

BOOK REVIEWS

Hollandgang im Spiegel der Reiseberichte evangelischer Geistlicher. Quellen zur saisonalen Arbeitswanderung in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Hrsg. von Albin Gladen, Antje Kraus, Piet Lourens [u.a.]. [Geschichtliche Arbeiten zur Westfälischen Landesforschung, Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Gruppe, Band 17.] Aschendorff, Münster 2007. 1225 pp. (in 2 vols). € 98.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859008003763

This two-volume work brings to a German-speaking audience an integral and annotated edition of a most interesting body of source material for the study of the European labour history and social history of the second half of the nineteenth century. It bundles 129 reports of journeys made by Protestant ministers from north-western Germany to provide spiritual care and assistance to parishioners from their home regions who worked in the neighbouring Netherlands as seasonal migrant labourers. Altogether, these reports run to over 1,000 pages and cover the years 1849–1893.

The annual migration of seasonal labourers from a number of north and west German regions to the Netherlands dated back to the seventeenth century. The urban economic expansion associated with the Dutch Golden Age depleted rural labour reserves, which were replenished by migrant labourers from the adjacent regions of Germany. These German migrants worked in a number of industries, mostly in the primary sector. From the Münster, Osnabrück, Minden-Ravensberg regions and Ostfriesland, peat-cutters went to work on the moors of Drenthe and eastern Groningen as well as to Dutch Friesland and southern Holland as grass-mowers. From the principedom of Lippe-Deilmold, migrants went to work almost exclusively in the Dutch brickmaking industry, located primarily in the south of Holland. The Oldenburg region specialized in plasterers, who worked in construction in the larger urban centres of the Netherlands.

What all these trades had in common was that they created a sharp seasonal demand for labour which could not be met from local labour reserves, and at the same time prevented the permanent relocation of German workers to the Netherlands. For the migrants, the income from seasonal employment made an important contribution to their household budgets, particularly after the collapse in the nineteenth century of rural household textile production, which had been one of the other mainstays of family income. Depending on the period and the trade, wage income from seasonal employment in the Netherlands could provide up to one-third of total annual household income, earned during no more than one-seventh of the year. That way, migrant labour kept the family farm afloat – an added factor working against the permanent relocation of families to the Netherlands. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the annual migration of German workers to the Netherlands started to decrease in importance and eventually disappeared as the rise of industry in Germany itself came to provide rival job opportunities at home.

The reports published in this volume offer a rich source of information on the life and work of these seasonal labour migrants, a segment of the workforce which tends to be poorly documented as a rule. They provide a wealth of details on the organization of the trade, labour relations, wages and wage setting, labour conditions, regional specialization, housing, alimentation, and other aspects of everyday life. What is particularly valuable is that because of the incidence with which the ministers sent their reports home

they allow one to follow the evolution of social and economic conditions and practices over time. This allows the researcher to follow closely the subtle changes in the equilibrium on which the annual migration flow depended. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century mechanization started to make its inroads on the demand for labour and the employment of seasonal labourers, and by the mid-1890s migration to the moors had come almost to a standstill. Brickmaking also experienced a decline, while at the same time other trades, such as grass-mowing and plastering, increased in importance.

Its value for the study of labour history notwithstanding, the existence of such a unique source owes its origins to circumstances only indirectly related to issues of work and migration. It was in fact the rise of the "Awakening" movement in the Protestant churches of Germany and the Netherlands during the first half of the nineteenth century which provided the impulse for the ministers' journeys to their fellow countrymen in the Netherlands. The movement had been born of a concern about the disruptive social and moral consequences of industrialization and modernization. The footloose migrant workforce, away from home and church for prolonged periods, was seen as a particularly vulnerable group in this respect, and in 1849 the Internal Mission Department of the German Evangelical Church sent the first minister to the Netherlands to visit his fellow countrymen, preach in German, and provide general spiritual guidance.

Although these two volumes are intended primarily as a source for the study of labour history and the history of labour migration, and are explicitly positioned as such by the editors, they also constitute a most interesting source on religiosity and the role of the Church in north-west European society in the second half of the nineteenth century. What is more, the journey reports offer a rather unique comparative perspective on these issues. One of the main concerns of the ministers who wrote them was the impact of the different religious traditions of the Netherlands on the German migrant workers. The reports therefore devote ample consideration to the differences in religious awareness and practice between the two regions, and the observations of the ministers in that respect are among the most interesting parts of the reports.

