

children and motherhood is a means of achieving a fully formed female identity, but at the same time we all know the lengths to which women have gone now and in the past in order not to have children.

This tension between the requirement of the species to reproduce itself, society's valourisation of motherhood, individual desires and the real difficulties, even dangers, attendant on motherhood are the real subject of Lisle's book. However, they remain as threads that are never fully gathered together. This is partly to do with the structure of a book that is part advocacy, part sociology and part personal narrative. Lisle is herself "without child" and the story of why this is so unfolds gradually and sometimes intrusively. I am not suggesting that the author should have refrained from personal reminiscence and reflection. This material adds to the book's authenticity, but could have been communicated with greater force and clarity if restricted to a single chapter.

Another weakness of the book is its failure to provide a full discussion of the kinds of alternative forms of mothering that are open to women. On page 108 Lisle observes that not only is it now possible for a child to have two biological mothers, but also a whole range of psychological ones as well, including adoptive mother, foster mother, godmother, lesbian co-mother and so on. The fit between biological mother and the social category of mother is extremely rigid in Euro-American societies, especially when compared to the kinship system of many others societies. Lisle suggests that this could change and that new family formations open up quite different possibilities for childless women than might have been present in the past, but this interesting area warrants much more attention than it receives here.

Sandra Bell
University of Durham

John H.M. Laslett, *Colliers Across the Sea: A Comparative Study of Class Formation in Scotland and the American Midwest, 1830-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

The past twenty years have had an obvious chastening effect upon historians of the labour movement, and nowhere has this been more apparent than in Britain. There was a time when British coal miners were both lionized and envied for their self-evident solidarity, their determination to struggle even in the face of tremendous hardships, their organizational skills, and their vision of a society in which nationalized industry superceded private ownership and capitalist competition. They not only seemed to epitomize the labor movement generally but their initial particularist agenda was eventually writ large as the national

social program of post-war Britain. At the same time, in the United States, while the ultimate trajectory of miners' unionism differed significantly from that in Britain, many of those same qualities were also readily apparent among American miners. This was so much so that as early as the mid-1950s industrial sociologists already had hypothesized that such forms of solidarity and activism were a common feature of miners internationally. In one especially influential proposition, these special characteristics were thought to be a function both of the degree to which mining villages were isolated from other centers of population and the extent to which miners lived in relatively homogeneous communities. Miners thus became famously categorized in the academic literature as an "isolated mass," an obvious albeit formidable aberration of modern urban and industrial society.

In Britain, however, this forbidding reputation was first threatened by the election of Mrs. Thatcher in 1979 and then shattered by her government's subsequent victory over them in 1984-5. Over the course of the next decade or so, several historians sought to pick up the pieces and in doing so began to build a decidedly different portrait of the nature of miners' unionism and their political activism. Rather than emphasize the essentialism of miners' solidarity, there evolved a new concern with its contingencies and fragility; rather than seeking to explicate the miners' unusual "strike-proneness," more recent work has suggested that miners' strikes were both highly localized and rather transient events; rather than stress the isolation and homogeneity of the miners' communities, there is now new interest in the extent of these communities' external contacts and in the scope of their social heterogeneity; and rather than seeking to illustrate "the forward march of labour," recent miners' historians have come to see in this perspective an invented tradition that, in the words of one group of sympathetic writers, was comprised of "selective myths [with] significant absences and limiting closures."

John H.M. Laslett's new book therefore comes at a time when historians, especially those on the other side of the Atlantic, are engaged in a significant reevaluation of many of the verities of their profession. From that perspective, the importance of this book lay foremost in placing the history of miners' unionism and political activism in a comparative historical perspective, for Laslett seeks to trace and account for the similarities and differences in the fate of the miners and their unions in both Britain and the United States. Laslett therefore has selected to study a half dozen mining communities in both Scotland and Illinois, communities whose histories were often surprisingly intertwined at the same time that they ultimately developed in quite different directions.

