

LUCY MIDDLETON, ed. — *Women in the Labour Movement*. London: Croom Helm, 1977.

Anyone trying to find out about women's experiences in the past is continually faced with a dearth of basic information. Most recognised texts barely mention women; Henry Pelling's contributions on the Labour Party and trade unions are good examples of this neglect. This book of essays covers a wide range of women's activities in the organized labour movement from the 1880's to the present day. Appendices give biographical notes on women referred to in the text and details as to the numerical extent of women's participation in the Labour Party, the TUC and the Women's Co-operative Guild. In short, the book is full of factual information not easily accessible elsewhere and on that ground alone will be welcomed.

However, it is really more a celebration than an analysis of women's role in the labour movement. The contributors were, or are, all activists in the movement and they do their best to ignore the awkward realities of sex/class conflicts to which all women's history is obliged to address itself, none more, perhaps, than a book concerned with the part played by women in the labour movement. The theme reiterated throughout the book is stated clearly by Middleton: "The happy association of working class women ... with leisured women ... is a motif that runs through the story of Labour women." When the narrative cannot help but expose divisions that occurred between middle and working class women, or between working class men and women, the authors tend to invoke a modified form of conspiracy theory. Thus, Margherita Rendel, describing the part played by the Women's Labour League in the fight for the suffrage, lets the following stand without further comment:

There was everything to be gained for those hostile to Labour policies by setting middle class against working class women, working women against working men and the needs of the working class against the most important means of emancipating half that class.

No doubt, but this does not explain why the unidentified forces from without were successful. The determination to chronicle the activities of united women in a united movement at the expense of an in-depth analysis of the context in which labour women lived and worked adds little to our understanding of women's experiences.

Each chapter concentrates on the contribution labour women made within one of the main branches of the movement: of trade union women to the welfare of working women, of the Women's Labour League to social services and the suffrage campaign, of the Women's Co-operative Guild to co-operation and of various groups to internationalism. The narrative concentrates on the leadership, which was clearly middle class. Only Jean Gaffin attempts to give some idea of the social composition of a labour women's organization, in this case the Women's Co-operative Guild. It is not clear how internal conflicts were resolved, how the groups interacted with each other, or how they handled the division of loyalties between feminism and the labour movement. For example, on the issue of birth control (never mentioned in the book) the Workers' Birth Control Group, composed largely of women, found itself in direct conflict with John Wheatley, the Labour Minister of Health. Another important issue for women during the inter-war years was family allowances and here the ILP (largely ignored by the contributors) and parts of the Labour Party found themselves in total disagreement with the unions. How did the women's sections within the Labour Party and unions line up? Did they reach their decisions on the basis of political allegiance and did their perception of themselves as part of the labour movement

conflict with their role as women? And were the views of the married, non-working women in the Women's Co-operative Guild, for example, at odds with those of women trade unionists?

Because the context for discussion is limited to particular women's sections in the labour movement, it is hard to assess just how far the celebration of labour women's achievements is justified. For example, Oonagh McDonald would have us believe that labour women made the questions of nutrition, family allowances and maternal mortality political issues in the 1930s. She ignores the pressure exerted by an all-party committee of women organized by May Tennant to reduce maternal mortality, the influence of the Children's Minimum Committee and the Family Endowment Society (both included MPs of all parties and were organized by Eleanor Rathbone, an Independent Liberal), the Committee Against Malnutrition (an organization of radical male physicians and Medical Officers of Health) and the BMA. It is also worth noting that the motivations of the people involved in these groups differed widely; some put a premium on better nutrition and family allowances as a means of increasing the birth rate. When applied in a different context, for example in the fight for access to birth control information, this worked against labour women.

The first six chapters of the book give an optimistic account of labour women's progress. Sheila Lohead sets the tone at the end of her Introduction with the comment: "Perhaps now our focus must concentrate more on psychological equality than on the political and social standing we have virtually succeeded in achieving." However, the last three chapters reveal this to be far too complacent a view. Here the authors have to admit that the results of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts have been disappointing and that women in the labour movement have made little progress since World War II, no more, say, than in the Conservative Party. What this book does not attempt to explain is 'why?'.

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MAURICE MANDELBAUM. — *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Since the Second World War, there has been a remarkable surge of interest in problems of historical knowledge and inquiry on the part of British and American philosophers working within what could broadly be characterized as an analytical and empiricist tradition. Professor Mandelbaum was in at the beginning of this development — indeed, he somewhat anticipated it in his *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, published in 1938 (reprinted in 1967 as a Harper Torchbook). His new book, which, like the first, has as a central objective the elaboration of a case against historical relativism, but which in style and content reflects the very large changes undergone by English-speaking philosophy in the interval, is a distinguished addition to the growing monographic literature of its genre. More than most, it presents itself as a philosopher's response to what he finds historians actually doing: still somewhat at a distance, perhaps, since no detailed analyses are offered of any historical theses or controversies; yet historians who read the book will surely do so with a sense of recognition.