REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Lisa Pasolli and Julia Smith, eds., *Rethinking Feminist History and Theory: Essays on Gender, Class, and Labour* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2025)

Rethinking Feminist History and Theory: Essays on Gender, Class, and Labour grows out of a conference organized at Trent University in June 2019. Scholars from Canada and the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Iceland, gathered in Peterborough, Ontario for two days. Their purpose was two-fold. Participants reflected on the field of women's and gender history, on how the discipline has changed since the first such conference was held at Trent in 1993, and where it could be headed in the future. They also took the opportunity to celebrate the legacy of Joan Sangster, who retired in 2019 after a 35-year career as a Canadian historian at the same institution. Sangster not only shaped many of the topics under study, but she also mentored the edited collection's two editors, Lisa Pasolli and Julia Smith. The fact that all fifteen chapters reference Sangster's work is proof of her impact on the field.

While paying tribute to Sangster, *Rethinking Feminist History and Theory* stands on its own two feet. As Judy Fudge posits in the introduction, explaining the book's guiding questions: "How have women's resistance and radicalism been expressed, lived, represented, and repressed over the past century? How do we research them? How do we situate feminism in relation to other movements for egalitarian social change?" (8) Covering most of the 20th century, the book highlights the shifts and changes in the structure of capitalism, with several chapters addressing the neoliberal era. Specialists in Canadian history are treated to chapters on England, Chile, Iceland, France, as well as on transnational social movements and international migration. Indeed, I found it refreshing to read these chapters alongside those focused on Canada.

The edited collection is divided into four parts. "Women, Labour, and the Left" explores women's politics in the workforce in the second half of the 20th century. Taking a cue from Sangster, the first part features the interconnectedness of leftist social movements. Focusing on the Dare Foods Strike of 1972, in Kitchener/Waterloo, Mason Godden demonstrates the ready coalitions established by labour, feminist, and New Left groups to fight against a differential wage increase for men and women workers. Andrea Samoil, in turn, investigates the 1995 Calgary Laundry Workers' Strike. The strikers, mostly immigrant and racialized women, ignored two Alberta Labour Relations Board orders to return to work after they found out that their jobs were going to be contracted out to K-Bro Linen. Symbolic of a greater malaise in the public sector at the time, the action eventually "turned into a referendum on cutbacks and contracting out" (89) and the province was forced to slow its cuts, even if the laundry workers still lost their

Table of Contents for Reviews, p. 5. Table des matières pour les comptes rendus, p. 5.

jobs in the end. Sean Antaya delves into the political lives of Pat Noonan, a former nun, and Bronwen Wallace, a poet and writer, to counter the "historical amnesia" (40) related to the upsurge of feminist activism in the 1970s. Contrary to other biographies on the two women, Antaya foregrounds their commitment to revolutionary ideals by explaining their political work in Marxist and feminist organizations. Barbara M. Freeman's chapter on sexual harassment within the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the 1980s ties human rights decisions and changing labour legislation to the women's movement. Thanks to feminist pressure, civil servants of all stripes were better supported in challenging exploitation and impropriety.

Part 2, "Gender and Politics," moves away from the workplace to the realm of politics more generally. June Hannam's and Gabriela Castillo's contributions illustrate the quotidian factors behind women's political organizing at the grassroots level in two contexts, the Labour Party of South-West England and the *centros de madres* in Chile. Hannam's chapter on Anne Townley, a grassroots organizer, underlines the importance of emotional support and cultivating a sense of belonging for women in the Labour Party, whereas Castillo's work on mothers' centres illustrates the ways in which Chilean women reappropriated their services under Salvador Allende. Originally founded at the turn of the 20th century to turn working-class women into "respectable" mothers and citizens, the *centros de madres* became important sites for women's politicization and radicalization. Silke Neunsinger and Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir maintain that the events surrounding the United Nations' International Women's Year in 1975 were of "major importance to globalizing women's struggles in general and the struggles for equal remuneration in particular." (144) Alvin Finkel's chapter on the impact of socialism and communism on women's struggles is a useful synthesis on a marginalized topic. Together, the first two parts of the book counter some of the stereotypes associated with feminism in the historical literature, namely its supposed white, middle-class, liberal character.

Part 3, "Violence and the Law," shifts gears from work and politics to focus on violence, law, and moral regulation. P.E. Bryden's and Nadia Verrelli and Lori Chambers' close attention to social context highlights the significance of public opinion in shaping women's rapport with the law. Bryden's piece on the scandal involving Premier Brownlee of Alberta in the 1930s carefully reveals how accounts of sexual assault can cause genuine collective outrage but then are easily erased from the historical record. For their part, Verrelli and Chambers analyze a trial of a Nova Scotian woman who shot and killed her abusive husband. Though she served time in jail, Jane Hurshman's case provided essential evidence of the problem of intimate partner violence and the failure of the police, and the courts, to protect women from violent men. Katie-Marie McNeill studies the role of women employees and volunteers within the prison system. She argues that their ideas for rehabilitation and prison reform were ultimately dismissed by their superiors "because they challenged, ever so slightly, the philosophy of the prison system, which was designed by men for men" (121)

Part 4, "Theory and Method," engages with the "questions of method and theory that have been central to Sangster's work." (13) Linda Kealey's chapter on radical women's biographies portrays the intricacy of their lives. As she explains, "Their political trajectories were complicated and non-linear," defying easy categorization and labels. (266) Both D.Y. Turner's

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.014

and Winnie Lem's pieces encourage historians to move beyond the colonial and written archive. While Turner re-reads Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties: Women and Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (1980) and Lem used oral history to discuss Chinese migrants and social reproduction in contemporary Paris, both chapters emphasize the relationship between women's bodies, labour, and the spatial economy. Overall, parts three and four of the edited collection showcase the large number of potential sources and approaches at the historian's disposal to present a rich history of women's lives.

In sum, the edited collection honours Sangster's political commitments. The authors adopt a range of methodologies to get at the key question of the collection, namely, how to recount women's various forms of resistance. For instance, the work on biography, affect, and emotion exposes the underrated importance of personal ties on political mobilization, and the chapters related to legal history and labour actions demonstrate women's complex relationship with the state, as a site of both quiet affirmation and violent repression. The book will thus appeal to more seasoned labour and feminist historians looking for new questions as well as a rising generation of leftist scholars seeking to become acquainted with the evolution of the field. As Ted McCoy writes in the final chapter, "Sangster has illustrated the elasticity of the socialist-feminist project and the ways its goals of understanding social history can continue to develop and expand." (309) *Rethinking Feminist History and Theory* does justice to her intellectual endeavors.

Amanda Ricci
York University

Alain Savard, *Organiser, mobiliser, gagner. Guide de renouveau syndical* (Montréal : Écosociété, 2024)

Quiconque fréquente les congrès et autres événements syndicaux au Québec aura sans doute entendu parler dans les dernières années de Labor Notes. Né en 1979 aux États-Unis, ce groupe s'est d'abord organisé autour d'une publication défendant une forme combative de syndicalisme. Il s'est ensuite fait largement connaître par sa conférence bisannuelle rassemblant des militant·es engagé·es et souhaitant partager leurs expériences. Labor Notes produit également des guides à destination des membres des syndicats, dont le principal est *Secrets of a Successful Organizer*. La popularité croissante de l'approche de Labor Notes au Québec (tant en termes de participation à leur conférence que d'utilisation de leur matériel) rendait donc logique la traduction de cet ouvrage, tâche à laquelle s'est attelé Alain Savard, lui-même conseiller syndical et docteur en science politique.

Il serait toutefois injuste de ne parler que d'une traduction. Il s'agit bel et bien d'une adaptation dans la mesure où l'auteur a inséré une grande partie de contenu québécois à l'ouvrage. Le livre contient plusieurs exemples et citations provenant du Québec, puisant à la fois dans différentes organisations et dans une pluralité de secteurs : services privés ou publics, industrie manufacturière ou agro-alimentaire, etc. On respecte ainsi l'esprit originel de Labor Notes qui est de ne pas s'identifier à une organisation spécifique mais bien de nourrir des bases militantes au sein de toutes les structures afin de porter une approche combative quel que soit le syndicat dans lequel elles évoluent.

Quel est justement ce modèle promu par Labor Notes, qu'on retrouve également dans cet ouvrage ? L'introduction parle