

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



James A. SCHMIECHEN : *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor : The London Clothing Trades, 1860-1914*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1984, 209 pp., ISBN 0-252-01024-8

James Thwaites

Volume 41, Number 4, 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050270ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050270ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Thwaites, J. (1986). Review of [James A. SCHMIECHEN : *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor : The London Clothing Trades, 1860-1914*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1984, 209 pp., ISBN 0-252-01024-8]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 41(4), 877-878.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/050270ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1986

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Les annexes méritent une mention spéciale. En plus de reproduire les principales formules utilisées devant le Conseil, elles comprennent une liste des décisions d'accréditation qu'il avait rendues à la fin de 1984, le texte, à titre illustratif, d'ordonnances à l'effet de cesser des grèves ou des lock-out illégaux et, par ailleurs, de donner accès à des représentants syndicaux à des employés travaillant dans des endroits isolés, de même que la reproduction de règles de présence égale à l'employeur dans le cas d'un syndicat contrôlant l'embauchage en vertu d'une convention collective.

À l'heure actuelle, l'ouvrage de messieurs Foisy, Lavery et Martineau se présente comme le compendium le plus complet de la législation fédérale relative aux rapports collectifs de travail (et à l'hygiène et à la sécurité au travail). Il permet d'accéder utilement et sûrement à l'imposant corpus jurisprudentiel découlant de l'application de ces Parties IV et V du **Code canadien du travail**, à une connaissance de solutions jurisprudentielles, dans l'ensemble, empreintes de réalisme et de souci de traduire concrètement les exigences de la liberté syndicale de la négociation collective. Il est ainsi d'un apport certain à l'élaboration du droit du travail canadien. Aussi, faut-il souhaiter la parution rapide de sa version française.

Pierre VERGÉ

Université Laval

Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: the London Clothing Trades, 1860-1914, by James Schmiechen, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1984, 209 pp., ISBN 0-252-01024-8

The reading of this study reveals a fascinating, intricate and important analysis of the impact of technological change and its impact which forces students of such factors in the present to reflect on the significant changes surrounding us today.

Schmiechen introduces us to the world of the clothing trades during the latter part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. It was a world in the throes of the «Sweating system», that is to say a socio-economic system involving:

«... long and tedious hours of labor, abominably low wages, and degrading and unhealthy surroundings... usually found in trades like tailoring, furniture-making, chainmaking, which technology was making less skilled and more seasonal... sweating meant the movement of work into unregulated premises, often the worker's home, just as often any backroom, basement, or garret shop...»

It was not exclusive to the UK, as government commissions of enquiry, for example, in the United States and Canada, would show. As far as the UK was concerned though, according to Schmiechen:

«Sweating ... was as Victorian as the railroad and the music hall.»

It was part of the essential decor.

Chapters 1 to 3 of this book are based on the causes of the Sweating system, while chapters 4 to 6 focus «on the role of the trade unions and the state in the long struggle to end sweating (The author also comments on the conditions of the working class generally in Victorian England.) In concluding, Schmiechen notes that:

«poverty was not chiefly a Malthusian certainly or a result of moral weakness, but the outgrowth of an exploitive industrial system...»

and that:

«the failure of the unions to organize the workers and of the state to legislate the abolition of sweating forced the nation to adopt an elementary form of a national minimum wage.»

For specialists of technological change, this book also contains fascinating material and insights on the impact of new technology — the process of deskilling, the parallel «outwork» subsystem outside the factories, the physical and geographical displacement of labour. One of the key developments of the period was the invention of the sewing machine by the Singer Company. It was accompanied by other creations such as cloth- and leather-cutting machines, and the veneer band saw. In turn these inventions had their impact on production methods, and the use of labour.

The author comments pertinently in closing that:

«the movement of labor and industry toward the factory system and the concomitant fusion of the working class was not inexorable. Industry, in the case of the clothing trades was transformed not by centralization, but by decentralization.»

In doing so, Schmiechen goes against the long-established arguments of the generally macro approach of researchers like Pentland and their younger disciples. At the same time he supports, as he himself states, the arguments of Hall, Stedman-Jones and Bythell who argue that parallel centrifugal and centrifugal forces were present in this sort of context.

This sort of constructive iconoclasm is of importance for the analysis of similar cases of technological change in manufacturing in this and other time frames. It forces us to be more perspicacious and adventurous, balancing «bird's eye» and «worm's eye» views of our subjects. And it may make us more open to comparison with other contexts and periods.

James THWAITES

Université Laval

Conditions of Work and Quality of Working Life, a Directory of Institutions, edited by Linda Stoddart, Geneva, International Labour Office, 1986, xxi-306 pp., ISBN 92-2-105328-8

Ce répertoire identifie les principales institutions au niveau international et national qui s'intéressent aux conditions de travail et aux questions de la qualité de la vie au travail.

Il en est à sa deuxième édition qui a été mise à jour avec 288 institutions — dont 70 sont de nouvelles — dans 56 pays.

La liste des institutions comprend des agences gouvernementales, des associations d'employeurs, des syndicats de travailleurs, des instituts de recherches, des départements d'universités, etc. Elle est disposée d'abord au niveau international et ensuite, par ordre alphabétique, au niveau national.

Chaque entrée fournit les renseignements suivants selon un plan uniforme: nature de l'organisme, adresse, langue utilisée, date de fondation, type d'organisation, genre d'activités, champs de recherche, financement, personnel, personne responsable, documentation, équipements, publications etc. En somme, toutes les informations qui permettent de connaître le genre de travail qui y est effectué et de pouvoir entrer en communication. Les organismes se limitant à la santé et à la sécurité au travail n'ont pas été retenus.