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Laurie Nussdorfer
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Dear Laurie:

Yes, I remember your mentioning your other course; but I did speak a little too quickly, because the literature is extremely limited and I find myself hard put to know what to suggest. Labor history in the sense of analysis of the changing mode of production and its effect on the composition and nature of the working class is virtually non-existent since Marx. Of course you know of the various articles and pamphlets produced by the left in recent years; I think you mentioned some of them. I can suggest a few other things, but the work of analysis remains to be done, and perhaps some of you in your course can add to it.

Taylor is very important, not in the sense of the specific techniques of time and motion study he advanced, but because he was the first to grasp and systematically expound the thesis that the process of production must never be entrusted to the control of those who perform it, even in the case of simple non-mechanized labor, and even in the case of complex craft skills. Some of you should read all of Taylor, from the point of view of trying to figure out what this does to a. the labor process; and b. the composition of the working class.

One of the best on recent so-called automation is James Bright at the Harvard School of Business, and he has done a book on automation and a number of articles, in Harvard Business Review, etc.

In looking into the very important field of clerical labor, which has grown so huge and so rapidly, Ida Hoos book, Automation in the Office (1960) is very important. And C. Wright Mills White Collar is still the best book on office workers. David Lockwood did a useful book on white-collar workers in England a few years ago. *There is also an early application of Taylor to the office: Lippincott, Scientific Office Management (1917?).*

The Department of Labor published, about 1964 (or maybe '66), a survey called Technological Trends in Major American Industries. A little reading in that can give you an idea of some of the changes in industrial processes that are under way today. The one on the manufacture of furniture, as I remember it, is clearer than most and somewhat typical of that sort of manufacturing industry.

Nothing can substitute for detailed statistics on occupations. These historical statistics are not very plentiful, but you can construct a detailed occupational tabulation from Kaplan and Casey, Bureau of the Census Working Paper No. 5, which goes up to 1950 (from 1900), and then the 1950 and 1960 Census figures on detailed occupations. There

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is also a set of 1967 figures done by the Department of Labor in a pamphlet on occupational distribution 1960 and 1967. These are the sources for detailed occupational figures as against the broad occupational classifications which are very deceptive, since many of those who use them have no idea of the occupations they embrace, which segments are going up, etc. For earlier than 1900, statistics are very unreliable, but there are figures on broad industry classifications going back to 1820 and occupational classifications going back to about 1870. For the latter, look up Alba Edwards; for the former, you'd better check with me again if you really need them. (I'm writing this at the office from memory and my notes are at home; I may not even have every title correct in the above.)

In brief, there is no systematic source or sources, and most of what I'm getting is culled from scores of sources, each of which may provide only a fact or two.

Oh yes. On the very important subject of white collar unionism, there is a new book, just published by Random House, by Albert Blum, Marten Estey, et. al. which has a lot of information. The essays are uneven, but Marten Estey's on the organization of Retail Clerks is important; Blum's on clerical workers has plenty of stupidities but also lots of facts. And there is a world survey of the same subject called White Collar Trade Unions, ed. Adolf Sturmthal, which has a section on the U. S.; I haven't read this yet.

Of all the long-term trends, the most important to study is the growth of service, government, and trade employment. But to get past the superficial level, one must study why this has happened, exactly what occupational effect this has had in the above detailed terms, and where it is heading. Static conceptions which celebrate this change as making us all middle class simply rely on past images of white collar workers formed two, three, and four generations ago. The prevalence of women and blacks in these occupations should be enough to warn us that they cannot be prize occupations. But there is tons of work to be done before a solid picture emerges.

I hope this is useful. I'd appreciate it if you kept me posted about how your group is proceeding and what sort of papers, statistical work, etc. emerges. And if I can help any more, do write.

Regards,


Harry Braverman