

was futile. Debs soon led the remnants of the ARU into the Social Democracy of America.

Stromquist explores many other questions, including the nature of community support for railroad strikers and the role of the Knights of Labor in railroad worker organization. His use of the concept of a "labor force life cycle" is particularly intriguing. The scope of this impressive book sometimes makes for difficult going; the complex material treated here is not easily organized, necessitating much repetition and shifting between topics. The introductory chapter fails to prepare the reader for what is to come, although the chapter summaries are very helpful. Stromquist sometimes works with a narrow research base; a few cities provide most of the data for some interpretations. While this obviously was necessary for a manageable project, much "fine-tuning" probably remains to be done through studies of other railroad towns. The author gathered his strike data from reports published by the office of the United States commissioner of labor for the years 1881–1894. These reports are a rich and largely untapped resource but must be used with caution: if the experience of this reviewer in studying one midwestern city is any indication, they can greatly underreport strikes.

These are minor concerns. Stromquist provides a fascinating look at railroad labor during a crucial period in the nation's history, presenting insights of such broad significance that this book should be of interest to all historians of the American working class.

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Fordson, Farmall, and Poppin' Johnny: A History of the Farm Tractor and Its Impact on America. By Robert C. Williams. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. ix, 232. Notes, illustrations, figures, table, bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

Robert C. Williams's unique background—he is a Texas farmer with a Ph.D. in history—shapes his splendid book, which is both a careful history of the farm tractor and a polemical defense of small-scale, efficient farms. Williams provides a business history of the tractor industry, a description of the course of technological change, and an analysis of the effects of the tractor on farmers and farm life—all in a sprightly style that makes the book both accessible to the general reader and valuable for the scholar. The book's 37-page bibliography listing important scholarly books and articles along with federal and state government publications and articles from trade journals, newspapers, and farm publications testifies to Williams's indefatigable and meticulous scholarship and provides an invaluable aid for future research.

The now ubiquitous tractor is a relative newcomer to American farms. Steam tractors proved too cumbersome and heavy to become widely adopted, and the internal combustion engine, which quickly brought the automobile to the nation's streets, proved difficult to adapt to farm tractors. The major problem was technological; the successful tractor had to be more than a motor-driven horseless carriage. To be useful and economical tractors had to be powerful yet small and cheap enough for small farmers, which meant that they had to be versatile enough to do the many different tasks performed by horses and mules while costing less to buy, operate, and maintain than the animals they would replace. In addition, tractors and implements had to be adapted to each other, requiring cooperative and coordinated innovation. Williams carefully describes early efforts and experiments and the inability of manufacturers to meet all these goals in a satisfactory manner, concluding that "tractors did not reach a practical, mechanical maturity until the eve of the Second World War" (p. 86).

Once perfected, tractors had revolutionary effects on farming and on rural society. They increased output while decreasing the drudgery of farm work, but at a cost as farmers became increasingly and dangerously dependent on off-farm inputs such as credit, fuel, and maintenance. Expenditures for such services and products seemed wise when incurred during good times but proved disastrous when farm commodity prices declined. Williams concludes, however, that much of the resulting social disruption could have been avoided and current trends might still be reversed. Mistaken social policy, not technology, is destroying the "moderate-sized" family farm, he insists: "tractors and other machinery are but scapegoats for a society that has never been able to address the unconscious centralization of economic power into ever fewer, but ever bigger, heedless corporations" (p. 186). Many will surely disagree, and some will undoubtedly wonder how big a moderate-sized farm should be. But all should ponder Williams's arguments as they learn from his well-written history.

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