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# Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930

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Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban  
Chile, 1900-1930

national production and retailing companies will profit with lower labor costs, and consumers will pay less for their clothing. The developing countries will gain jobs that pay better than many domestic job opportunities, collect western currency as well as aid in the form of industrial development and trade advantages, and build their economies.

Rosen uses most of the book (the second section) to present a historical picture of the globalization of the U.S. apparel industry from a variety of perspectives (labor, industry, and government) through analysis of trade policies that seemed protectionist but proceeded along an inexorable path to free trade. She outlines the protectionist policies that started with Japan after World War II as the United States continued to fight the spread of communism through economic aid and trade policies. The U.S. apparel-related trade policies evolved into reciprocal trade policies that benefited the Caribbean Basin and were also grounded in this fight against communism. The final stage of trade policy liberalization and movement toward free trade included the replacement of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) with the World Trade Organization (WTO), the phasing out of the Multi-Fiber Agreement, and NAFTA. Rosen outlines how U.S. apparel retailers were the big winners in this globalization process, through consolidation and price-cutting that eventually brought back sweatshops both domestically and in developing countries. She argues that these developments occurred within a gendered context, with the apparel industry paternalistically viewing female workers' wages as a secondary income to supplement the "family income" earned by the man/head of the household.

The concluding chapters summarize support for Rosen's argument that social, historical, and political processes must be considered alongside economic processes to understand the globalization of the U.S. apparel industry. The predominantly female apparel production workers set a gendered context for both the trade policies and the continual movement of production to lower-wage labor. The job loss in the developed countries is dismissed by neoliberal economists as no problem because workers can now hold higher-paying, more responsible jobs. Unfortunately, the data presented show that these unskilled female workers do not find higher-paying jobs, if they find jobs at all. In particular, the retail sales jobs that have grown in number do not pay higher wages.

The book's sections suggest a variety of pos-

sible approaches for readers to follow. Those familiar with the numerous trade agreements affecting apparel production and export/import may be most interested in the development of Rosen's argument against a strictly economic analysis of the globalization of the apparel industry in the first and last sets of chapters. Of special interest are the comparison of the apparel industry's globalization with other manufacturing industries, the consideration of gender as a factor in globalization processes, and the argument that the new apparel assembly jobs in developing countries do not contribute to long-term economic development of the countries. Those with little knowledge of the apparel industry and the trade policies that regulate it should be sure to read the middle chapters. These chapters describe the important policies that regulated the U.S. apparel industry in its globalization—among them, the Short and Long Term Arrangements leading up to the Multi-Fiber Agreement, the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and NAFTA—and also provide an understanding of the basis for these policies in a social, historical, and political context.

This wide-ranging book is likely to spark much-needed debate over the social issues surrounding globalization of the apparel industry. Readers with an interest in how globalization affects female labor, and how it may be linked to the proliferation of sweatshops, will find it of particular value.

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## History

*Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930.* By Elizabeth Quay Hutchison. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. Part of the Latin America Otherwise series. 342 pp. ISBN 0-8223-2732-5, \$64.95 (cloth); 0-8223-2742-2, \$21.95 (paper).

Recent "gendered" histories of Latin America have often looked beyond the workplace—particularly to movements tied to patterns of consumption, rather than production—in order to incorporate women more fully into the history of working people. By contrast, Elizabeth Quay Hutchison insists that the "hidden" history of women as wage workers is essential to any understanding of class formation and politics, as

well as to understanding the varieties of feminism that emerged in twentieth-century Chile.

The early chapters of her book tell a fairly familiar story, that of Chile's urbanization and industrialization in the first three decades of the twentieth century, linked to the nitrate export economy. But Hutchison focuses on the role of female workers, who have been largely neglected by labor historians, in part because of their reliance on national censuses that indicate that many female workers left the industrial work force during this period. Through a close reading of census categories and methodological explanations given by census officials, Hutchison shows that attempts to "modernize" census categories systematically moved women employed on the margins (such as the many seamstresses working out of their homes) from "active" to "inactive" categories, thus obscuring the reality that much manufacturing and virtually all domestic service continued to be done by women. Though clearly segregated to marginal jobs, women working for wages remained central to Chilean industrialization.

The manipulation of categories to diminish the importance of female labor tells us as much about the ideas and concerns of government officials as it does about the specific roles of female workers. Indeed, while the book is well rooted in a discussion of the structural ("real") parameters of work and draws from the traditional narrative of cycles of worker mobilization, its main focus and greatest strength is its analysis of the discursive ("fictive") representations of working women during this period. Hutchison asks, how did different sectors of Chilean society view the massive participation of women in the urban (and, most visibly, the manufacturing) work force, and how did these views shape actions and policies?

Discourses about the "social question" and its most urgent manifestation, the widespread and public existence of working women, were largely those of elites; but Hutchison devotes much of the first half of the book to a particular group of elites, union leaders and labor journalists. The author shows how male labor leaders relied on gendered paradigms to rally male workers against employers, by elaborating a vision of working women as victims of the economic and moral exploitation of the capitalist system. While labor leaders clung to a patriarchal ideal of women as the pillars of domestic tranquility, they nonetheless sought to organize female factory workers within the "family" of labor, thereby acknowledging women's factory work as at least a temporary reality.

