

réexportés en Hollande et en Scandinavie, mais aussi en Angleterre, Espagne, Portugal, Italie et Suisse. Un tel système rendait La Rochelle extrêmement dépendante des conjonctures militaires internationales et des politiques tarifaires de l'État. C'est pourquoi, si le port fait montre d'une belle vitalité à l'époque des privilèges, les guerres et les exactions fiscales auront finalement raison des entreprises avant même la Révolution française.

Dans une deuxième partie, l'auteur insiste sur le fait que les réalisations, inexplicables en termes purement économiques, tiennent au labour des Rochelais et à la force de l'organisation familiale des affaires. À peine une centaine de négociants contrôlent le commerce et les affaires. Leur famille — descendance, parents et alliés — assume des fonctions essentielles d'accumulation et de circulation du capital. Si la firme familiale ne permet pas d'assembler de très grands capitaux, elle assure la stabilité de l'entreprise, procure une tâche à chacun, favorise la répartition de la richesse et surtout elle permet le renouvellement dans la continuité. Il s'ensuit une cohésion sociale très forte, puisqu'à peine 5% des négociants sont étrangers alors qu'on en retrouve jusqu'à 45% à Nantes et à Marseille. C'est un système finalement efficace pour le maintien de la famille dans les affaires.

L'élite commerciale devient ainsi celle de la ville. Les négociants huguenots et catholiques occupent la majorité des postes dans les institutions vouées à la promotion des intérêts de La Rochelle. Même s'ils évitent la conclusion d'alliances matrimoniales entre leurs familles, ils collaborent régulièrement aux plans politique et économique. Dans cette société domine finalement un mode de vie bourgeois. Le titre ou l'office n'entrave pas les mariages. Chacun se plaît à imiter l'aristocratie.

Si l'organisation du commerce ne diffère guère de ce que l'on trouve ailleurs, le contexte atlantique lui confère un rôle particulier. Port de réexportation avant tout, inséré dans un réseau mondial de commerce, basé sur les importations des Îles, La Rochelle est fort soumise à la conjoncture. À ce point de vue, il aurait été intéressant de vérifier si le développement d'une chambre d'assurance a pu constituer un palliatif aux problèmes du commerce.

Tout au long de sa démonstration, l'auteur épouse la cause et la perception des Rochelais. La difficulté d'établir des points de comparaison avec la situation vécue dans les autres centres portuaires ne permet pas toujours de prendre suffisamment de distance face aux arguments des contemporains. Il n'est pas possible par exemple d'évaluer jusqu'à quel point La Rochelle a pu être plus défavorisée que d'autres ports par le fisc, l'organisation familiale, les guerres, le système des privilèges ou l'orientation atlantique. Avant même la fin du XVIII^e siècle, elle n'en perd pas moins son rang de grand centre portuaire.

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FRANÇOIS GENDRON. — *La Jeunesse dorée: Épisodes de la Révolution française.* Québec: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1979. Pp. xiv, 446.

Gendron here seeks to determine by "l'histoire scientifique" (p. 323) how much truth there is in generally accepted estimates of the composition, character

and importance of the bands of dandified bullies who dominated the streets of Paris in 1794-95, the period of the Thermidorian Reaction. The inquiry is necessary because, as he says, our knowledge of the subject has hitherto been impressionistic, being derived in part from anecdotal writing and in part from serious studies of those whom these *muscadins* persecuted, the *sans-culottes*.

By contrast, Gendron's own work is presented as exhaustive and definitive. In many respects Albert Soboul, who supervised the research and who provides a carefully balanced preface, is indeed justified in saying that the *jeunesse dorée* has found its historian. Literary sources, pamphlets and the ephemeral press of the period are here used extensively, and the core of the study is firmly founded on contemporary documents. More particularly, Gendron has ransacked the records of the Committee of General Security, in one sub-series alone of which he reports reading, one by one, 36,000 individual police dossiers. The results of this research appear in part in careful analyses and substantial appendices. The body of the book, however, is an examination in narrative form of the activity of the *jeunesse dorée* from its first appearance in May 1793, when resistance to conscription was widespread, until Vendémiaire Year IV (October 1795), when the bands were dispersed by the army. Today both Soboul and Gendron feel obliged to defend this chronological approach, but it is certainly necessary and effective in making complexity comprehensible.

