Introduction

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During the decades that closed the nineteenth century and opened the twentieth, wrote David Landes, the industrial revolution caught its 'second wind'. Rapid economic growth and changing structures of economic activity wove the more heavily populated portions of the world into networks of interdependence, while magnifying the global power of the few industrialized countries and the contrast between the life styles of their inhabitants and those of the rest of humanity.

The epoch lends itself well to comparative history. Dependency theory in its various guises has served to illuminate common patterns of economic development within the formidable cultural and political diversity of the colonial and semi-colonial world. The question of whether industrialization's 'second wind' also produced a convergence not only of economic activities, but also of urban cultures and popular movements across national boundaries within its heartland has produced some of the most rewarding historical reflection of recent years.

The essays in this collection contribute to the effort to situate local and regional experiences within an international context by investigating the activities of working men and women in Canada and Wales at the turn of the century. None of the authors have adopted national characteristics as a point of departure; indeed, Robert Babcock explicitly challenges the style of historical analysis that is based on the comparison of national cultures and institutions. Rather than posing the antiquity and compactness of Wales against the youth and vast expanses of Canada, the contributors to this volume have focused their attention on processes and settings found within the two countries during the Second Industrial Revolution, which turn out to be sometimes instructively similar and sometimes provocatively different. The two national settings shared some important common features, to be sure: coal miners played major roles in the development of both countries' trade unions, the headquarters of major Canadian unions and practically all Welsh unions were located in neighbouring countries which also over-shadowed each nation's economic life, and both peoples were governed by the British parliamentary monarchy. By studying patterns of economic change, migration, community development, and industrial conflict, however, the participants
in this colloquium have suggested questions of international significance about the reshaping of the working class during these decades, which research into the Welsh and Canadian experiences can help us answer.

The surveys of the Welsh and Canadian economies provide by John Williams and Craig Heron draw the reader’s attention immediately to the dramatic rise in the numbers and importance of coal miners after 1890, and also to the global decline suffered by their industry in the 1920s. In marked contrast to the technological leaps which characterized the manufacturing sector itself during the Second Industrial Revolution, its voracious appetite for coal drew ever greater numbers of men underground and encouraged the development of huge mining companies, but did little to change the labour-intensive ways in which miners hewed and loaded coal in either Wales or Canada. Consequently, the most productive mining regions attracted newcomers from afar. In the mines of Nanaimo, British Columbia, Alan Seager reveals, less than two percent of the miners of 1891 had been born in the province. Although the colliers of northern and western Wales had drawn most of their miners from the surrounding countryside, as had those of Nova Scotia, the soaring output of steam coal in Glamorgan County, where 70 percent of Wales’ population growth was to be found, was made possible not only by a southward drift of the Welsh population, but also by a great influx of people from England, Ireland, and Spain. The communities created by migrants to the mine fields are explored by Christopher Turner, Dot Jones, and Varpu Lindstrom-Best, as well as by Seager and Heron. They reveal the importance of related industries, like steel and tin plate production, and especially of shipping, in shaping a region’s job structure (export of coal by water, for example, generated a different occupational pattern from that based on railroad shipment). Because miners were paid in mooney, their neighbourhoods supported an abundance of shopkeepers. The encounter between the hopes which had brought men and women to the pit towns and the anxieties generated by life in those towns provided fertile soil for religious revivals, as well as political mobilization and trade unions.

As Dot Jones reveals in her remarkable comparison of women’s lives in rural Cardiganshire and in the Rhondda Valley, the migration of as many as one-fourth of Cardiganshire’s farm women to mining areas caused even more wrenching changes for them than it did for men. Women’s work in both settings held the key to family survival, but it was hidden by census categories. Moreover, early marriage, frequent child-bearing, squalid surroundings, and endless rounds of household toil made young wives of miners in the Rhondda Valley die at a greater rate than their husbands, who spent their days amid noxious gases, roof-falls, and maverick explosions. Large as coal mining looms in these essays, however, it does not crowd out other topics. On the contrary, the presentations of Meryn Jones and Robert Babcock, as well as those of Williams, Seager, and Heron, put the growth of mining in context by revealing how industrialization’s ‘second wind’ redefined economic regions and relations among them. The north coast of Wales lay within the economic orbit of Liverpool and Manchester, even though the line which marked the border with England was also a boundary in culture and popular politics. Canada’s maritime provinces were deindustrialized and partially depopulated, as manufacturing became concentrated in Montreal and southern Ontario. The country’s growing export of farm produce favoured Portland, Maine, as its winter outlet, drawing workers to that seaport in the United States and away from its Canadian rival, St. John, New Brunswick. Production of coal, metallic ores, and timber, as well as grain, fed directly into international markets from both countries, while Canada’s factories then supplied an emerging national market. Economically dominant and dependent regions thus emerged within the nation-states whose industry gave them mastery over the rest of the world.