These mining communities on either side of the Atlantic, Laslett suggests, developed in roughly the same manner and at approximately the same time. Both in Scotland and in Illinois, relatively small units of ownership and tradi-

tional methods of coal extraction yielded to larger-scale and partially mechanized production. The social and economic effects of such a transition were also remarkably similar. In Laslett's terms, the skilled "artisan-collier" gave way to the "semi-proletarianized" underground labourer as the ideology of industrial relations shifted from a sense of the shared stewardship over industry at mid-century to the recognition of class conflict and exploitation by the century's end. Moreover, Laslett further identifies comparable developments within the British and American trade union movements as their increasing professionalization and bureaucratization spawned rank-and-file movements that by 1900 often exhibited similar syndicalist characteristics.

Notwithstanding such similar processes of class formation the miners' movements in Illinois and Scotland did not yield similar political results. In Britain, the Scottish miners eventually came to support the Labour Party through which, Laslett argues, it could best promote its collectivist objectives. In the U.S., however, support for socialism in the midwest coalfields although initially substantial ultimately waned, especially in the years after World War I. It was once common, of course, to explain these decidedly different trajectories as an example of American "exceptionalism," the historical effects of a nation rooted in a different political tradition and burdened with a different historical legacy than its European counterparts. However, Laslett convincingly rejects this "exceptionalist" thesis by illuminating the common political objectives that continued to be expressed by miners on both sides of the Atlantic throughout this period. Instead, the differing fortunes of the miners in the U.S. and Britain can be better explained by contingent political developments. Laslett argues that a variety of structural differences contributed to significantly different historical results, among them the distinct nature of the franchise in Britain and the U.S., the differing forms and practices of each country's two-party systems, and the differing policies followed by the respective miners' unions. Ultimately, however, the political impact of the First World War had a decisive effect. In Britain, the creation of David Lloyd George's coalition government during the wartime crisis of 1916 not only split the ruling Liberal Party but also further legitimated its Labour allies by inviting them to share power. In the U.S., on the other hand, the center held at the same time that the Socialist Party's opposition to the war became a significant factor in the demise of a collectivist party there.

Such an interesting and thoughtful analysis merits the attention of a wide range of social and political historians but it perhaps could have been even further improved by a direct engagement with some of the more recent historical writing on class and party, particularly those emanating from the U.K. Thus it would seem relevant here to discuss the work of Gareth Stedman Jones and his progeny whose linguistic postmodernism has led them to jettison the importance of class altogether and assert the autonomy of the political. Similarly, recent work on the electoral sociology of early twentieth-century Britain, such

as Duncan Tanner's important book, merit further attention. Some engagement with important post-Thatcher era works on miners, their unions and politics in Britain is also lacking, although this book admittedly appeared just prior to the publication of Alan Campbell's second volume on the history of the Scottish miners. Finally, especially considering the rightwards turn of contemporary Labour politics, an evaluation of recent work on the persistence of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century "popular radicalism," the term coined by Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid to indicate the shared ideological heritage of both Liberals and Labour, would also seem to be in order.

Such reservations aside, Professor Laslett has written a unique book. Few historians are willing to tackle the logistical and historiographic morass of systematic comparative history and even fewer are able to directly confront major interpretive puzzles. This book succeeds on both counts.

James Jaffe

University of Wisconsin at Whitewater

Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

Pamela Pilbeam asks "was Cabet the Barbara Cartland of the 1840s?" In other words, did his book, *Voyage en Icarie*, merely offer artisan readers "a dream world in which to escape"?

This provocative question, in addition to numerous allusions to contemporary figures such as Jospin and Blair, discloses the author's interest in showing how early French nineteenth century socialism is relevant to our times.

This is a very difficult undertaking, in view of the great changes in the meaning of socialism over time. Pilbeam is aware of this, of course, and in a brilliant introduction she presents a review of how contemporary historians have modified their approach of that period.

Her study offers a new line of attack by focusing on a thematic investigation of theories and actions, strategies and solutions, rather than on individual biographical studies or philosophical analysis. As the work progresses, this approach succeeds in uncovering continuities within a movement that has changed its discourse markedly as it has grown from a repressed minority to a important locus of political power.

The author's analysis shows very clearly the important fact that all socialist writers concentrated on concrete economic issues, even when