

social and economic changes taking place in post-war Ontario, as well as the disjunctions between the dominant images of women and the realities of their disparate lives, and sets the context for the essays which follow. The overall purpose of the book, as the introduction explains, is "to understand how the beliefs about women were formed in these years, both what others expected of them and how women came to understand their own predicaments; how the distinctive circumstances in which they found themselves framed their experiences; and how they, in interpreting these experiences, made sense of their lives" (9). These questions guide the development of each of the eleven chapters, thereby providing a strong sense of continuity and cohesion to the volume as a whole.

The collection offers sophisticated, finely nuanced analyses of subjects ranging from the gender politics of shopping for major home appliances to the anatomy of a strike in a female-dominated factory, and from the practical difficulties and social tensions faced by women farmers in southwestern Ontario to the complex challenges which confronted foreign-born immigrant women, Franco-Ontarian women, and First Nations women, as well as working mothers, suburban housewives, teenaged girls and feminists active in the initial decades of the second wave. Taken together, these studies offer important insights into how, and why, women's differences of race, ethnicity, class and culture were obscured in the public discourse of the post-war era, and how women's conformity to the "common" values of consumerism and familialism came to be perceived as fundamental to Western democracy. Compelling explorations of social history, the articles in this collection also provide an important framework for considering the challenges that contemporary feminist scholars and activists face as they continue to work toward making gender equity a reality in Canadian society.

Together, these two books provide an excellent introduction to Ontario women's history in the years following the end of World War Two. They approach the issues of diversity and social change from very different perspectives, but in this

they can be considered to complement rather than challenge each other. Overall, they explore new and exciting areas of research, and should be of immense interest to feminist activists and to graduate students and researchers in many fields, particularly those in women's studies, labour studies, and Canadian women's history.

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***Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940.***

Mercedes Steedman. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1997; 333 pages; ISBN 0-19-541308-3; \$19.95 (paper).

Women garment workers have always figured prominently in Canadian labour history, for they represent one of the earliest industrial sectors with large numbers of women to be unionized, and these women often had a reputation for militancy in strike situations. Yet there was a contradiction at the heart of this picture of militancy: women garment workers remained trapped in less "skilled" jobs in the industry, were paid less than men, and made up a minority of the union leadership.

Mercedes Steedman's *Angels of the Workplace* explores this contradiction, examining labour relations in the Toronto and Montreal garment industry from the late nineteenth century to the eve of World War II. Her book is a detailed and well-researched study which weaves together the intricacies of class, gender and ethnicity that together shaped productive and social relations in the garment industry. Although her introduction pays brief homage to post-structuralist attempts to "deconstruct" the naturalness of gender categories, in fact the book's strength lies in its careful examination of both the material and social framework shaping garment making, and the attempts of workers and unions to secure what they defined as a fair livelihood for their work.

Steedman shows that the secondary status of women in the workplace and the union was in no way "foreordained" but rather was constructed over time, by capital, by the particular organization of this highly competitive industry with many workplaces and a history of home work, and also by the actions and ideologies of workers themselves. Her emphasis on the historical and social construction of gendered work roles, and especially the social construction of "skill," has long been an important theme in women's labour history. Steedman's analysis is a welcome addition to this work, as it ties in issues relating to ethnicity, left politics, union organizing and the state.

Steedman shows the way in which family and workplace relations were closely connected, through an ideology which saw women not only as angels of the hearth, but also as angels of the workplace, with the role of breadwinner and public spokesman given to the male worker. "Patriarchal relations of ruling," she argues, became deeply embedded in the organization of work (257).

Nor was gender the only variable in these workplaces: ethnicity, language and culture were also crucial. Steedman argues that a masculine Jewish culture was dominant in many workplaces, but tensions also existed between French and English (or Yiddish) speakers in Montreal and between female gentile and Jewish workers in Toronto. These complexities sometimes created their own ironies. In Montreal, for example, some of the Jewish employers did not want to embrace the non-confrontational option of an accommodating "company union" given that the "Jew-baiting" outlook of these "Catholic syndicates" was too much for them to take (249).

The book also delineates the evolution of unions in garment work, a story so intricate and complex that even the knowledgeable reader sometimes gets lost in the narrative. Unions were separated not only by jurisdictional issues, but also by inter-union competition that changed over time, and sometimes by the conflicting agendas of workers within their unions. This was further complicated by the influence exerted over Canadian unions by internationals based in the US, and last but not least, by the competing political

ideologies of union members and leaders. During the "Third Period" of Communist organizing, for instance, separate Canadian-based, left-wing garment unions were organized, and though they did not last, their brief history shows, according to Steedman, the positive possibilities for women workers of concentrating on shop floor organizing and militant action. This "bottom up" method of organizing was more likely to allow women's voices about issues such as piece rates to be heard.

