

recent studies, are referred to. This volume may thus also be fruitfully used to introduce students in a succinct way to a large body of literature on social life in European cities.

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HILSON, MARY. *Political Change and the Rise of Labour in Comparative Perspective. Britain and Sweden 1890–1920*. Nordic Academic Press, Lund 2006. 352 pp. Maps. S.Kr. 290; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007022961

This study sets itself a number of complex tasks. It seeks to engage with two sets of historiographical traditions within labour history (British and Swedish), to evaluate the concept of comparative labour history, and to employ these approaches in detailed case studies of two naval dockyard towns, Portsmouth in England and Karlskrona in Sweden. What this constitutes is a very heavy agenda, daunting for any labour historian. The structure of the volume takes the reader through a general discussion of labour historiography in both countries and an evaluation and affirmation of comparative history, before embarking on detailed studies of Plymouth and Karlskrona.

The period under consideration, 1890–1920, allows for a thorough examination of the years often seen as fundamental to the formation of a “modern” labour movement in a European setting. Its linkages to earlier liberal and artisanal interests are noted in this study but Hilson also stresses the significance of the impact of World War I upon the emergence of a more powerful set of labour identities. One of the key arguments in her discussion is the rejection of an “exceptionalist” line of explanation, whereby the formation of the British or Swedish movements is compared to some abstract or generalized notion of such a development. The critique of this approach, as articulated over recent years by historians such as Blackbourn, Eley, Geary, and Kirk, is one which finds particular favour with Hilson. She seeks instead to engage with a comparative framework which explores different historiographical traditions and therefore moves away from a simplistic and mythologizing notion of national specificity based on assumptions about how a country’s political evolution ought to have taken place. As Hilson explains, her concern is far more with specific historical processes than reliance upon situations at any fixed point in time. This allows, she declares, for a much more meaningful comparative approach.

A second chapter looks in more depth at the range of writing on the emergence of organized labour movements in both countries. For Anglocentric readers, the British literature is no doubt familiar, but it is interesting to note the perhaps less well-known Swedish historiography. Comparative studies between the two countries on such themes are still relatively rare and the analysis offered here demonstrates some of the problems associated with the deterministic models of the rise of labour. Over-simplified comparisons of the different political institutional frameworks within the two countries or a narrowly conceived notion of the different ideological perspectives within each movement are rejected. Hilson is able to point out very different facets within each national experience, arguing, for example, that the British labour movement contains a radical ideological strand from its early days, similar to those of many other European countries. She is also critical of the often advanced argument that Sweden had a much less liberal political regime in the nineteenth century and that this held back the emergence of a coherent labour movement there. The emphasis, for Hilson, ought to be on the weakness of trying to identify such determining characteristics of particular national paths.

In similar fashion, she assembles an interesting critique of the “linguistic turn” in labour history. This is not based on any crude dismissal; indeed, the contributions of such approaches are freely acknowledged. What she does is reflect upon some of the potential neglect which such analysis can create, for example, in foregrounding elites who have left behind their languages of identity and ignoring other less clear senses of labour consciousness. Significantly, the most serious criticism is that much of the culturally centred work in this field fails to explain adequately “the dynamics of political change, especially when seen in a cross-national context” (p. 56). In this respect, Hilson follows the writing of Dick Geary in reclaiming a role for the concept of class, not as the central feature of any ideological certainty, but as a variable in the differing economic and political structures or conjunctures of any society. It is, thus, a desire to focus more closely upon these structures and conjunctures which is the basis of the remainder of her book.

One of the fundamental dimensions of this study is, therefore, a careful evaluation of the links between national and local politics and a focus on a much more nuanced conception of what constituted politics in a labour movement context. Thus, notions of “local patriotism”, the “politics of place” and “local political culture” are all explored in some detail, since, for Hilson, this is a route to a better understanding of how and why labour movements developed in the ways that they did. More specifically, this helps to establish a framework for the detailed studies of Plymouth and Karlskrona.

