

The cover of this book proclaims it to be "an important book." In that it provides a chronicle of the fortunes of the textile industry in a troubled decade, it is a useful book. This said, it must be noted that *The Politics of Industrial Restructuring* is not easy or in any way stimulating reading. Sentences frequently require rereading before the meaning becomes clear. There is a tendency to employ terms without adequate definition. Jargon occasionally permeates the narrative.

One is left with the sense that with a less fervent devotion to ideology and a greater appreciation of the innate pragmatism and complexity of Canadian public policy-making, this book would convey a more convincing message. In an earlier volume in this "State and Economic Life" series, Tom Traves concluded that the development of the Canadian state and changes in the political economy of the 1920s "did not follow any predetermined pattern" (p. 167). "At each stage," Traves notes in *The State and Enterprise*, "business and government leaders, as well as a host of lesser figures, acted upon their perceptions of the complex balance between self interest and social stability in the face of numerous changes in markets, private and public institutions, and political alignments" (p. 167). Canadian society and its economy have increased immeasurably since the 1920s in their complexity. Attempting to interpret them solely on the basis of "hegemonic class domination" denies this progression and Canada's one true political talent — adept political accommodation within a pluralistic state.

Writing of Ottawa's unsuccessful experiments with economic planning and industrial strategy-making in the 1970s, Richard French suggests that technocratic planning fails because it has tended to downplay "the regular inconsistency, frequent perversity, and occasional chaos of policy-making in a democracy" (*How Ottawa Decides*, Ottawa: 1980, p. 155). Unlike the decisive ongoing creative destruction of Schumpeter's economy, Canada survives by means of "rolling compromises." In its devotion to "hegemonic class domination," *The Politics of Industrial Restructuring* refuses to acknowledge this complexity.

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BRYAN PALMER — *Working Class Experience. The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980*. Toronto: Butterworth, 1983. Pp. 347.

This is an ambitious book in which the author attempts to trace the historical peaks and troughs of Canadian working class struggles from their incipient emergence in the early 1800s to their mass culturalization between the 1920s and 1980s; in short, Palmer attempts to suggest "... how the Canadian working class has been made and remade over the course of two centuries" (p. 5). Adopting a Thompsonian perspective, Palmer marks the high point of working class formation in the struggles of the Knights of Labour in the 1880s as they sought, he claims, to extend working class organization beyond the skilled male craft-worker to include the less skilled, women, and ethnic minorities; this high point extends into western labour radicalism from 1899 to 1919. Other decades were never to match such a level and scope of organizing: "no workers' movement since then [the 1880s] has so effectively bridged the gaps separating and fragmenting different labour factions ..." (p. 297). During the early 1800s, the worker was oppressed under the burden of a paternalistic ideology in social, economic and political fields; after the peak of the post-World War I struggles, the working class was torn asunder by ideological competition, and by labour market, ethnic, regional, and gender fragmentation; and, since the 1920s, commodity consciousness and mass culture have atomized working class culture into individualized competitions among workers for the titillating crumbs of monopoly capitalism.

Palmer's book is an excellent collection of several social-historical hypotheses requiring more detailed historical, sociological, and political research. The book excels at placing at the centre of class analysis the everyday struggles of workers against their oppressive conditions of existence. In this respect, it is far superior to the research of the institutional historical trade union school which analyzes labour narrowly in terms of either trade union organizations or state industrial relations policies; instead Palmer expands the notion of labour and the working class to include community and family, association and church, and politics and struggle. The book is also much superior to the static analyses found within both functionalist and neo-Marxist sociology with its emphasis on counting the number of workers occupying slots in the social system. For all of this, we are deeply indebted to Bryan Palmer. Having said this, I must now turn to a friendly critique of his work. Only in this way will we progress to new levels of practical understanding of working class experiences.

