

These essays on middling attitudes are central to the basic thesis of the book that "the law was not the absolute property of patricians but a limited multiple-use right available to most Englishmen" (p. 20). The question remains, as we move from the law-as-authority to the matter of power, whether this "use right" was accessible to the labouring poor. Certainly the poor often had a keen sense of the legitimacy of their grievances, as John Walter's account of the Maldon bread riots ably illustrates, and this gave them some bargaining power. But frequently they had to back up their legitimate supplications with direct action and this in turn exposed them to the discretionary interpretation of the law by the powerful, perhaps to retributive justice at the gallows. Furthermore, the rights of the poor, embedded in custom, were progressively undermined as use rights were reified into property rights and brought under the criminal sanction. Doubtless the authors of this volume concede as much, but how did the redefinition of the law affect popular attitudes to it? Was the common people's assent to the law so wholehearted as that of those above them? Or was it, as Defoe once remarked, personified by the justice of the peace, remote and unpredictable? Until we know more about who took advantage of the law in this litigious age we will not be able to answer this question. What we can explain, thanks to this volume, is why the law won so much support among the small property-holders as well as the great.

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R. A. LEESON. — *Travelling Brothers*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979. Pp. 348.

The main argument of this book is that the nineteenth-century growth of trade unions was built upon a foundation of ritual and fellowship of ancient lineage. Leeson begins his discussion with the guild organizations of masters and men; he goes on to write about the separation of the "yeomanry" from the hierarchical guilds; and then, finally, he stresses the solidarities between geographically dispersed groups of artisans. In making this argument he stands opposed to the tradition of the Webbs which regarded unions as a new response to the new conditions brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the author devotes his final chapter to articulating his differences with the Webbs and their followers; I thought, however, that the whole book would have been far more forceful if Leeson had reversed his order and made this statement of his thesis and its counterpoint at the outset.

The "aristocratic" trade unions had four main rules: control of entry by apprenticeship; the administration of friendly benefits; the regulation of the workload; and the "tramping system". This last characteristic is of primary interest to Leeson and plays a very large role in his account of the chronological development of workmen's organizations. Its roots were planted deep in the fraternal societies of skilled workmen — "the masons' system of employment or hospitality and payment to help the travelling 'fellow' on his way is on record from the 1580s" (p. 74) — while among the blacksmiths "a procedure laid down in 1434 ... delegated a yeomanry member to direct the traveller to a place of employment"

(p. 126). The tramping system was a crucial component of workers' solidarity not only as a form of unemployment assistance and a welfare scheme which helped to deal with the imperfections of the labour market but also as a form of what might be termed "collective bargaining by desertion". Thus, workers who were laid off or faced wage cuts below the traditional, acceptable rate could respond by hitting the road and thereby almost instantly turning a local labour glut into a scarcity. In this way the craftsmen in geographically dispersed towns and cities were both linked and separated. The main point was that a section of the members in, say, Worcester would be both willing and able to leave town and to receive fellowship from their brothers and sisters in, say, Leicester, Birmingham, Warwick or wherever. In this way it was possible to bargain with employers about the pace of work, the ratio between men and boys and to insist on a kind of closed shop. As such, the tramping system is of central importance in understanding how workers — and, in particular, such skilled craftsmen as carpenters, masons or blacksmiths — struggled with their employers in pre-industrial circumstances. Not surprisingly a system that was long-standing was called upon in the period of the first Industrial Revolution when workers faced unprecedented challenges to their control over work. The tramping system enjoyed a long Indian summer and flourished between the 1780s and the 1840s, after which it suffered a protracted demise. It would seem that the dramatic absolute growth of the labour force together with the cyclical depressions of the capitalist economy placed unbearable burdens on the system of travelling while the ease of movement fostered by the age of the rails made the system of tramping obsolete. As Leeson writes, "more machines, more power, more workers and bigger workplaces meant the dwindling of a system and way of life based on a chain of small workshops where journeymen and masters shared the same craft traditions, a chain along which the independent artisan might move seeking work or the potential strike breaker might be helped on his way with a square meal, a pint and slap on the back" (p. 194).

The phenomenal growth and geographical integration of the labour force, the need for centralized organization and financing of unions, the desire for respectability and, finally, the increase of "home welfare" instead of tramping spelled the end of the road for this customary form of working-class organization. Before finally expiring the system fell into disgrace with the respectable, bureaucratic forces in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The tenacity with which tramping held out was a profound testament to its integration in the lifestyles of artisans. As late as 1879 "something like 5,000 engineers, masons, founders and tailors took the road with tramp cards in their pockets" (p. 224). In its long waning years one of the strategies which the workers availed themselves of was emigration and Leeson writes a very interesting chapter on the internationalization of the tramping system — both Toronto and Montreal, with their bad beer, figure in this story as does the growth of Canadian engineering unions at the expense of British fellowships.

The book's breadth of learning and its sympathy testify to its author's commitment. It deals in great detail with the transformation in labour's internal organization but I felt that there were a number of instances when the treatment was superficial and the discussion lacked clarity. Thus, the precise system of payment and intra-local budget balancing is inadequately explored; this is particularly surprising since Leeson claims that it was the demands of central authorities who gained control over the informal groupings of locals which led to an intense concern for both economy and respectability and, thereby, attacked the tramping system root-and-branch. Secondly, and this is a hard point, there is little discussion of who it was who hit the road. Social historians — particularly those concerned with the representativeness of past experience — will be particularly upset with

the author's inability to confront this point. If, as he sometimes seems to suggest, the tramps were mostly single men and only rarely were they married, then this would mean that marriage was not only a personal *rite de passage* but also a social one. In addition, this marital-status specific difference might also prove to be a causal factor of some significance in explaining why highly mobile journeymen in the skilled trades married later than did the rather more sedentary proto-industrial workers. Another point on which he is surprisingly reticent has to do with the bifurcation in the labour force — rough and respectable; artisan and labourer — which had profound implications for all aspects of life and work. Moreover this point is particularly important because many of the groups seen as exemplars of the tramping system, such as the framework knitters, were highly variegated during the course of the Industrial Revolution, both between town and country as well as between those who worked in small "shops" and those who were domestic outworkers. So, there were framework knitters and there were framework knitters — Leeson is never very specific in telling us which groups he is talking about. Finally, I must say something about the execrable system of footnoting that is employed. Not only are the notes at the end of the text (as usual, alas!) but the lack of any coherent apparatus merely obfuscates when the provision of notes is meant to enlighten the reader.

I do not want to end on a caustic note since this book can be recommended as being a very useful text for undergraduates in survey courses on British history. For its scope and its sensitivity to the nuances of working-class life I know of nothing else quite like it.

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RICHARD PRICE. — *Masters, Unions and Men: Work control in building and the rise of labour, 1830-1914*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Pp. xi, 355.

PATRICK JOYCE. — *Work, Society & Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980. Pp. xxv, 356.

These two studies must rank among the most significant works on British labour produced in the last few years. Addressing questions of international concern, they should be read closely by those who profess an interest in working-class and social history. Moreover, these seemingly disparate examinations of specific slices of labour's experience are complementary: both confront the interpretive problem of the stabilization of class relations in the years after the Chartist upheaval of the 1840s.

Price's *Masters, Unions and Men* examines the struggle for worker control in the building trades over the *longue durée* (1830-1914), and lays stress upon the structural transformations that conditioned a negotiated compromise between labour and the dominant social elements. By the 1890s unions had assumed their role as disciplinary agents in a fully fledged industrial relations system, assuring that the syndicalism of the pre-war years would be at one and the same time a