

interdit, qui s'y est exercée. Les interrogations posées trouvent parfois réponse vite satisfaite. Ainsi, la raideur des années sectaires n'est-elle due qu'à la politique de l'Internationale communiste ? N'y a-t-il pas dans ce parti groupusculaire, formé majoritairement d'émigrés de fraîche date, des éléments intrinsèques qui conditionnent le sectarisme ? Malgré qu'elle court comme un fil rouge à travers tout le volume et en justifie sans doute l'existence, la problématique nationale ne fait pas l'objet d'un exposé systématique. On peut le regretter, tant son poids a manifestement joué, étroitement confondue qu'elle était avec la revendication démocratique, dans l'histoire des communistes du Québec. Et ce d'autant plus qu'ils faisaient face au monolithisme et au dogmatisme du groupe dirigeant canadien symbolisé par Tim Buck, le plus ancien des « chefs historiques » du communisme en Occident.

Il me paraît que ces approches négligent par trop la problématique de l'histoire du communisme telle qu'elle a été abordée par les travaux et l'équipe d'Annie Kriegel à Nanterre. On en reste trop souvent à l'histoire purement événementielle ou idéologique, à l'histoire interne, avec les critiques nécessairement d'usage aujourd'hui, mais sans chercher à donner une épaisseur sociologique aux communistes québécois. Ceux-ci n'apparaissent dans ces pages qu'à travers quelques-uns de leurs dirigeants. C'est pourquoi sont particulièrement parlants les cas présentés d'actions syndicales où se perçoivent clairement le rôle exact, le pourquoi des succès et surtout des échecs des communistes au Québec.

Pour le lecteur non américain, pour le familier de la problématique communiste européenne, il existe une distance manifeste entre cette approche, encore trop liée à l'historiographie, honnête et courageuse, chaleureuse et ouverte, du passé, et les méthodes appliquées aujourd'hui à l'histoire du communisme. À l'heure où se perçoivent déjà les apports dûs à l'ouverture des archives du Komintern à Moscou, cet ouvrage reflète encore quelque peu la nature obsidionale du communisme au Québec.

Ces réserves, formulées à bon compte, car conçues dans la période post-1991 d'accès aux archives, ne peuvent cacher que l'ouvrage constituera pour le grand public comme pour les chercheurs francophones une introduction particulière fructueuse à une problématique en devenir.

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Mitchell Dean — *The Constitution of Poverty. Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. viii, 248.

E.J. Hobsbawm once remarked that the New Poor Law of 1834 “created more embittered unhappiness than any other statute of modern British history” [*Industry and Empire* (229)]. Historical sociologist Mitchell Dean's purpose is not to examine the reaction of the poor to this legislation, but rather, through a case-history of the discourses, policies and relief practices between 1795 and 1834, to reveal the “full, ruptural nature of pauperism” (4) in the creation of the liberal mode of government. Relying heavily, though by no means exclusively, on Foucault's theory of

“eventualisation” (4), Dean views the debate on pauperism and the 1834 Law as a crucial “event” marking a “major break” (7) with previous discourse concerning the poor.

The significance of this “liberal break in poor policy” (6), according to Dean, has immense historiographical and theoretical ramifications. He charges some post-war historians with finding too great a “continuity and necessity in the passage from ancient poor law to modern welfare state” (6) — a teleological view which Dean seeks to avoid. On the other hand, some historians view the 1834 reform as an aberration eventually reversed. In either case, Dean contends, such historians underplay the profound rupture of 1834, a break “more fundamental than any which has succeeded it” (7). “The classical liberal mode of government,” moreover, “always contained the active possibility of the expansion and centralisation of state activity within its form of economy in a way which traverses empty oppositions between individualism and collectivism, *laissez-faire* and interventionism, etc.” (6, Dean’s emphasis). Indeed, the New Poor Law itself is evidence for the somewhat paradoxical phenomenon that “the liberal proscription of the relief of poverty...does not lead to a minimal state, as might be expected, but to a fundamental reorganization and extension of the powers and prerogatives of state administration” (198-199).

Perhaps even more significant are the implications of Dean’s argument for classical theorists of capitalist transformation. The New Poor Law, by banning outdoor relief to able-bodied males and their dependants, removed a key obstacle to the emergence of a national labour market based on wage-labour. Henceforth, such males either entered the workhouse where their condition would be made “less-eligible” than outside or sought wage employment in the market as patriarchal breadwinners totally responsible for support of their families. This mode of government of poverty, what Dean calls “the constitution of poverty” (3), is neglected by both Marx and Weber. Thus, the former cannot explain fully why a large propertyless and landless plebian mass became wage-labourers while the latter cannot explain adequately the rise of the ethic of patriarchal self-responsibility (212-213, my emphasis).

Such arguments are by no means entirely original. Karl Polanyi’s seminal book *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944, drew many similar conclusions. Dean, indeed, pays tribute to Polanyi’s “exemplary” work (8) and, at many points, seeks to test and refine his thesis. Although disagreeing with Polanyi on many substantive issues — his failure to distinguish adequately between political economy and social economy, his neglect to differentiate between paternalism and patriarchy and his exaggerated notion of the prevalence of the Speenhamland system of poor relief prior to 1834 — Dean endorses Polanyi’s contention that the New Poor Law of 1834, in that it led to a commodification of labour, was “a necessary component of early capitalist social relations” (15). Dean thus provides an important contribution to a growing body of work, especially since the mid-1980s, assessing Polanyi’s rich legacy.

There are many other strengths in Dean’s analysis. He presents excellent discussions of the important role played by reformers such as Jeremy Bentham, Patrick Colquhoun and Edwin Chadwick. His emphasis on the 1790s as the critical decade which “witnessed the discovery, or even the invention of a concept of poverty” (137, Dean’s emphasis) is well taken. The impact of T.R. Malthus’ *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, published in 1798, is given the attention it deserves

(chapters four and five are devoted to this writer). Dean offers strong arguments in favour of the Malthusian aims, if not means, of the New Poor Law of 1834. The crucial Malthusian objective is what Dean terms the “breadwinner” model where the independent male labourer becomes “the sole responsible agent of the welfare of his wife and children...capable of rationally calculating the costs of gaining a wife and the potential economic burdens represented by children” (104-105, Dean’s emphasis). As the 1834 Report succinctly remarked: “The effects of each man’s improvidence or mis-conduct are borne by himself and his family” (104). Dean, then, stresses an important gender component within Malthusian ideology. If paternalism was abolished by the New Poor Law, patriarchy certainly was not.

A number of Dean’s arguments and conclusions, however, would benefit from the insights of historical specialists whose approaches to history and “the division of labour they presuppose” (4) Dean challenges. While arguing that E.P. Thompson’s concept of the moral economy “will intellectually survive for some time to come” despite being too “neat, simple, and general” (108-109), he denies the existence of a “moral economy of poor relief” (119) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The notion of a right to relief and even to subsistence, Dean argues, only came to be stated in universal moral terms with “full intellectual rigour” (119) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and only then in reaction to the new liberal mode of poor relief. It is unfortunate that Dean did not utilize the recent work by “specialist” historians such as K.D.M. Snell who argues that poor relief should be considered a part of the moral economy [*Annals of the Labouring Poor* (99-100)]. Dean’s discussion would also benefit from a consideration of the Settlement Laws, so closely were they bound up with the Poor Laws. Settlement in a parish, in fact, conferred a legal right to relief and evidence suggests that the poor perceived both relief and settlement as rights to which they were morally entitled well before the end of the eighteenth century.