As Gendron recognises, his conclusions confirm the commonly accepted picture of the *jeunesse dorée*. This in no way diminishes their value. He shows that these *muscadins* numbered between 2,000 and 3,000 men and that most of them were either deserters or men who had evaded military service by occupying some minor administrative position — secured for them, it is surmised, by prosperous parents. He also shows that their behaviour was obnoxious: whatever the sources of their affluence, they flaunted it most offensively in the faces of the poor, whom they abused and assaulted shamelessly. Further, Gendron's exposition of the political activity of the bands is illuminating, for his survey of their role on such great occasions as the insurrection of Prairial is reinforced by his exposure of their regular employment and protection by the Committee of General Security as an unofficial police force. Although he probably goes too far in concluding that the *jeunesse dorée* was "l'explication ultime du phénomène thermidorien" (p. 328), this study will henceforth be indispensable to students of the period.

This book must nevertheless be approached with caution, for as Gendron himself avows, he is passionately partisan. That he should identify himself with *les petites gens* who were victimised by arrogant young blackguards is understandable, but it inevitably involves considerable loss of perspective. One minor, though regrettable, effect of this is that, despite rich documentation, the *muscadins* are seldom seen as personalities; yet some of them surely deserve understanding as men who had experienced the Terror and were determined to prevent its recurrence. A more serious defect of the book, however, is Gendron's uncritical acceptance of assumptions about matters he does not directly examine. The Convention, for example, is constantly represented as an utterly despicable assembly, subservient to the streets and composed, save only for its Montagnard remnant, of men interested only in their own survival and enrichment. Although this view may have been fostered by sources which tend to equate the Convention with its Committee of General Security, it follows also from readiness to accept the assertions of royalist writers like Mallet du Pan. Here, as in the alleged "affiliation girondine de la jeunesse dorée" (p. 25), the convenient is too often and too easily confounded with the truth.

So searching in some things and yet so uncritically dogmatic about others, this book reflects the strengths and weaknesses of its school. According to "the

classical tradition", to which Gendron almost defiantly adheres, the Revolution was primarily a class conflict. Aspects of that conflict must therefore be established by rigorous research of the type so well demonstrated here. Such investigations, however, are subject to a predetermined limitation: not only the existence of class conflict, but also its adequacy as an explanation of everything, is axiomatic. Thus once Gendron has established the fact that a substantial proportion of the *jeunesse dorée* consisted of minor clerks, "la petite bourgeoisie professionnelle" (pp. 26, 159, etc.), his book follows a predictable path, little light being shed on any factor in the situation except that of class hatred. *La Jeunesse dorée* is consequently a book which is invaluable for what lies within its compass, but which substitutes reiterated assertion for inquiry or caution about anything else. In short, scholarship is here marred by failure to differentiate between proven knowledge and personal conviction.

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E. H. HUNT. — *British Labour History 1815-1914*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 428.

Some readers may be misled by the title of this book. It is not a history of the trade-union movement, nor is it even a history of the British labour movement from 1815 to 1914. It deals with these topics but its scope is somewhat broader. This book is an attempt to write a history of British labour as a whole, that is, including organized and unorganized labour, immigrant and native workers, female and child labour, and even the role of labour in the industrial revolution.

In spite of the modest claim made by the author that the book is only an "introductory textbook" (p. xi), it is a major work of synthesis by a leading economic historian of labour. Its engaging and argumentative style will certainly inspire, encourage and, possibly, annoy a generation of students of labour history. Moreover, the author has attempted with some success to provide his readers with examples of the careers of individual workers to illustrate his broad statistical evidence.

Topics such as the role of Irish labour in the industrial revolution, the standard of living debate and the extent of poverty receive a fair-handed treatment that will be of interest to social historians. The author examines, for example, Charles Booth's 1886 survey of poverty in London. He points out that Booth's heavy reliance on school superintendents to collect data resulted in some distortion. On the one hand the extent of poverty was underestimated because the elderly were under-represented in a sample of respondents with schoolage children. On the other hand the superintendents also administered a means test for the remission of school fees. This created an incentive for respondents to under-report the size of the family income.

At the same time many social historians will not be pleased with the treatment accorded to some topics in this book. The working-class role in the reform agitation of 1832 is viewed as "a passive one, assigned to them by middle-class