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Book review: working-class formation: nineteenth-century patterns in Western Europe and the United States. by Ira Katznelson; Aristide R. Zolberg

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Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States. by Ira Katznelson; Aristide R. Zolberg

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German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler is a stimulating contribution to class analysis and political sociology whose appeal should reach beyond those involved in German studies.

Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States. Edited by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. viii + 470. \$55.00 (cloth); \$14.50 (paper).

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No doubt, *Working-Class Formation* was conceived as a pathbreaking project; occasionally the rhetorical style of individual chapters is that of delivering new news and knocking down old shibboleths. Nonetheless, this book in comparative history must stand primarily as a synthesis of what has now become the mainstream position. This is not to deny its value. The mainstream view of specialists has not yet, unfortunately, won over the conventional wisdom of sociologists at large. This book is one of the best ways available for this larger community to find out what the products of the past 20 years' resurgence of attention to the historical problematic of class formation and struggle have been, at least in the cases of France, Germany, and the United States.

Ira Katznelson provides the ostensible conceptual framework for the book in an introductory essay that served as the basis for discussion among contributors before they wrote their own chapters. Katznelson's themes will be familiar to readers of his other work: the importance of proletarianization as a general, even defining, theme of modernity, the complexity (but also importance) of class as an analytic concept, and the diversity of historical experience in different national states. The central conceptual proposal of his introductory essay is an "unpacking" of the term "class" into "four connected layers of theory and history: those of structure, ways of life, dispositions, and collective action" (p. 14). Among other things, this is an effort to get away from a too simplistic problematic of "class-in-itself" versus "class-for-itself." Katznelson suggests that analysis should proceed in three directions. The first is to look at the way in which the development of capitalism determines class development; this is primary and should be "exhausted" before turning to other explanatory hypotheses. The second direction for analysis is to explore the ways in which social phenomena not clearly a part of capitalism affect the linkages among different levels of class. Demography or religion, for example, may be important in determining the extent to which class structure affects ways of life, dispositions, or alignments for collective action. The third direction of analysis is the most important; it is the study of how state formation and the exercise or pursuit of state power create or shape

the occasions for collective action and determine the practical processes by which class (in its various levels) may come to matter in such action. The arguments of nearly all the chapters focus on the latter two directions of analysis; they challenge views holding economic development to be anything close to a sufficient basis for explaining class formation.

In the section on each country, a pair of essays divides the topic by time: before and after 1848 in France, before and after the Civil War in the United States, before and after the 1870s in Germany. There is also a bonus essay by Michelle Perrot on the formation of the French working class in general. Themes include the popular resistance to industrialization, the relationship between residence and workplace, the formation of a collective identity, and the rise of syndicalism as a distinctive form of collective action, with its own innumerable fissures and its base in popular culture. In the first essay on France, William Sewell takes up the “paradox” that conventional histories have found in the coincidence of British industrialization with French working-class consciousness and radical politicization. He ably states the now well-established position that artisans were central to radical politics and points out that France was indeed transformed by industrial capitalism, though not in quite the same way as Britain. Alain Cottereau takes up working-class cultures in late 19th-century France. A primary purpose of his essay is to challenge the idea that patterns of social change were imposed by effective domination of employing classes—a view that was long common in conventional bourgeois history but has been given new currency by Foucault and various followers. Cottereau usefully suggests the many ways in which groups of workers developed different social identities, logics, and practices of their own—sometimes contradictory to one another as well as to those of elites. He traces in particular workers’ experience of industrialization, their defense of traditional patterns against the efficient, “purely economic” functioning of labor markets, and the importance of different identities (e.g., patriots, citizens, and workers) in political activity.

In the section on the United States, Amy Bridges offers an excellent essay on the preindustrial working classes, stressing the processes by which they became distinctively American and diverged from their European cousins. The much greater percentage of urban workers and the widespread entitlement to vote were central factors in this divergence. Perhaps less widely recognized is the importance of relatively independent local politics, including but not limited to those that gave rise to the great urban political machines. Bridges argues that American artisans shared a great deal culturally with Europeans but forged their collective identities in a very different political setting. Martin Shefter focuses his attention directly on the political machines and their relations with trade unions and ethnic communities. His essay reinforces the main arguments of Bridges and adds a stress on the fragmentation of political authority among competing fractions of the American elite. He also offers a useful review of some of the organizational difficulties faced by American work-

ing-class organizations. His central theme is the institutionalization of a separation between the collectivities and identities through which workers confronted the state and those through which they confronted their employers.