Because women garment workers were seen as a particularly exploited class of workers (revelations made by government investigations during the Depression offered dramatic examples of this, and Steedman has used these sources very well), they sometimes attracted the attention of middle-class women wanting to "help" their less fortunate sisters. Attempts at cross-class alliances, as Steedman shows, sometimes failed miserably (such as in the Toronto 1912 strike) or might have some minor effect (such as in the Montreal strike of 1910), with Montreal suffragists raising the question of equal pay and women organizing, even if they were uncomfortable with the strike weapon. Indeed, another strength of the book is the author's examination of both Montreal and Toronto workplaces, unions and provincial governments; this offers a comparative view of French and English Canadian labour histories, all too often dealt with separately.

Steedman also provides a detailed account of the setting of wage rates and the assessment, always within a gendered lens, of notions of skill, then the way in which the involvement of the state in this process in the 1930s actually rigidified the situation, to the detriment of women. Faced with a desperate situation in the Depression, unions turned to provincial governments in the hopes that standards similar to those laid out in the American National Recovery Administration (NRA) might aid Canadian unions. In the last resort though, setting standards with the state's aid meant that divisions between workers, based on "gender, length of experience, skill and geographical location...were crystallized" (211). The existing power relations were simply encoded in the agreements. Long before the post World War II

"Fordist" compromise, therefore, there was clear evidence of the double-edged sword that state "recognition" and regulation brought with it; as Steedman argues, a vital element of shop floor input and militancy - the place where women could make their voices heard - was lost.

Trying to understand what women made of their situation, and why some were nonetheless very class conscious, is one of the challenges Steedman faces. She does make good use of oral history in some parts of the book, but there are other sections where the actual women workers, their daily work experiences, their vision of life and work and their understandings of class and gender relations are less visible. This is, in part, a result of the emphasis of the book. Because Steedman looks less at issues such as work culture, and concentrates more on union organization, inter-union battles, state regulation, etc., it is simply more difficult to place women front and centre in the narrative. For a feminist reading the book, there is also a rather depressing similarity to the beginning and end of this story, because women remain an unchanging source of underpaid labour. Perhaps, though, there was more change over time in women's consciousness, and this could have been explored and emphasized more.

These minor criticisms aside, *Angels of the Workplace* makes an important contribution to North American labour and women's history. It is a work of immense research, careful argument and significant conclusions.

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***A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I.*** Frances H. Early. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997; illustrations; xxi+ 265 pages; ISBN 0-8156-2764-5; \$22.95 (US).

***A Reconstructed World: A Feminist Biography of Gertrude Richardson.*** Barbara Roberts. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996; illustrations; xx+ 387 pages; ISBN 0-7735-1394-9; \$55.00 (cloth).

The First World War era witnessed an unprecedented convergence of ideologies - feminism, socialism, pacifism, and social gospel Christianity - which, when translated into political activism, resulted in a vibrant struggle for a better world. Two recent books offer fascinating insights into this important period of left-wing activism, through the lives of individuals and through the lens of gender. Frances H. Early's study focuses on the work of the New York Bureau of Legal Advice and more specifically, on its leaders, Frances Witherspoon (1885-1973) and Charles Recht (1887-1964). Barbara Roberts' biography of Gertrude Richardson (1875-1946) offers the story of a first-wave feminist activist and writer from England and later Manitoba, Canada.

The Bureau of Legal Advice profiled by Early existed from 1917 and offered legal advice and representation to a wide range of individuals whose speech and activity were considered "disorderly" and unpatriotic in the context of a country that was mainly pro-war. These included conscientious objectors, "immigrant aliens" threatened with deportation because of anti-war activity, draft-age men seeking exemptions, and families needing legal help to secure benefits and pay allowances. The workers with the Bureau assisted individuals who were often powerless and marginal in sorting through unsympathetic bureaucratic structures and arguing their cases. With the end of the First World War, the Bureau put its energies into a campaign of amnesty for political prisoners, an especially important goal for radical women whose menfolk were confined. Ultimately, the Bureau was committed to protecting civil liberties and free speech in a nation unsympathetic to nonconformity and dissent.

Even while offering many details surrounding the work of the Bureau, Early places this daily activity into an overall ideological