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Janet R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France. The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. xiii + 354 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8223-2782-1.

Review by Judith F. Stone, Western Michigan University.

This carefully researched study of the Musée social contributes to our understanding of social reform during the early Third Republic. Janet Horne stresses that the essential assumptions of the modern welfare state emerged in the late nineteenth century. She rejects a class analysis as an explanation as to why some bourgeois politicians and academics took up the cause of reform. In addition she insists that historians have given too much attention to the parliamentary arena, thus neglecting equally critical sites of change. Horne argues that a heterogeneous group of social reformers developed the crucial discursive shift from private charity to state intervention. These men elaborated the concept of "the social" as we still understand it. The members of the extra-parliamentary Musée social were key players in this rhetorical transformation. Focusing on this private think tank, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France* joins a lengthy bibliography on French social reform. Horne is interested in examining the origins of the welfare state from the perspective of the early twenty-first century when its accomplishments are being sharply criticized.

Her most significant contributions emphasize the rhetorical transformation and the men who constructed a new language with which to think about poverty. The research projects, publications, lectures, and informal contacts of the Musée introduced the French political, academic and industrial elites to the new "cultural underpinning of the social." The activities of the Musée addressed the tensions between the individual and the state, the private and the public, charity and state intervention. Members and visitors to the Musée became familiar with a new, implicitly more modern way of considering the social question. At the Musée they encountered one version of a critique of classical Liberalism.

Horne grounds her argument about this discursive transformation and its influence on a detailed description of the Musée's organization and activities. She has collected revealing mini-biographies of the leading members of this think tank, those who sat on the Board of Directors, the Grand Conseil, and the salaried administrators. The Musée was founded and funded by an aristocratic industrialist, the Count de Chambrun, who had abandoned monarchist politics for conservative republicanism. The initial discussions concerning the founding of the Musée took place at the 1889 World Fair, commemorating the centennial of the French Revolution. Horne provides a brief but insightful analysis of these first meetings and the significance of the 1889 Fair. The Musée was committed to the Republic. Jules Siegfried, a Protestant moderate republican and deputy, was the driving force of the institution, presiding over the board of directors. The salaried professionals headed the library and organized the influential research projects. Many applied the assumptions and methods of Frédéric Le Play, the pioneering mid-nineteenth-century Catholic sociologist. Le Play insisted that any effort to improve workers' social conditions must be based on detailed, empirical studies of the proletarian family. The family was the crux of his concern. Le Play influenced Musée members, such as Emile Cheysson and Georges Picot, who had trained as engineers, academics, lawyers, or who had previous administrative

experience. They prided themselves on their objectivity and their empirical methods. This positivist rhetoric was an essential element in lending legitimacy to the Musée's projects.

Horne hints at tensions between the administrators and the more prestigious members of the board and Grand Conseil. She attributes these problems to conflicting class interests and worldviews between middle class professionals and established bourgeois industrialists and politicians. Unfortunately, Horne does not develop this interesting theme that might have provided additional insight on the elusive middle classes and the fractured nature of the bourgeoisie. Horne characterizes the politics of this socially diverse institution as conservative republican, but she insists that the Musée operated neither from a class basis nor as a business lobby. However, she also points out that this conservative republicanism derived from several distinct sources. The ideological strains that commingled in the views of the Musée were: Le Play's empiricism and claims to expertise; the tradition of Social Catholicism and its charities; the institutions of Social Protestantism; Republican public welfare assistance; Republican Solidarism; and Liberal *prévoyance*, especially membership in mutual aid societies. Nonetheless, despite (or because of) these eclectic sources, Horne argues that the Musée social did not promote any explicit political perspective. Only orthodox Marxism was excluded from consideration and actively opposed.

