

(Cambridge, MA, 1996), much more illuminating than a conventional history of ideas. On the other side, many, probably most, social historians are already giving ample consideration to identities not reducible to class and are far more sensitive to language, to representation, and to discourse than they were a few years ago. This is probably less than Eley and Nield would like but, as Foucault is supposed to have said when it was pointed out that he was not a historian: “nobody’s perfect”.

*Michael M. Hall*

STROMQUIST, SHELTON. Reinventing “The People”. The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism. [The Working Class in American History.] University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 2006. x, 289 pp. £50.00; £22.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008033361

Shelton Stromquist’s stimulating synthesis of the US Progressive Movement, a volume in the outstanding series, “The Working Class in American History”, appears at a most opportune moment. At a time when corporate scandals and wrongdoing, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, the run on the Northern Rock bank, and fears of worldwide recession and escalating socio-political conflict are forcing politicians and financiers to question the continued efficacy and health of neoliberal globalization, Stromquist forcefully reminds us that capitalist crisis, escalating socio-political conflict and turns to reform, regulation, and even revolution are by no means confined to the current era.

Stromquist’s context is that of the “social crisis” of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. During that period of time individualistic, competitive capitalism in the US increasingly and painfully gave way to a more collectivist, oligopolistic, monopolistic, Taylorite, and aggressively imperialistic form of capitalist social organization. This triggered a massive escalation in socio-political conflict, “most clearly revealed in the battles between labor and capital”, and extensive concern with the ills and victims of rapid industrialization, urbanization, population growth, and migration. In response to this “mounting social crisis”, argues Stromquist, an array of predominantly white and middle-class male and female reformers, but also including representatives from the native-born working class, adopted the language of “the people” and sought to “save” the social system.

This goal was to be achieved by the promotion of a more democratic political system (for example, personal registration, direct primaries, initiative, and referenda) and corporate social responsibility towards employee welfare and the wider public good, by the elimination of corporate, political, and civic corruption and waste, and in improvements in the living standards, health, working conditions, education, and the general “customs and habits” of the citizenry. The latter applied with special force to those mainly immigrant children, women and others of the “submerged tenth” mired in poverty, low pay, ill-health, lack of education, and employment. By means of a mixture of voluntary and limited legislative and state-regulatory efforts, these Progressive business leaders and professional experts in the ranks of government and the professions sought to bring about a more “open”, harmonious, efficient, “humanized”, democratic, collectivist, and bureaucratic form of capitalism in America. They would both restore “order” out of “chaos” and renew the liberal promise of “equal rights” to the country’s citizenry.

In considering the work of these reformers Stromquist sets himself two main tasks. The first is to demonstrate that despite “the diversity of perspectives and interests from which it

sprang”, and “the conflicted and discontinuous course of its evolution”, Progressivism did constitute a *movement*. This task might seem “redundant” in view of the “extraordinary” historiographical attention to Progressivism. The author, however, justifies his concern on the grounds that since the 1970s many historians have “skirted” this task and that as a result there has been a “void of attention to the movement dimension of progressivism”. In arguing for “the existence of such a movement”, Stromquist concentrates not only upon “the common ideological and rhetorical ground Progressives claimed”, but also “its history”, including “its internal conflicts”.

While not an expert in this area of historical research, I find Stromquist’s case, as developed throughout the book, to be generally persuasive. However, I wish to raise a serious question concerning the composition, relations, and ideological make up of “the Progressives”. Stromquist usefully makes a distinction on page 3 of his study between “a dominant ‘meliorist’ wing” of the movement and “a vigorous but smaller group of reformers” within the same “movement” who “identified with the class-partisan perspective associated with the nineteenth-century producers’ movement or in the early twentieth century with socialist or syndicalist tendencies”. Finally, between these two wings “lay a group of reformers whose ideology and organizational commitments fluctuated and overlapped the two”. Yet in practice this study concerns itself overwhelmingly with the thoughts and actions of the dominant “meliorist” wing.