Naval dockyard towns have almost always been represented as very poor territory for a fledgling labour movement. The nature of employment, the terms and conditions of work, and the presence of the ideological power of navalism have essentially been seen as limiting factors. The dominance of the national state as employer in the workplace, and the accompanying patriotisms, helped to create, it has often been suggested, a set of political and ideological forces which served to stifle the growth of a more challenging form of labour politics. In addition, the relative weakness of alternative forms of employment, which might have served as a location for different political awareness, has been seen as adding to the problems for labour. Hilson does not seek to deny the power of such characteristics but, through her detailed research, sets out to challenge the static notion of inevitability and the continuous absence of alternative voices.

It is this unwillingness to accept the monotone image of the politics of dockyard towns which is perhaps the most significant aspect of Hilson’s study. She is able to demonstrate both a range of political cultures and the dynamic processes of change and development which characterize the rise of labour in both towns during these years. She is also astutely aware of both the similarities and differences between the two locations, a key strength of the comparative approach. For example, in Karlskrona, a developing trade-union movement was less hampered by sectional differences. The formation in 1913 of the Naval Dockyard Workers’ Union (MVAF) seems to have symbolized a desire for the representation of all workers within the yard and thereby consolidated a more effective and encompassing organization seeking to negotiate with the naval authorities. In contrast, the “British” model, as seen in Plymouth (and other dockyard towns) was of unions still divided by trades, levels of skill, and the specificity of naval dockyard work.

In similar fashion, there is considerable attention devoted to the importance of the politics of consumption, both in Sweden and Britain, and the ways in which this served to contribute to a growing labour consciousness. In the case of Karlskrona, this was probably most clearly identifiable in what might be called “moral-economy” arguments about the pricing and supply of commodities. In Plymouth, it was the development of a powerful

cooperative movement, one which offered not merely alternative sources of supply but also a political and ideological rhetoric of their significance, which greatly aided a developing labourist perspective.

It is the combination of factors such as these, and the politicizing impact of World War I, which help to explain the ways in which a labour politics emerges against the grain of national navalist ideologies. Such growth is patchy, irregular, and unpredictable but that is the essential point of Hilson's argument and the strength of her approach. It is possible that a separate consideration of each town weakens the point of comparative history but there is a consistent presence of cross-referencing in each of the chapters and, in this way, the reader is always made aware of similarities and differences.

Ultimately, the volume is a brave enterprise, moving well beyond a narrative study of two dockyard towns. It certainly goes a considerable way to reclaiming the local without resorting to any form of antiquarianism. Its grasp of wider debates and the attempt to engage in some of the most complex discussions contained within labour history's pages in the last two decades provide more general readers with food for thought. This work may sometimes lack a decisiveness of intervention in these debates but it demonstrates a willingness to explore such issues and to state quite firmly the case for this kind of work. Above all, it can reassure us that the need for, and significance of, labour history has not been lost.

Kenneth Lunn

GORNY, YOSEF. *Converging Alternatives. The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897–1985*. [SUNY series in Israeli Studies.] State University of New York Press, Albany 2006. xiii, 309 pp. \$27.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007032968.

In the past decades, many studies have been devoted to the Bund and Poalei Zion (the Zionist Labour Movement) as part of the emergence and development of the two most important Jewish socialist movements in the twentieth century. Both movements developed at the end of the nineteenth century, when the situation of the Jews in Russia, plagued by extreme poverty and anti-Semitism, had become unbearable. The traditional religious and Jewish style of life offered no relief, and socialism and Zionism became, as it were, the new holy doctrines. The traditional hope of salvation through the intervention of the Messiah was replaced by the new ideals of international solidarity of all the earth's downtrodden masses or of the deliverance from the diaspora through a return to the Promised Land of their fathers.

These two worldly alternatives, with their very opposite ideals, strongly contested against one another in their publications. In a short time, the Bund managed to acquire a great many followers amongst the Jewish workers and craftsmen in the Czarist empire, and it was principally the "converted" Talmud students who were to be the organizers and propagandists of the new doctrine. Poalei Zion initially only attracted Jewish students from Russian universities and assimilated backgrounds, who felt little or no affinity for the Jewish workers. The students spoke Russian and adopted Hebrew as a new national language because they did not want to use Yiddish, the despised language of the diaspora, which they believed did not belong in the new Jewish homeland. Nevertheless, they were later forced to use Yiddish because it was the only language that the Jewish workers understood.