Looking primarily at pre-Bismarckian Germany, Jürgen Kocka traces the process by which long-standing corporate solidarities gradually gave way to class ones. Reforms from above, slow urbanization until after 1871, the disunity of German political power (and then the nature of unification), and the mix of forward- and backward-looking elements in German socialism form some of his main topics. The development of a strong independent labor party is one of the main features distinguishing the German case, and it receives due attention. Mary Nolan takes up some of the ambiguities in this generally familiar story by looking at the effect of the late 19th-century economic crises, the way in which an elite strategy focused on collective protectionism helped to produce narrowly class-based and economic political parties, and the extent to which certain groups of workers (notably miners, peasants, the permanently unskilled, and women) remained hostile to social democracy. She points out the especially sharp split between skilled and unskilled workers and the strong commitment of skilled workers to urban life. The problem of the SPD's inability to act constructively in an unreformed parliament and the fatalism brought on by the lack of any good solution to it forms the end of her story. Despite this ending, it is apparent from both her essay and Kocka's that the German case was exceptional in having the widest sharing of class identities and largest class-based mobilization of workers.

The contributors for the most part make only slight reference to Katznelson's introduction. His unpacking of class, in particular, seems clarifying but not particularly fertile. In a fine concluding essay, however, Aristide Zolberg ties the disparate contributions together and goes beyond mere synthesis. His chapter should prove of the greatest use to non-specialist sociologists and to those interested in theoretical and methodological issues. His theme is the intellectual poverty of the old problematic of American exceptionalism. His argument that all cases are exceptional, and thus that there is no single and informative European/American split, is sensible and interesting beyond its conclusion. Zolberg formulates most clearly the place of capitalism in the analyses in this book: "If the advent of industrial capitalism in a given country necessarily fostered the emergence of a working class, it did not of itself determine the dynamics of its development and its resulting structure" (pp. 400–401). Moreover, the actual histories reveal the crystallization of only a limited array of patterns out of a vast spectrum of possibilities. Zolberg draws together a number of the challenges to conventional wisdom that the new mainstream working-class history has to offer. For example, it is unclear what is meant by treating American workers as economically "conservative" and their French counterparts as "radical" when a higher proportion of the Americans belonged to unions, a third of the American

AFL members disagreed with the leadership's commitment to "unionism pure and simple," and the majority of French workers in the GCT were not committed to its revolutionary doctrines. Zolberg gives a clear indication of the problems of reading the alignments that emerged after the Russian Revolution back into earlier working-class history. Methodologically critical of approaches like S. M. Lipset's, Zolberg nonetheless winds up sharing their central conclusion: the single most important determinant of patterns of working-class politics is whether at the time the class was brought into being by the development of capitalism it faced an absolutist or a liberal state. Zolberg's most forceful arguments are directed against unilinear, developmentalist views of history. Though he is not a pioneer in this attack, he is on target, and he confronts one of the areas in which an old view, though effectively challenged by specialists, persists implicitly in the very conventional wisdom of the field.

The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare. By Norman Pollack. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. xi + 376. \$29.95.

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In *The Just Polity*, Norman Pollack provides a welcome complement to the growing literature on class formation and political mobilization in 19th-century America. Based on a close reading of works by a select group of Populist leaders, Pollack's study sketches the intellectual landscape of a social movement that eschewed property- or production-based understandings of class conflict in favor of a more inclusive vision of "noncompetitive" or "nondominating" capitalism. Accepting both the right to private property and established political institutions, Populist political economy attacked contemporary capitalism for undermining democracy through the depersonalization and domination of individual wage workers as well as the outright purchase of political privilege. This critique of agrarian and industrial capitalism culminated in calls for public ownership and state intervention to promote the general welfare. Yet, despite demands that were unquestionably radical by the standards of the 1890s, Populism was, in some senses, profoundly conservative—committed to family, property, and democratic political processes. Through an exploration of this unusual ideological mix, *The Just Polity* helps to illuminate both the development of the Populist movement and its precipitous collapse in 1896.

As is appropriate for an intellectual historian, Pollack emphasizes the role of ideas in social change. He argues that the most significant Populist ideas were not inherited from the past but "self-created" in the experience of the rapid transition from frontier to monopoly capitalism: "a specific response to a specific historical context founded on specific economic and