I would like to know far more about groups to the left of the “meliorists”. How did their more radical and at times revolutionary prescriptions for the ills of capitalism fit with the reformist goals of mainstream Progressives? Did these prescriptions and their authors really constitute, as claimed by Stromquist on page 5, “An alternative strand of progressivism”? Or are we witnessing the birth and development of more *independent* forms of protest qualitatively different from and, notwithstanding some overlaps in personnel and ideology, often in conflict with mainstream Progressivism? If so, can these forms of protest convincingly be gathered into the, albeit far from uniform and harmonious, Progressive fold? Relations among these various groups merit further, more nuanced attention in the manner undertaken both by many historians in their treatment of “labour” and “Progressivism” in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and, ironically, by Stromquist himself in his impressive comparative, cross-national research on working-class politics during the same period of time.

Stromquist’s second, indeed main, task is to argue that Progressivism foundered upon the rock of class and that its twentieth- and twenty-first-century liberal successors have continued to fail to overcome this same obstacle. This argument draws substantially on the author’s extensive primary- and secondary-based research into class during the Progressive era. It may be summarized thus. While the Progressives “denied the centrality of class” in both their diagnosis of American capitalism’s ills and their prescriptions for its recuperation and future health, “they could not stop talking about it”. In their quest for “social reconciliation in the service of democratic renewal”, they “convinced themselves that class conflict and the ‘parochial’ class loyalties that bred it could be transcended” in the name of “the people”. Yet at the heart of the Progressives’ usage of the latter concept lay two fundamental and ultimately irresolvable contradictions.

First, “in their programmatic efforts to constitute an imagined people, they failed to come to terms with the structures of class power and domination that shaped ‘public’ interest and over time undermined their quest for democratic community”. The same failing and lack of overall success have for the most part continued to afflict

Progressivism's liberal successors in America. Second, notwithstanding the considerable presence of mainly middle-class women in its ranks, Progressivism's definition of "the people" largely excluded the vast majority of the women and men who made up the "new" immigrants and increasingly the majority of workers in corporate America. Despite considerable support within its ranks for the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, Progressivism also "consigned to the margins" of citizenship, African Americans (considered to be "ill prepared for full citizenship") and reacted with a mixture of "unease" and "outright hostility" to W.E. Dubois's insistence upon the priority of black rights. In sum, the Progressives' version of the "people" and the very success of their movement fell upon the boundaries and exclusions of class, race, and ethnicity.

Stromquist performs most of his second task admirably. The "class thesis" is presented clearly and convincingly. It both informs the text throughout and acts as a timely reminder that, notwithstanding its unfashionable standing in academia and mainstream politics, class constituted a significant presence in the American Progressive past. However, the author's cursory treatment of class and the American liberal tradition from the end of World War I to the present day means that his ambitious claims about class and the failure of American liberalism in general, must await further detailed investigation and evaluation.

In conclusion, this is an interesting, ambitious, and challenging study. It should help to reawaken much needed interest in the roles of political economy and class in American history and history more generally. It should also stimulate research into the cross-national comparative ways in which reformers and revolutionaries in many countries sought either to "civilize" and regulate or transform crisis-torn capitalism between the 1880s and 1914. It is comforting to know that the leading authority into this exciting new area of comparative research is Shelton Stromquist himself.

*Neville Kirk*

HUNG-YOK IP. *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China, 1921–1949. Leaders, heroes and sophisticates.* [Chinese worlds.] RoutledgeCurzon, London [etc.] 2005. xii, 328 pp. £65.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008043368

In this study of revolutionaries' self-construction as leaders, heroes and sophisticates and the way their self-construction helped shape the culture and politics of the pre- and post-1949 periods Hung-yok Ip makes a very important contribution to our understanding of China's twentieth-century revolutionary experience. This is a subtle study of revolutionary intellectuals' elitism, a subject that Ip approaches by viewing such people as "individuals whose lives were marked by various positions". As she states, these people were at once: "radical agents for change, people who had their own longings and preferences, and educated members of their own society" (p. 217).

The central historical dynamic that Ip explores in attempt to understand how such intellectuals constructed their identities is the tension that always existed between the revolutionary milieu in which these people existed, one that celebrated anti-elitism and excoriated elitism, and the deep-seated elitism that intellectuals nevertheless continued to feel vis-à-vis other social classes, especially the peasantry. In that tension Ip uncovers many clues that help us better understand the role of intellectuals in China's Communist Revolution and the hierarchical nature of twentieth-century Chinese society.