One of the weakest and most confusing aspects of the book is Palmer's use of "class" in general and "working class" in particular. Rather than providing a precise, though flexible, definition of the "working class", Palmer offers a few general statements which are so vague, empty of content, and ambiguous that "working class" seems to stand for almost any dynamic historical phenomenon involving "workers". "working class life" is seen as fundamentally based on the economic realities of the "workplace" (Palmer means here the more sexist term, "capitalist workplace", which excludes the home as a "workplace"). He also extends the "working class" beyond these bounds to include union organizations, labour politics, the community, family, religion, voluntary associations, and culture (p. 3). I could not agree more with such extensions, but it is amazing that he should write as if the traditional Marxist conception of class had not been based primarily on the "capitalist workplace" and therefore that his extensions needed no additional comment! We need to know how Palmer theorizes the relation between working class culture outside and within the "capitalist workplace". We need to know how he theorizes the relation between the working class community and its daily struggles at work in the "capitalist workplace". Palmer argues that the family has occupied a "... central importance in the history of the working class", but he then passes this off with the remark that "the family remains virtually unstudied" (p. 81); this despite the existence of hundreds of Canadian sociological research reports on this topic and despite the existence of a large body of feminist writings on the relation between the household and the "capitalist workplace"! There is a large literature, especially in Europe, in which writers have attempted to wrestle with the conceptualization of class, both within and outside the "workplace", but Palmer sidesteps such writings, and steepers himself in his data so much that it appears at times that "working class" can be stretched to mean almost anything among "workers" that changes. Most surprisingly, Palmer's conception of the working class shifts significantly from the first to the last parts of his book. Initially, the "working class" is seen as including the struggles of the "capitalist workplace" as well as those of the community, family, church, tavern and associations outside this "workplace"; but by chapter 6, the "working class" has been reduced primarily to the struggles of the organized trade union movement. There is no discussion here of working class communities, or working class families, or working class churches, or working class taverns, or working class associational life; these have either disappeared, or are now studied by sociologists and thus considered suspect by Palmer. This is indeed ironic for Palmer ventures into contemporary society where historians have little expertise; yet, despite the interdisciplinary flavour of the "new social history", Palmer studiously ignores studies in political science of working class politics in the 1960s and 1970s and studies in sociology of working class identification (consciousness?), families, and communities. This gives the book an unbalanced focus with a greater empirical strength before World War II, and considerable speculation for the period after the war, especially on the question of mass culture (which, unbeknownst to Palmer, sociologists have studied extensively).

Readers should be forgiven if they suspect that Palmer slips unwittingly from a holistic conception of the working class as all those oppressed at the hands of capital within and outside the "workplace" to only the skilled, male, craft worker honoured by such subordination. Palmer refers to the strikes during the 1850s as increasing "class cleavage" and "class distinctions", but acknowledges that almost all of them were led by skilled workers (pp. 68-71). He refers to the "conflict between master and man" as an "emerging class cleavage", thereby excluding women (especially

“at home” in the family) from class relations (p. 68). Most of the evidence on the Knights of Labour suggests that they were led by, and composed primarily of, male skilled craft workers. Despite this, Palmer mounts exaggerated claims that they integrated women, the unskilled, and ethnic minorities into a cohesive working class movement. For example, Palmer characterizes the Knights of Labour as “... a movement culture [which] heightened workers’ awareness, bringing together the unskilled and the skilled” (p. 129), but never tells us what proportion of the Knights were unskilled workers. If such data are not available, then clearly Palmer is not justified in going beyond the data he does have to make his cohesive class argument. On the question of gender, Palmer states that the Knights “... achieved new organizational strength by including women, uniting the particular oppression of sex with the cause of the exploited workingman” (p. 112; see also pp. 115, 116-7, 118). Where is the evidence? Palmer states that during the 1880s, “... approximately 10 percent, or 25 out of 250, of the Ontario local assemblies contained women” (p. 118), but does not tell us what percentage of the membership of each local were women, nor what percentage of the leading positions in the Knights were occupied by women. “Hope” and “Advance” were special women’s assemblies, but little evidence is provided of their scope in Ontario. Furthermore, no evidence is provided of any attempt by the Knights to break out of the traditional capitalist “workplace” to organize the domestic “workplace”. This is surprising, given Palmer’s inclusion of the family in working class struggles and experiences (unless, of course, domestic women are not considered by Palmer to be a “legitimate” part of the working class).

In this reviewer’s mind, Palmer’s “working class” contains nine main concepts: economic relations of production, unions, associations, conflict and struggle, culture, religion and the churches, community, politics, and the family. Excluding the first concept, each of them falls into Antonio Gramsci’s “civil society” and thus excludes the state. This suggests that Palmer does not locate class struggle even partially within the state, and thus sets himself quite apart from the theories of Nicos Poulantzas. It seems that Palmer would therefore have to accept Gramsci’s “war of manoeuvre” in which a successful working class socialist revolution could occur only through a direct armed assault against the state “from the outside”. This “outside” exists in the economic substratum of the social formation and its civil society. This is where Palmer’s “working class” is constituted. In these areas there are two main dimensions in Palmer’s nine “working class” concepts: the relational and organizational. There are four relational concepts in Palmer’s “working class”: the economic relations of production, struggle and conflict, culture, and politics. The organizational include five major concepts: unions, associations, churches, family, and community. The two “fundamental” concepts in Palmer’s “working class” in general and its relational dimension in particular, it may be argued, are the economic relations of production and culture. Between these two exists a dialectical relation in which the more fundamental concept is the economic relations of production. Out of this dialectical relation emerges struggle and conflict, whose highest pinnacle extends to political relations and struggles. Each of these four relational concepts in Palmer’s “working class” has its site or field of struggle in his five organizational concepts. Some, such as unions, are dominated more by the working class, even though ultimately they have been the creation of the state and the bourgeois class. Others, such as churches, are dominated more by the bourgeois and middle classes, although their class composition varies from one religious denomination to the next. If Palmer were to apply such “working class” theorizing to his future historical work, his impact on academic as well as political practice would be more forceful than it has been in the past.