In what Hutchison calls the "cultural paradox" of female workers, female labor activists and journalists for the most part agreed with their male counterparts that women's wage work was ultimately undesirable; even so, these "working-class feminists" pushed women to join unions and urged them to undertake self-improvement, and occasionally decried the continued working-class paternalism and subordination experienced by women in their homes and unions. Working-class feminists rarely questioned the gendered segregation of work or pushed for equal pay for equal work, and their limited emancipatory discourse largely disappeared after the political repression of labor in 1908. But Hutchison argues that the legacy of this early working-class feminism can be seen in the continued incorporation of female militants in the revived post-1917 labor movement, and eventually in the more extensive feminist critiques of sexual inequality in the decades after 1930.

The second half of the book explores how women's paid labor became the "locus of anxiety" for social elites whose interest was in seeing working-class families continue to accept their assigned place in industrial capitalism. Again, traditional gender preconceptions dominated attempts to understand and react to the perceived crisis of women working in factories. Even potentially innovative programs such as industrial schools for girls, established in the late nineteenth century, quickly shifted their focus from teaching manufacturing skills to reinforcing domestic skills and inculcating moral behavior. At the same time that middle-class and elite women embraced new white-collar jobs (as teachers, department store clerks, and public employees) as constituting opportunities for women, they continued to see women working in factories as a troublesome, though perhaps inevitable, consequence of industrialization. After World War I, female reformers organized a variety of cooperatives and Catholic labor organizations that aimed at promoting female self-reliance and preventing the progress of radical labor ideologies among women. While divided on other aspects of the "social question," elite reformers and politicians ultimately agreed in the 1910s and 1920s on the need to protect working women.

The final chapter traces the formulation of protective legislation for female workers, such as laws limiting night work and mandating day-care facilities. Again, "Women received their exceptional (and largely ineffective) protections on the basis of their capacities as mothers and not as workers, a paradigm that would

prove fundamental to the development of industrial relations and the welfare state in later decades" (p. 240). The outcomes of such laws were accordingly problematic: they were applied sporadically and were unenforceable; they ignored the women who most needed protection, such as those who worked out of their homes; and they may even have led employers to push female workers out of factories and into more marginal jobs. On the other hand, Hutchison argues that such legislation offered the first challenges to the impunity of industrialists and, as suggested in the above quotation, anticipated the extensive state interventions to come.

*Labors Appropriate to Their Sex* is exhaustively researched, elegantly written, and well-informed by the related literature from U.S., European, and Latin American history. What makes this excellent book an innovative model for working-class history is Hutchison's ambitious attempt to relate the changes in economic and social structures to changes in discursive structures, with attention to the actions and policies that resulted. Similarly, she moves adroitly across class and gender lines, ultimately showing the strength of gender stereotypes and the proclivity for paternalistic solutions among reformers and revolutionaries, men and women alike.

At times while reading this book, I wished for a better sense of how discourses of elites and labor leaders were received, rejected, or transformed by working people. For example, were there working-class women who rejected the dominant paradigm of women's factory work as exploitative but necessary (besides, perhaps, the notorious cross-dressing baker, Laura Rosa Zelada, whose court case opens and closes the book)? To what extent were working women empowered by working-class feminism to stand up to their employers, or, for that matter, to their fathers and husbands? Hutchison more than fulfills her ambitious goal of establishing the important place female workers must be given in any evaluation of Chilean class and state formation in the early twentieth century; to expect more than this very significant accomplishment would be unfair. Rather, future scholars can now better explore the old and new questions suggested by this important book. At any rate, this book will, I hope, make it impossible for future scholars to exclude female workers from the history of Chile's working people.

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*Harry Van Arsdale, Jr.: Labor's Champion.* By Gene Ruffini. Foreword by Theodore Kheel. Lebanon, Pa.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002. 304 pp. ISBN 0-7656-1044-2, \$29.95 (cloth).

In the Foreword to this book, noted labor mediator Theodore Kheel refers to Harry Van Arsdale, Jr., as a "practical realist." In the book's preface, the author, Gene Ruffini, calls Van Arsdale the most powerful labor leader in New York City, a champion, a legend accorded the respect of a saint. By the time I got to the first chapter, I expected this biography to be little more than an experience in public relations hyperbole. However, after reading the book, I would describe Van Arsdale as a pragmatist, visionary, and icon, and one of the most powerful, influential, and productive leaders in the history of American trade unionism.

The struggles, influence, and accomplishments of Van Arsdale are so far-reaching that they continue to have a major impact on labor-management relations. Speeches and programs made and initiated by Van Arsdale more than 50 years ago are as relevant in today's world as they were visionary a half-century ago.

The author details a number of strategies and tactics applied by Van Arsdale as he struggled to rid the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) of corruption and to overcome the heavily biased anti-union reporting of the media. The strikes and boycotts he managed to lead despite such impediments resulted in collective bargaining agreements and union organizing campaigns; and yet, notwithstanding his readiness to fight when necessary, ultimately a more important means by which he bettered union members' lot—shortening their work hours while increasing their pay and benefits—was by paving the way for an unprecedented level of labor-management cooperation.

The book traces the roots of Van Arsdale's family from the Revolutionary War to twentieth-century New York City, where his father, an electrical worker who was a staunch union advocate, strove to improve the lot of his fellow workers by fighting not only contractors, but also factions within the electricians' union itself. The author spares neither union nor individuals in recounting these struggles. The disorganized, greedy, corrupt, and sometimes violent activities of various union members and leaders are exposed. Even the arrests, convictions, and jail time of the book's hero Harry Van