Such arguments concerning the moral economy are closely related, of course, to the concept of paternalism. Dean’s argument that the liberal break in poor policy entailed “both a rejection of the old paternalist patriarchalism” of the Elizabethan Poor Law “and an enforcement of patriarchal relations of economic responsibility and dependence within poor families” (112, Dean’s emphasis) is a valid one. More might be said, however, concerning the situation of family members within this patriarchy. Female children, for example, were pushed out to service at an earlier age in order to ease the burden on the male breadwinner. Would this observation help to answer Dean’s question (170) as to why the numbers of single able-bodied women without children requesting relief after 1834 was so small? Is there, moreover, a connection between the New Poor Law and the dissolution of domestic ties — a phenomenon condemned, as Dean acknowledges, by Gaskell, but also more widely on a spectrum of opinion from Lord Ashley to Engels?

“Specialist” historians might also query the degree to which the 1834 Poor Law Act was, in reality, the sudden rupture, the “major break” that Dean posits. He tends to accept uncritically the statistics of Karel Williams [*From Pauperism to Poverty*] revealing an immediate and effective denial of outdoor relief to able-bodied males after 1834. Many historians have suggested that such a feat was not accomplished until at least 1850, especially in the North. The creation of the first national capitalist labour market, then, should be placed in England and Wales somewhat later than Dean suggests.

Such comments are not meant to detract from the overall scope and perceptiveness of Dean's analysis. This book is a must for all concerned with the history of poverty and its treatment and, in a wider context, with the rise of the liberal capitalist system. Dean promises a further study dealing with the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries in defence of his thesis that the New Poor Law of 1834 marked a change more profound than any since. This follow-up study, no doubt, will be equally provocative and insightful.

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Claire Dolan, dir. — *Événement, identité et histoire*. Sillery (Québec) : Les éditions du Septentrion, 1991, 277 p.

L'événement revient à la mode. Telle est du moins la première impression qui se dégage de la lecture de l'ouvrage publié sous la direction de Claire Dolan, *Événement, identité et histoire*. Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas. Il ne s'agit pas ici de cette « histoire événementielle » tant vilipendée par « l'école des Annales », mais bien d'une approche nouvelle en histoire qui tente de faire la lumière sur le rôle fondamental de l'événement dans la formation de l'identité collective.

Fruit d'une réflexion amorcée dans les années 1980, les quatorze articles réunis dans cet ouvrage visent en effet à comprendre pourquoi certains événements tragiques (épidémies, guerres, persécutions, etc.), après avoir bouleversé la vie de communautés entières, ont pris dans la mémoire collective une place importante alors que d'autres tombaient rapidement dans l'oubli.

Prenant comme hypothèse de base que les effets matériels de ces événements ont pu influencer le processus de sélection opéré par la mémoire, on a alors retenu un certain nombre « d'événements-catastrophes dont le souvenir ponctuaient les récits d'autrefois » (13). On cherchait à établir si ceux-ci avaient suffisamment perturbé les sociétés qui leur avaient servi de cadre pour être considérés comme des ruptures déterminantes dans le cours de leur histoire.

Du Moyen Age à l'époque moderne, de la Provence à la Nouvelle-Angleterre, voilà donc les principales étapes d'une vaste quête qui occupe toute la première partie du livre de Claire Dolan. Mais la recherche de l'événement traumatique n'est pas une entreprise aussi aisée qu'on pourrait le croire de prime abord. Au contraire, l'observation d'un tel phénomène se révèle une opération fort subjective qui dépend tant de la distance à laquelle on se place par rapport à lui que de la grille d'analyse à laquelle on le soumet.

Qu'on l'observe dans la longue durée, comme le fait Ellery Schalk qui place au cœur de son propos près de trois siècles d'histoire marseillaise, ou qu'on le scrute à la loupe, à l'exemple de Christian Maurel qui fait subir au sac de Marseille par les Aragonais en 1423 une véritable autopsie, l'événement prend, sous des regards différents, aussi bien l'allure d'un accident sans conséquences que celle d'un changement profond.