These developments produced complex patterns of migration. Bruno Ramero examines those of Quebec, where farm families from congested rural regions colonized interior woodlands at the urging of the Catholic Church and lumber companies, while others moved south to industrial New England, and immigrants from Europe (especially Italy) took up the unskilled tasks of Montreal. Though the clergy struggled to preserve French-Canadian culture on the land, industrial towns offered the Quebecois wider possibilities to experiment with a new life and much quicker rewards for hard work than did the wilderness. With urbanization, however, also came dramatic and often painful changes in the relationships between wives and husbands. The photo-montage of Canadian mining towns is part of wider work by Varpu Lindstrom-Best on the role of women in creating new communities of Finnish immigrants. Although the large proportion of women among Finnish immigrants indicated a propensity to settle permanently in the new country, the mining and lumbering towns they inhabited were remote from other population centers and prone to destruction by fire, as well as to extreme fluctuations in the demand for male labor and very limited wage-earning prospects for women. Keeping boarders, selling drink, prostitution, and housekeeping for the mine managers provided women’s only prospects for earning money, but Finnish women carved out a prominent role for themselves in the town’s socialist and communist politics.

It is the Welsh studies that devote the closest attention to workers’ religious lives. Christopher Turner notes not only the vigorous response of residents of south Wales’ mining towns to Christian revivals, but also the magnetic pull of working-class life on religious teachings and practice. Although prominent activists of the 1898 coal strike left the Nonconformist churches, which had opposed the strike, the militants were able to attract large numbers of miners to the Independent Labour Party.
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only by couching socialist teachings in rhetoric borrowed from the Gospels. Conversely, in the aftermath of the 1904 revivals many preachers began to advocate social, as well as personal reform. Orthodox Nonconformists coupled their resistance to socialism with appeals to Welsh nationalism.

The social basis of this religious and political controversy is analyzed by Merfyn Jones, who notes that Wales' leading businessmen had become great landowners with aristocratic life-styles during the nineteenth century, and that rural struggles over tithes, enclosures, and sales of royal lands had accompanied the strikes of miners, quarrymen, and other workers. The radical Liberals of north Wales had harnessed such popular protests to their own campaign against the Tory Establishment, while maintaining a discrete distance from the illegality of those protests. Jones’ description of the radical-Liberal political discourse of the 1880s is remarkably similar to Turner's depiction of the rhetoric of the ILP in south Wales twenty years later: both identified the popular enemy with landlords and usury.

The remaking of the working class during the Second Industrial Revolution had a major impact on national politics in both Canada and Wales. The final set of questions posed by these essays revolves around an evaluation of that influence. Seager finds considerable variety in political movements between one mining region of western Canada and another. In general, he argues, miners carried far more weight in local than in dominion politics. Linda Kealey examines women activists, and especially the Women’s Labour League during 1919, in several parts of Canada and underscores the local character and impact of their mobilizations. Women defined their endeavours more in terms of family and community needs than of national organizations, brought unions to telephone, clerical, sales, and restaurant workers, distributed birth control information, and vigourously pursued demands through minimum wage boards.

Both Gregory Kealey and Deian Hopkin scrutinize national strike statistics in order to test the argument that a contagious upsurge in industrial disputes on the eve of World War I explains evident changes in workers’ political behaviour. Hopkin points out that the strike activity of 1891–1913 was located primarily in the Glamorgan coal fields, where it lasted for decades rather than years and peaked well before the famous period of 1911–1913. The mushrooming coal towns dominated by big-anti-union companies produced twenty years of continuous strike activity, while most outbursts of social violence were located elsewhere. Although south Wales shifted its loyalty from Liberals to Labour during these decades, the contours of its industrial conflict did not exhibit a rise of labour militancy to crisis proportions on the eve of the Great War.

Kealey's data are more comprehensive than the British statistics, and they suggest to him a pattern of strikes in Canada rather different from what Hopkin had found in Wales. Canadian strike statistics for the period
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between 1891 and 1930 display three prominent strike waves: 1899–1903, 1911–13, and 1917–20. Miners were leading actors at all times, and workers in transportation played a prominent role in the first strike wave, but the immediate prewar years also saw metal workers, building tradesmen, labourers, and others engaged in industrial disputes of unprecedented size and frequency. The postwar strikes were the most widespread of all, both geographically and occupationally, with employees of the public sector conspicuously joining the militant ranks. Consequently, Kealey endorses James Cronin's conception of a Great Unrest evident among workers throughout the industrialized world on the eve of the war and resumed toward its end -- a thesis on which Hopkin's evidence casts doubt.¹

The two authors agree, however, that strike statistics are used most profitably when they are disaggregated. Strikes in both countries were created by particular groups of workers in specific localities. Workers in some industries who had remained quiescent while miners, building workers, and others struck often, entered the fray at particular moments to impart a wave-like appearance to Canadian strikes. Sympathetic stoppages, contagious examples, and the influence of national or international unions often linked such local actions to each other. None of these phenomena, however, were peculiar to Canada either before or after the war, nor was the persistent prominence of coal miners uniquely Welsh. The specificity with which both authors identify the determinants of strike activity makes a comparison of their findings especially fruitful.

International scholarly collaboration of the type evident in these essays helps historians discover regional and global patterns within working-class activity, which is best studied at the community level. The interlocking economic changes of the Second Industrial Revolution and the personal and family projects which inspired people to migrate in quest of wages fashioned common meanings for human experience out of the endeavours of millions of men and women who never met each other and who spoke in many different tongues.

Notes

¹ David S. Landes, The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 231–358.
