

José A. Piqueras, Vincent Sanz Rozalén. *A Social History of Spanish Labour: New Perspectives on Class, Politics, and Gender.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. 330 S. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-296-4.



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J. A. Piqueras u.a. (Hrsg.): A Social History of Spanish Labour

European contemporary historiography underwent a considerable transformation during the seventies. In only a few years, Europe witnessed the convergence of the impact of the events that took place on May 1968, the influx of French post-structuralism and Foucault's writings, the postmodernist criticism on metanarrative and on the "grands récits" and the questioning of the revolutionary ideal due to the so-called "Solzhenitsyn effect". It was all translated into the weakening of the certainties in which "the historian's craft", to quote Marc Bloch, based his trust. The new history that was starting to take shape was more cautious, both against the illusions of objectivity and scientism and against the temptations of ideology. Plus, it was open to subjectivity, contingency and narrative and it was notably influenced by the anti-totalitarianism, which sprang after the discovery of "Gulag Archipelago".

Obviously, social history was also influenced by these transformations. As it has already been mentioned, this history went through a crisis and it had to face the challenge of being truly social and fully unbiased. Thus, what was most noteworthy during this period was the transi-

tion from a strongly ideologized history of the working class to one that focused the attention on the whole world of labour in a wider perspective. In the Spanish case, which is the one that concerns this review, the chronology of this transformation must be altered, since the existence of the Francoist regime hindered the development of social history. In Spain, therefore, the challenge was double: on the one hand, historians had to face the challenge of historiographical renovation but, on the other, the amount of acquired knowledge through historical investigation was notably inferior.

However, during the eighties, the same issues that had shaken Europe a few years before reached Spain. This was not a minor challenge. The introduction of concepts and categories such as Anderson's "imagined communities" or Hobsbawm and Ranger's "invention of tradition" posed many problems. Nation, class, gender went from being given realities to being seen as cultural constructs or artifacts. Besides, as the editors already discuss in the introduction, Spain had to face the strong political polarization aroused by some historical periods, such as the Restoration (1874-1923) and, especially, the Second

Republic and the Civil War (1931-1939).

The book here under review is a proof of the success and scope of this historiographical renewal. It is a compilation of fourteen representative texts, published between 1993 and 2005, that deal with social history in Spain. The texts have been selected following criteria that intend to reflect the variegated methodological points of view, conceptual innovations and geographical and chronological diversity and they also embrace different areas of the Spanish territory from the eighteenth century until the twentieth. In all the articles, it can be observed the way authors deal with the epistemological problems of their field of study: introduction of cultural history, revision of the role of women, reappraisal of local studies and the need to abandon stiff categories of traditional history.

The first two essays rethink some of these categories. In the first one, Manuel PÃ©rez Ledesma regards the creation of the working class as a cultural creation and states that the working class, as well as other classes, is not the direct and expected result of relations of production. On the contrary, the construction of a social class requires a series of common myths, symbols, language-games and rituals to become consolidated and to create the 'class consciousness' needed to mobilize its members in the pursuit of their emancipation. In the second article, Pilar PÃ©rez Fuentes examines the role that women play in the 'division of labour in society'. Firstly, she highlights the changes that industrialization brought to gender identities and to social hierarchies. Secondly, she states the importance that had the reconceptualization of the public and private sphere, the social construction of domesticity and the figure of the 'housewife' in feminine work.

Most of the other articles are studies with a local character and include new analytical tools. Due to their large number, we will take as an example those referring to mining. Jorge UrÃ©a describes how the 'self-exploitation' of Asturian mixed workers diminished when their work only fulfilled needs regarded as marginal. JosÃ© Sierra Ãlvarez highlights how the 'rough character' of miners in Linares stems from the resistance to changes produced by industrialization and from the rootlessness it entailed. Antonio Escudero focuses on the living con-

ditions of miners in Biscay and discerns a more realistic 'third way' that sees beyond the debate between optimistic and pessimistic views surrounding the benefits and costs of industrialization.

There are also articles that raise new points of view on social history. Carmen SarasÃ¡a's contribution is an approach to the world of laundresses, which reviews the issue of gender and its relation with technology. Javier Paniagua explores the different meanings that the word 'revolution' has amongst anarchist, socialist and republican groups in a way that recalls Reinhart Koselleck's 'Begriffsgeschichte'. Finally, Joan Serrallonga examines the role that fear, terror and discipline had in the repressive role of the Francoist regime. Although all essays cannot be discussed here, this does not imply that they lack interest and they will be left for the reader to discover. In all of them, however, constant features can be seen: the depth of changes brought by industrialization to traditional lifestyles, the difficulty of adaptation and the multiple ways of resistance that were therefore generated, and the coexistence of new elements and what survived from the past in this period of transition.

Nonetheless, the review cannot be concluded without mentioning the suggestions posed by JuliÃ¡n Casanova's article. In his essay, he introduces the question of whether or not the Spanish Civil War presented the characteristics of class struggle. He sustains that it is not possible to reduce this conflict into a war between two classes and highlights other more important issues during the conflict: religion, family, language, regionalism or nationalism. Moreover, he analyses the war as a situation of 'multiple sovereignty', to borrow Charles Tilly's felicitous words. All in all, the article problematizes a conflict that has been usually assailed by interpretative schematism and manichaeism. And, after all, this is the whole point. Casanova makes a call to imagination, to theoretical innovation, so that history studies in Spain will no longer be dependent on imported interpretative methods. A call to face, without fear, the challenges posed by history, to open to comparative analysis and leave localism and provincialism aside—probably, also the 'provincialism of time' that T. S. Eliot once denounced. To sum up, this 'Social History of Spanish Labour' is a proof that steps have been taken in the right direction.

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