study working class formation must be both comparative and historical. If that is to be the case, there must also be a move beyond the Europeanist optic (with the U.S. as honorary guest) which is only one step away from previous emphasis on Britain as the master key.

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CAHN, SUSAN. *Industry and Devotion. The Transformation of Women’s Work in England, 1500-1660*. Columbia University Press, New York 1987. xi, 252 pp. \$ 27.50.

The central theme of this book is the proposition that the social position of English women, as measured both by their status and their possibilities, underwent a relative and absolute decline compared to that of men. The author describes how, around 1500, most women were part of households which were self-supporting. Beside the obvious responsibility for all the affairs of the family, a woman was expected to make products such as bread, beer, wool and candles herself and to exchange some of these on the local market. In the next part of the book the reader is shown the increasing importance of the “homeliness ideology”. As the market economy grew women’s work, according to