According to Horne, the Musée social offered a space where industrialists, moderate politicians, engineers, academics, and leaders of moderate working-class organizations could meet, be informed, and debate the social question and its most effective solutions. Two central and overlapping debates preoccupied the members of the Musée. First, what was the appropriate role of the state in social policy? This necessarily became part of, second, an even larger re-examination of classical Liberalism and how to transform it for the modern, industrial world. The Musée was at the forefront of developing a new concept of social reform. During its first decade of existence the Musée mobilized its influence behind parliamentary bills for old-age pensions. The version supported by the Musée and eventually passed in 1910 designated the network of mutual aid societies as one among several administrators of the pensions. Soon after the pension law was enacted, the Musée shifted its interest to housing, social hygiene, and urban planning influenced by demographic anxieties and the expanding pro-natalist movement.

A Social Laboratory for Modern France persuades the reader of the centrality of the discursive shifts within Liberalism and the vital role played by ever more powerful middle-class professionals. Given these themes it is surprising that Horne spends so little time examining professionalism, positivism, and objectivity as ideologies. Too often the claims of objectivity made by the Musée's research groups remain unexplored. Horne's emphasis on the sociology of Frédéric Le Play is quite critical. Historians and sociologists have too often neglected his work. But the weight of his studies would take on even greater interest if Le Play's endorsement of social hierarchy, employer authority, clerical power, and the patriarchal family were examined as well.

This study convincingly demonstrates the influence of an extra-parliamentary organization such as the Musée social. By 1900 its goal was increasingly to shape reform legislation. The Musée also continued to struggle with ideological questions. The dominant one was how to define the appropriate relations between the state and society. More and more, the Musée was involved in political issues. It would have been helpful to know more about the interaction of the Musée and the Chambre des Députés. Horne shows how the Musée social linked the new vision of social reform with claims of professionalism, objectivity, modernity and progress. However, security, certainly a preeminent reform goal, appears rarely in this account of the Musée social. Did the members of the Musée ignore the vision of greater social protection for citizens? It seems unlikely. Léon Bourgeois, the promoter of Solidarism, was a prominent participant in the Musée's activities. The promotion of mutual aid societies was among the highest priority of the Musée. What then was the place of security in an emerging new Liberalism, and how did it complement the other elements of new Liberalism, which Horne discusses?

Horne successfully presents a nuanced and intriguing portrait of the class identities of the men of the Musée. Unfortunately, we understand less about the gender dimension of social reform. Horne skirts the challenges that recent studies on gender and reform have posed. In a 1994 review essay on “The Welfare State” Philip Nord observed, “Belle Epoque France, it turns out, has a substantial welfare state after all, and a welfare state innovative in its familist objectives. The conservative, pro-natalist dimension of the regime’s family welfare project is unmistakable.”^[1] This discourse—conservative, pro-natalist and familist—seems quite different from that associated with the Musée. How is our view of the diffusion of the social reform discourse altered when it includes gender-specific protective legislation, supported by pro-natalist arguments? One might argue that social reform began in the 1870s when some of the earliest gender-specific legislation was enacted. Was some version of the maternalist discourse a part of the Musée’s agenda? What changes occurred when the Musée adopted pro-natalist concerns in the second decade of the twentieth century? A discussion of gender issues and the Musée’s position would have strengthened the argument that the Musée was central to the reform effort.

Nonetheless, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France* remains a significant study. Of particular importance is Horne’s demonstration of the importance of discursive change and how it is disseminated. Twentieth-century Liberalism would be an ideology considerably different from its nineteenth-century predecessor. Horne makes a persuasive case for the authenticity of the men of the Musée as committed reformers, eager to build a modern, progressive society. They had little interest in defending traditional social relations, nor was their main concern “social peace.” Janet Horne has added a crucial thread to the tapestry that is our understanding of the construction of the welfare state. As she notes, we live in a moment in which the reexamination of the origins of social reform legislation is especially critical.

NOTES

[1] Philip Nord, “The Welfare State in France,” *French Historical Studies* 18:3 (Spring 1994), 832.

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