

On The Job: Confronting The Labour Process in Canada. Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986. Pp xiv + 346, index

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BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

On The Job: Confronting The Labour Process in Canada.
Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., Kingston and Montreal:
McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986. Pp xiv + 346, index.

In this volume the editors present a dozen original essays on labour history in Canada of the 19th and 20th centuries. A general essay, by the editors, on wage labour in Canada is followed by studies of railways in the 1850s, 19th century printers, coal miners in the 1920s, domestic work, the clothing industry 1890-1940, office work in the early 20th century, steel 1900-1950, logging, longshoring, fast food operations and autoworkers.

Technology and technological change is, and is intended to be, a major focus of this volume, but in general it has not been handled well. None of the essays presents a sustained, technology-centred argument. The authors appear unaware or unconvinced that other reasons existed for introducing new technologies besides substituting for labour and other effects besides skill dilution and loss of worker control (or else they confuse result with intent). The essays in general do not seem to be informed by the best recent writing on the history of technology, engineering or science and industry. In particular, the growing body of Canadian historical writing in this area is ignored.

For readers of this journal, three of the essays stand out above the others. Easily the best is Graham S. Lowe's 'Mechanization, Feminization and Managerial Control in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office.' The first half of the essay describes the mechanization of the office workplace, which Lowe dates for Canada as 1900-1930. His argument carefully weaves together and shows the relationships among trends in cost accounting, scientific management and office technology, describing a three-stage process. The first stage was the introduction of typewriters and adding machines. The second stage saw the integration of those machines into an office system with a typing pool and accounting office. Finally, in the third stage, the punch card technology of the Hollerith machines created a factory-like office. It is a solid argument and also an excellent summary of the introduction of mechanical technologies into the Canadian office.

Heron and Storey's second essay on the Canadian steel industry in the first half of the twentieth century shows the strengths and weaknesses of this volume's treatment of industrial technology. Thus, for instance, the authors state that the 'chemical process within these new {open-hearth} furnaces had replaced the puddler's craft' (p. 125) but tell us nothing about chemists or chemical engineers in Canadian steel mills. Elsewhere, the authors note that occupational mobility for skilled steel form employees was hampered by the geographical separateness of the industry. But how did this relate to any geographic fragmentation of the knowledge base of the industry caused by the site-specific nature of mill

technical problems? The notes to the essay do point to a literature on the technology of steelmaking little exploited by historians of technology in Canada.

The third essay having much that is interesting to say about technology is Ian Radforth's study of 'Logging Pulpwood in Northern Ontario.' The material he presents on the mechanization of logging will encourage interested readers to consult Radforth's recent York University PhD dissertation on this topic. He points out the extremely varied technical problems faced by loggers on a day-to-day basis which made it extremely difficult for management to devise standard methods for this productive process. Unfortunately, Radforth's discussion of the efforts of the Woodlands Section of the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association to do just that occupies a scant two paragraphs.

Radforth notes that 'no simple deskilling model satisfactorily describes the trends in the industry' (p. 266). This point is made more generally by the editors in their introductory essay. It is perhaps the volume's most important contribution to labour historiography. Yes, the impact of mechanization and Taylorism did combine to deskill the tasks of some groups of workers. For other groups, however, a change in the focus of skill or in the role of skilled workers in the overall productive process occurred. New skills were called forth and some skilled industries were supplanted altogether by new industries. A very important rise of a semi-skilled labour force and decline of unskilled materials-handling tasks also took place. All these are valuable points, marred when Storey and Heron, in this context, dismiss in a sentence 'newer groups of university-trained technical workers who were wrapping themselves in the robes of "professionalism"' (p. 30). Also ignored in this volume are such issues as technical education and the need to recruit competent supervisors and foremen in industries undergoing rapid technological evolution.

Historians of technology in Canada will find *On The Job* a book well worth their attention, especially the better essays. It would have been far more useful had the authors paid greater attention to the work of historians of technology.

James P. Hull