The most significant difference between the two countries concerned the degree of religious diversity. Whereas Germany, by and large, had only Roman Catholics and Lutherans, in the Netherlands, Protestants were divided among a great number of different denominations, a number which was actively growing during the period to which these reports relate. What is more, although the different churches tolerated each other, their coexistence was hardly peaceful. Heated controversies over religious matters were the order of the day in the Netherlands, to such an extent that German migrant workers actually hesitated to go to services in a Dutch church lest they be imbued with the "wrong" version of the faith. Needless to say, their ministers were even more concerned about such dangers, and throughout their reports this appears to have been a powerful motive underlying their "itinerant preaching" (*Reisepredigt*).

Thus, migrant workers in the Netherlands were subject to two temptations at the same time – the universal one of vice, depravity, and the bottle, associated with their migrant existence far from home; and the more specific one of being led astray by foreign heresy. What makes it all the more interesting is that, in the eyes of the German ministers, both of these temptations were distinct manifestations of the corrupting influence of modernization. It may come as something of a surprise to the contemporary Dutch non-specialist reader of the book to see a period in Dutch history usually associated with stifling religious conservatism being characterized as one of ultra-liberal religious experimentation and modernism, in which the central tenets of the scriptures and of Christianity were negated. The Netherlands appears as a country of shallow religiosity, dangerous liberalism, and, indeed, of permissiveness – a discourse not unfamiliar in the

present-day European context, but not so commonly associated with late nineteenth-century Europe.

It was not merely the dangers associated with this destination, though, which aroused the concern of ministers for the migrants' sanity and salvation. Just as importantly, it was the process of migration itself. In this respect the reports reflect the onset of a new era in European history, a period of nation- and community-building in which mobility and migration increasingly came to be seen as disruptive factors, which were best limited to the barest possible minimum. The kind of seasonal migration described in the reports was seen as particularly problematic. Not only did it tear people away from the disciplining social framework of church and family for extended periods, thus exposing them to the dangers of vice and religious indifference, it also undermined the labour ethics of migrants.

The nature of seasonal labour migration was such that it put a premium on trying to perform as much work as possible in as short as possible a time, minimizing the length of employment, and thus expenditure on food and lodging, and maximizing earnings. Migrants were said to work on Sundays, something condemned even by the all too liberal Dutch. What is more, when back home many were reluctant to do any work during the winter season, and instead preferred to quietly spend their summer earnings and wait for their next journey. The ministers regarded such behaviour and attitudes, which might have been perfectly rational from an economic point of view, as highly disruptive and a sign of moral decay. Increasingly, labour ethics came to favour the virtues of steady rather than hard work, and seasonal migration, a widespread phenomenon for centuries, fitted the demands of the time less and less satisfactorily.

Hollandgang im Spiegel der Reiseberichte evangelischer Geistlicher is a welcome source publication on the history of labour and migration, as well as on popular religiosity and modernization. Apart from the annotated reports and an introduction, it includes a valuable selection of appendices, consisting of a place name and person index, an index of biblical quotes referred to in the reports, a glossary of Dutch and German words, a set of maps, brief biographies of the ministers authoring the reports, information on the reports that could not be traced, and a comprehensive list of brickmaking establishments in the Netherlands.

Given its sheer size and the fact that the titles of the reports reveal little about their contents, this publication could have benefited greatly though from a subject index; its absence is remarkable. A second omission concerns the introduction, which gives a concise and balanced overview of the mechanisms and development of seasonal labour migration from Germany to the Netherlands but devotes only scant attention to the background to this source in terms of Church history and the history of religion in nineteenth-century Europe. The reports deal at least as much with religious issues as with the work and life of the migrants, and this omission is therefore puzzling.

Finally, one wonders whether it might not have been better to publish just a selection of the reports instead of all of them. The reports contain much that is repetitious, both in terms of the kind of information provided but also literal repetitions of passages apparently reproduced from one and the same source and phrased slightly differently over the years. On the other hand, it is valuable for scholars to have access to an integral source, so as to minimize the distortions that any selection involves. Rarely, however, is the time and money available to produce such integral source publications, and the volumes under review should therefore be welcomed as a valuable contribution to the history of labour, migration, and mobility in the period immediately preceding the modernization, industrialization, and urbanization of the twentieth century.

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