Besides “class”, “culture” is also mishandled in the book. Palmer laces his arguments with such terms as “movement culture”, “mass culture”, “emergent culture”, “residual culture”, (e.g. pp. 106-08), but none of these terms are defined, although they bear the imprint of Raymond Williams. Palmer appears to reject any use of the notion of class consciousness with the statement that it has rarely been attained in the history of the Canadian working class movement (pp. 3-4). But surely this assumes a dichotomous, black-and-white notion of either the presence or absence of class consciousness, when in fact it is a complicated, dialectical *process* of emergence (and retardation) over a long period of time. Since class interests are intimately connected to class consciousness, it is not surprising that Palmer does not distinguish between those aspects of working class culture that advance and those that retard workers’ interests. Labourism, as an aspect of working class culture, does not

appear to have any internal unity: at times it shades off into socialism, at other times it competes with socialism; at times it supports a democracy for all workers, but at other times it adopts a strident anti-Orientalism (pp. 158-61). Labourism can thus mean a moderate socialist opposition to capital and the state as well as the incorporation of labour into the designs of capital. A much clearer discussion has been provided recently by Craig Heron. On the question of mass culture, Palmer admits that most of his statements on this subject are speculative, despite the fact that it occupies a central position in his explanation of the fate of the working class after the immediate post-World War I events (and despite much contemporary research on the topic). Strangely, Palmer argues that consumerism, perhaps the central focus of mass culture, "... played a role in placating working people in these years of collapse [during the Great Depression of the 1930s]" (p. 189), yet he provides no evidence to support such a speculation. Throughout the book, there appears to be an exaggerated contrast between the cultural unity of the working class during the 1880s and the ideological fragmentation of the working class in the twentieth century; this downplays aspects of cultural disarray during the 1880s and aspects of cultural unity during the twentieth century (e.g. has baseball completely lost its solitary function for the working class and has it been completely subordinated to mass culture or the "dominant culture"?).

It is impossible to check Palmer's historical facts since he provides no footnotes but only bibliographic commentaries at the end of the book. This is unfortunate, for Palmer appears to generalize from single discrete facts to a universe of facts which go unreported and whose existence is thus highly suspect. At other times, he makes empirical-like statements when he has no historical facts to support them. He refers to "... a peculiarly Canadian social formation, in which capitalism and the state went hand in hand" (p. 61); but this is not peculiar to Canada since it is typical of many other countries, especially in the socialist bloc and in state monopoly capitalist Western countries. Palmer claims that under Terrence Powderly, the Knights of Labour in the United States "... captured the support of American working man and woman as had no other labour-reform organizations" (p. 100); but he offers no evidence comparing support for various labour-reform organizations, especially from women. Later, Palmer argues: "Especially striking is the degree to which the woman's place in working class society had been devalued since the 1880s, when the class and women's questions had intersected" (p. 182). Where is the evidence of such a devaluation? How can one claim that the "class and women's questions had intersected" in the 1880s? One certainly cannot make this claim on the basis of the flimsy evidence of the involvement of women in the Knights of Labour. Again, Palmer makes an exaggerated claim for E. T. Kingsley of the Socialist party of British Columbia and the *Western Clarion* which would seem almost incapable of verification: "Kingsley and his allies were seen as the new vanguard, pacing developments, not only in Canada, but in the socialist world" (p. 164). Seen by whom? Which developments in Canada? Which parts of the socialist world? Were they even aware of Kingsley?

Palmer ends the book with a desperate romantic harkening back to a utopian past with the suggestion that workers today will not be able to develop effective challenges on the political, cultural, and economic fronts unless they can recreate the spirit of the 1880s (pp. 297-98). On the contrary, unless workers today are able to *surpass* the gender, ethnic, and skilled narrowness of the Knights of Labour, they will never be able to mount effective struggles against capital and the state, both within and outside the "capitalist workplace".

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