

BOOK REVIEWS

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<i>Centre Formation, Protest Movements, and Class Structure in Europe and the United States</i>	S.N. Eisenstadt, L. Roniger, and A. Seligman	Charles Tilly
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EISENSTADT, S. N., L. RONIGER and A. SELIGMAN. *Centre Formation, Protest Movements, and Class Structure in Europe and the United States*. Frances Pinter (Publishers), London 1987. iv, 187 pp. £ 21.00.

Help! Having just finished *Centre Formation etc.*, I feel as though I have spent weeks in a huge maze with opaque ten-meter walls and no real exit. S.N. Eisenstadt and his collaborators, who reside within the maze, have committed themselves to three of the riskiest premises in the social sciences: 1) that the world consists of coherent societies organized around fundamental values and corresponding approximately to national states, 2) that those societies divide into well-defined centers and peripheries, 3) that an analyst can therefore explain such matters as organized inequality and social protest by referring to values and center-periphery relations. From these premises, they have tried to

deduce a wide range of social processes, or at least ways of talking about them. "The starting point of these studies", the authors declare,

has been the fact that most modern European and American centres have been constituted through a revolutionary process so that symbols of protest in general and of class protest in particular have been incorporated into the centres of most of these countries. Thus movements of protest in general and of class struggle in particular could become legitimate as central aspects of their demands were incorporated into the centre. It is a closely related fact that one of the specific characteristics of European civilization has been the continuous confrontation between centre and periphery. This confrontation has often resulted in the periphery attaining some measure of autonomy from the centre, or through its impingement on the centre, influencing and even transforming it (p. 2).

They neglect, alas, to define "centre" and "periphery"; their actual uses of the terms suggest no more than that they have in mind 1) the principal political authority and its immediate adjuncts, 2) everything else. The absence of definitions blocks any serious evaluation of this statement of Europe's specificity, and raises doubts as to whether the group from Hebrew University has discovered the *differentium specificum*. Guided (if the word is not too strong) by these abstract precepts, the authors have assembled eight essays on national politics, student protest, and social inequality in the United States, France, Spain, Italy, England, and Southern Europe as a whole. The essays compete with each other in two regards: vagueness and inaccuracy.

Adam Seligman's essay on the French nation-state, for example, alternates between commonplaces and non-sequiturs. Seligman claims that the ill-defined "centre" incorporated Huguenots and their orientations, so that "Both Huguenots and Jansenists tended to develop a high degree of association with broader strata groups and thereby became important articulators of models of collective identity" (p. 29). By contorted reasoning one might be able to claim that the state coopted the troublemaking Jansenists. But the Huguenots? Granting that Henry IV, a one-time Protestant, became king, we might still wonder about the "incorporation" of a people who fled France by the thousands, against whom Henry's son Louis XIII conducted full-scale military campaigns in the 1620s, whom his grandson Louis XIV proscribed and persecuted in the 1680s, and who suffered harassment and civil disability up to the Revolution.

Seligman goes on to explain the Revolution itself as a consequence of backward agriculture, economic crisis, and blocked mobility, but says not a word of war-induced debt or the Parlements' resistance to its refinancing. "The failure of the centre to incorporate the basic dimensions of protest within the core components of the socio-political order", he concludes, "was the ultimate cause of its collapse and of the emergence of the revolutionary situation" (p. 33). At this moment of intense debate about the Revolution's origins, it is hard to know whether to be more distressed by Seligman's failure to keep up with the literature or his retreat to an empty tautology.

On and on the analysis goes, swathing distinct figures in voluminous gray wraps that obscure almost all traces of their actual shapes. Luis Roniger, in his

turn, claims that the great historic difference between Spain and Italy has been the presence in Spain of a strong center and in Italy of a multitude of weak ones – thereby occulting the struggles among Catalonia, Castile, Portugal, the Basque country, and other old duchies that have recurrently torn Spain asunder; where is the fragmentation that led Juan Linz to speak of the Eight Spains? An essay by Sarah Levinthal on student protest in Italy and England ultimately attributes the greater moderation of English students to a supposed tradition that “emphasised the right of different social groups, especially elite groups of various natures, to have access to the centre which was moreover perceived as a focus of national identity” (p. 86), thus disposing of the Welsh, the Irish, the Scots, Catholics, John Wilkes, Thomas Paine, the Chartists, and the generations of angry workers E. P. Thompson has chronicled.

Adam Seligman’s attack on the classic question of socialism’s absence in the United States similarly dismisses all standard explanation in favor of a tautology, and a false tautology at that: Socialism failed because American protest movements “never articulated alternative *loci* of values, norms or collective identity beyond the parameters of the American belief system” (p. 110). William Gamson’s study of American challenging groups from 1815 to 1945, which Seligman does not cite, should have sufficed to dispel that illusion. Whatever happened to the Molly McGuires, the Civil War, the Knights of Labor, Haymarket, the Ku Klux Klan, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Hippy communes of the 1960s?

Eisenstadt and colleagues even try to revive the discredited derivation of class structure from prevailing values. Eisenstadt sums up the central notion: “[T]he more autonomous elites tend to carry cultural orientations which entail a conception of tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, and which tend to develop relatively broad and flexible modes of control and accordingly relatively broader modes of group bases of social hierarchies as well as of articulation of class interest and consciousness” (p. 131). This passage may actually contain the germ of a promising argument: that the national unity of ruling classes promotes the formation of nationwide subordinate classes. The formulation’s obscurity and abstraction make it difficult, and perhaps useless, to find out. In any case, the insertion of the “tension between the transcendental and the mundane order” adds nothing to the argument, yet constitutes the claim to link ideas and social stratification. The book’s reasoning and evidence do not sustain the claim.

Fuzzy language encourages spongy thought. We search vainly through the maze for well-defined agents, causes or effects; everything happens in the passive voice. “At the same time”, a characteristic sentence runs, “centres were judged according to their capacity to promote just and meaningful institutions, and as such, were subject to the continuous competition on the part of different groups and elites over the terms of access to these centres and the definition thereof” (p. 16). Who did what to whom? Despite the book’s publication in Great Britain, no native speaker of English seems to have inspected the manuscript. It abounds in misspelled words, grammatical errors, infelicities of expression, and unidiomatic phrases. “Insofar as such monopolisation of access to the centres”, reads one passage, “is, as the case in the United States [*sic*],

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!

Charles Tilly

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