Lieten, G.C.M.

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United States away from trying to understand change, especially over the long run. Instead, they endeavor to capture and evoke the context of past societies.

Since major changes, such as sustained declines in mortality and fertility, have occurred, the study of these transitions should not be neglected. Two questions are of particular interest to me. First, can the variation in paths to the present among societies be systematically conceptualized? In the field of economic history, for example, Alexander Gershenkron developed the proposition that the more backward the economy, the greater role major institutions played in industrialization. In England, individuals and family firms created modern economic growth. In Germany, banks played a large role, while in Russia the state played this role. Second, is it possible to distinguish Westernization from modernization? That is, does the fact that nearly the entire population residing in urban areas with most of the adult population working in jobs that require substantial schooling, and so forth, lead to a “modern” mentality or family values? Or is the content of a modern world view only a result of these developments first taking place in the West and then imported from that region? In a brief postscript on the use of terms such as “development,” Thornton sacrifices such questions because of a desire to avoid concepts that lack scientific rigor and are normatively laden. This is a high price to pay in terms of intellectual content.

Daniel Scott Smith

Rahikainen, Marjatta. Centuries of Child Labour. European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century. [Studies in Labour History.] Ashgate, Aldershot [etc.] 2004. xi, 272 pp. £45.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006032469

These days, books on child labour have a problem with definition. The inclusive view regards all children not in school as child labourers, particularly when they are engaged in household work. The exclusive view focuses on those children who are economically engaged and exploited. Rahikainen takes an exclusive view. Boys and girls helping out on the farm and girls helping their mothers in the household are excluded from the purview of this study with the argument, which has some validity, that household chores were a feature of daily family life. Rahikainen argues that extending the concept of child labour to all possible forms of work, including domestic work, would dilute the concept and make it analytically blurred. Child labour has thus been assessed primarily in terms of a labour relationship contributing to economic output, rather than in terms of work that engaged the child for too long at too young an age. In that sense, she deals with only one group of the deprived children of Europe’s poor in the past, but it at least enables her to maintain an analytical clarity.

Rahikainen combines her vast knowledge of the field with a tendency to polemicize, but without pushing her argument too far. It enables her to hold the reader’s attention and stimulates reflection. The author is an opinionated historian in the true sense. At the very beginning of her book, she takes issue with the theories of Ariès, which have been widely repeated in studies on the history of childhood and which tend to suggest that child labour was associated with the culture of the poor. That culture, Ariès argued, made no distinction between adults and children, between the public and the private. Child labour was natural. Rahikainen is indignant at such assumptions. The
bourgeoisie, she argues, took the children of the poor as a resource to be disciplined and mobilized. Whereas the elite were obsessed with the pedagogy of modern education for their children, the children of the poor continued to work and be exploited by their parents.

One quote from the early pages of this book (p. 4) is important in understanding the author’s basic position: “Our knowledge of the ideas, attitudes and practices prevailing among the lower orders in past times is sporadic and biased by the perspectives of the middle and upper orders, who produced virtually all of our early modern sources. They were to prove, say, that in ancien régime France the lower classes were almost by definition the last to show signs of affection for children.” The author takes exception to such aspersing thoughts and argues throughout the book that child labour was a necessity, a coercive choice on the part of the children and their parents; indeed, sometimes, it was the result of pure coercion.

There is a problem with this book, and it lies with the first part of the quotation. There is hardly enough material to write a history of child labour in Europe, covering, as this book aims to do, early household manufacturing, factory labour, the multifaceted urban labour market, and the vast use of children in agriculture and related fields such as herding and fishing. However, it should be added that the title of the book is not pretentious. Rahikainen’s aim was to collate experiences of child labour over four centuries and across a geographical region larger than the present-day European Union. In a laudable departure from usual practice, child labour in (for example) Russia and Spain receive as much attention as child labour in the British textile mills. But given the patchy nature of the evidence, conclusions remain equivocal. The author is upfront about this and warns that without proper data many questions will remain unanswered.

The problem of child labour was a serious one throughout the European pre-industrial and early industrial periods. But how serious? Rahikainen takes a position reminiscent of the argument introduced by Nardinelli. Episodic evidence, particularly when recorded by commissions investigating the worst cases of child labour, has been at the root of the mainstream view that child labour was the weft and warp of early industrialization, in the same way that child labour today is often seen as the backbone of economies in developing countries. There is quite a lot of evidence in this book that the incidence of child labour was less than often assumed and that employers did not always find it easy to recruit child labourers. In agriculture, farmers, who, apart from engaging their own children for specific activities, had to bring in outside children, had to rely mainly on farmed-out parish pauper children. In nineteenth-century manufacturing industry, demand, it is argued, was concentrated in just a dozen industries and “in some places pauper children may have been about the only labour force available” (p. 216). Rahikainen’s overview of the history of European child labour shows that the demand for and supply of child labour was not massive, but also that it meant a dreadful existence on the margins of society and the verge of destitution.

Many studies have focused on the supply side. The question has always been posed, and it continues to be posed in present-day studies on child labour, as to why parents and children choose a life of labour rather than a childhood of education and leisure. The approach in this book is different. Child labour in agriculture is looked at from the supply side; but in the context of industrial child labour Rahikainen is also interested in the demand side and so includes more evidence on the organization of production, changes in technology, and the shifting relationship between labour and capital.
The book ends with a brief chapter on the twentieth century. The author would have been wise to omit it. The source material for this period is abundant and diverse, and Rahikainen fails to do it justice. On the basis of her material the author concludes that by the 1970s child labour was a bygone phase in European history but that the 1980s saw a resurgence. In just a few pages, this is explained rather mechanically as a consequence of the flexibilization of the labour market. The author is right to point out that many European children do out-of-school work, but conceptually that work cannot be compared with the type of child labour common in Europe’s past.

Kristoffel Lieten


After the Nazis took power in January 1933, almost half a million Germans were forced to leave their country. Among them were leaders of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, or Sopade, as it called itself in exile), as well as activists from small socialist groups, such as the anti-Stalinist KPD Opposition, the Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP), and the Neu Beginnen (New Beginnings) group. The refugee activists migrated to Germany’s democratic neighbours – mainly Czechoslovakia and France – to continue their struggle against Hitler.

The Seventh Comintern in August 1935 called for unity “from above” and thus brought about official approval for a Popular Front against fascism. Before the congress, German communists had aimed for a “Soviet Germany”. Now, they decided to ally with all anti-fascist social forces in and outside Germany in order to establish a Popular Front. They hoped that a non-fascist section of the German bourgeoisie would become a partner in that Popular Front. Such an alliance would unify the various factions of the labour movement inside Germany and in exile abroad. All revolutionary goals were explicitly discarded: the KPD’s official aim became a parliamentary democracy.

Prominent among those scholars who have recently examined these political developments is Ursula Langkau-Alex, Senior Research Fellow at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Since the 1970s she has published many books and essays on the German labour movement in exile. This three-volume work on Popular-Front initiatives within the German labour movement in exile is her magnum opus. The first volume deals with the foundation of the Ausschuss zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen