

makes one wish for a discussion of the nature of that particular piece of social organization. Another theme that pervades the collection is that of ghettoization. Women generally took part in certain activities and not in others. Two explanations can be offered for this, both of which raise their heads at intervals in the various chapters. One is the old victimization interpretation: women were only allowed to do certain things. The other is less defensive: women — owing to a complicated combination of socialization, education and sex-role notions — chose to do certain things. Ghettoization lives on today. Twelve people produced the material in this book, eleven of them female. I do not believe that any of these women see themselves as victims shunted into a restrictive field, although those of us women historians who do not “do” women’s history can testify that such stereotyping exists. Rather, they have chosen the field for the more healthy reason that, just like the women they deal with, they are drawn to the study of topics of concern to themselves. Working from a certain ideological standpoint can be fraught with dangers but it can also produce vital results.

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MICHAEL J. PIVA. — *The Conditions of the Working Class in Toronto 1900-1921*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979. Pp. xiv, 190.

The study of the urban working class in Canadian society, formulated on the recognition of “class”, has only recently attracted Canadian historians. Not surprisingly these studies are the result of the work of scholars no longer willing to subscribe to the outmoded and unacceptable concept of a “classless society”. The most well-known, stimulating and controversial examinations are those on Hamilton in the nineteenth century by Michael Katz, and Bryan Palmer, and on Montreal in the early decades of the twentieth century by Terry Copp. Now Toronto, one of the most important cities of Canada because of its political, social, financial and economic power has been investigated by Michael Piva, a former student of Copp, using the basic framework of Copp’s appraisal of Montreal.

Piva states that “the present work examines the standard of living of blue-collar workers in Toronto” (p. ix) and that it “makes no attempt to discuss working-class ‘culture’” (p. ix). Furthermore the working class is defined “as all blue-collar wage workers” (p. xi) although the constitution of this class is not elaborated.

The book is structured thematically to deal with industrial growth, real wages, unemployment and relief, working conditions, public health and housing, and labour unrest. To clarify and demonstrate graphically these themes, numerous charts, tables and photographs are included.

The core of the study shows clearly how the decline of real wages and the rising costs of living entrapped workers. This substantiates what O. J. Firestone (*Canada’s Economic Development 1867-1953*) had already stated but Piva does it in a more thorough fashion. In addition the important relation between the workers’ real income and unemployment is made, a point which is often ignored but which underscores the difficulties of the working class. Here, however, care must be

taken with the figures and charts used, for too frequently there is an overlapping of dates and different percentages offered for each time frame; thus the comparative nature of the data is questionable (e.g. pp. 49, 56). The nimblest of mathematicians, it can be suggested, would have difficulty with the time-percentage relationships presented.

That there were real problems for the Toronto workers and that they attempted to resolve them is abundantly documented. The individuals seeking improved working conditions, public health and public housing are discussed as are the misdirected and negative reactions of Toronto's politicians and businessmen to proposed alterations. Although some changes were made, they were mere palliatives; it was a case of too little, too slowly. Toronto's proletariat was not much different from other exploited workers; when they were unable to obtain positive improvements or ameliorations they joined unions. Here, the author provides a refreshing reinterpretation of union growth and decline. The rapid unionization during and immediately after World War I and the sharp decline in the 1920s were not so startling as frequently suggested by such authors as Stuart Jamieson (*Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada 1900-1966*). Indeed, the decline in union membership, in relation to population size and effectiveness, began much before 1920. Thus the study includes a number of useful correctives.

There are, however, some features that require explanation and correction. Were the dates 1900-21 selected for convenience or because they coincided with industrial growth in Toronto? 1921 is important because a depression was under way; it did not end that year but continued well into 1924-25. Was it not possible to give a comparative percentage for the fall in prices of 11.1 percent in 1921 with other depressions and in other cities? This is a study of "blue-collar workers". Is the exclusion of the Toronto policemen and firemen from this group due to a Marxist or anarchist interpretation of their role in society? Similarly Piva excuses the dearth of information on women workers, but could not more information have been included since they were becoming increasingly more important in the Toronto work-force? Why is no mention made of the influenza epidemic of 1918 when in October alone approximately 1,300 died? Did this not affect the problems of public health, public housing and the working class? One other question: Why is the study so gentle with the Toronto capitalists and their so-called welfare activities?

In the preface it is implied that the study is a response to Copp's suggestion that "Toronto should be studied for comparative purposes" (p. ix) and in the conclusion that "there were comparable trends in Montreal and Toronto" (p. 172). Yet throughout the book there is little comparison between these two centres. In fairness, the title of the book refers to the Toronto working class and a comparison between these cities was obviously beyond the scope of this work. Readers, however, should be advised that there will be no comparison and here a critical editor could have been of considerable use. In the same vein he could have reduced the frequent repetitions that occur.

In spite of the questions and comments in the two preceding paragraphs, Piva has done what he set out to do. The monograph is a welcome addition to the historiography of Toronto and will undoubtedly stimulate further research on Toronto and on the working class in other Canadian urban centres.

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