

stove during chilly winter nights. Here his emphasis is misplaced, giving insufficient information about schools, teachers, trustees, children, and their families. As a case in point, Lord refers to the 1918 flu epidemic and the impact of the many funerals on the populace of Prince Rupert. But nowhere does he mention the flu's effects on students and teachers.

In conclusion, Lord's strength is that he delightfully conveys a sense of rural life in B.C. and explains the problems associated with establishing an effective educational system in a sparsely settled resource-based frontier. *Alex Lord's British Columbia* should be of interest to educators and local history buffs; the extensive notes provide a rich source of primary and secondary references for the academic historian.

Tim Dunn
McBride, B.C.

Clark Nardinelli. *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. Pp. 194. \$25.00 U.S.

One of the most enduring images of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain is that of the ragged factory boys toiling among the giant weaving machines in the "dark satanic mills" of England. Such images have been

fixed in the popular mind since the investigation of the British Select Committee on the Regulation of Factories (1832) and Frances Trollope's famous illustrations of the late 1830s. From that time forward historians from J.L. and Barbara Hammond to E.P. Thompson have decried the widespread "exploitation of little children" in hellish textile factories responsible for the virtual destruction of childhood.

Clark Nardinelli's recent book directly challenges both popular myth and accepted interpretation concerning child labour in Britain's Industrial Revolution. In what is billed as the first full-length study by a modern economic historian, Nardinelli takes to task previous "emotional" writings on the subject (pp. 9-34) and considers child labour from the standpoint of family economy, and particularly family needs in relation to other possible uses of children's time. Utilizing economic tools of analysis, he posits a neoclassical interpretation of child labour in nineteenth-century Britain.

Nardinelli's essential thesis is presented in a bold and provocative chapter entitled "Were Children Exploited During the Industrial Revolution?" After analyzing several definitions of exploitation, he presents some ingenious statistical comparisons between working time lost by cotton mill workers in various age groups, between adult agricultural wage rates and child labour activity, and between the wages of child miners and those children employed in other industries. The comparisons purport to demonstrate not only that the Industrial Revolution did not increase

exploitation, but that it may have gradually improved the lot of children. It is his contention that industrial growth produced an increasingly competitive labour market and fewer "imperfections," thereby reducing opportunities for exploitation.

Children employed as wage earners, according to Nardinelli, could at least flee harsh or exploitative parents. Contrary to critics of the Industrial Revolution, he argues that economic expansion, in the long run, actually ended child labour by increasing working-class incomes and rendering supplemental income unnecessary for many families. Going further, Nardinelli offers this sweeping conclusion: "Industrialization, far from being the source of the enslavement of children, was the source of their liberation" (p. 102).

The book also challenges accepted views of child labour laws in Britain and elsewhere. The British Factory Acts of 1833 and 1844, for example, are credited not with slowing the growth of child labour employment, but rather with accelerating the replacement of children by older workers already underway in the factory system (pp. 106, 121). Although child labour legislation may have had short-term effects in reducing child labour in the textile mills, its long-term effects were decidedly small. The salient factor, Nardinelli contends, was the cycle of industrial expansion which increased working-class incomes and, in turn, encouraged parents to keep children out of the labour force until later in their lives (p. 149).

This is a fascinating little book that attempts to turn conventional wis-

dom upon its head. Nardinelli succeeds in marshalling some rather inventive arguments in support of his case. Upon closer scrutiny, however, his supposed objectivity can be questioned and some of his arguments rest on rather shaky foundations.

The author criticizes previous "emotional" writings on child labour and claims to be attempting "a dispassionate study of the practice" (p. 34). Yet Nardinelli clearly exhibits a neoconservative orientation that carries its own biases. Mill owners and parents, he would have us believe, did not consciously exploit children in nineteenth-century Britain. Indeed, the experiences of children can be explained by market forces and neatly reduced to supply and demand economic formulae. Thus we are treated to an analysis of "the value of a child's marginal product" in cotton factories in 1833 that purports to show "no neoclassical exploitation of children" because VMP_c (£7.7) roughly equals W_c (£7.9), the average annual wage of children under thirteen (pp. 69-70). We learn, as well, that "market imperfections are a basic prerequisite to the market exploitation of children."

Much of the book, including Nardinelli's explanations, is written in the prose of an economist-turned-historian. Eschewing the emotional style of previous writers, he presents his case in stilted, almost wooden prose and mechanical or formulaic explanatory form. To cite one example among many, Nardinelli sets out one of his key conclusions in this fashion: "The implications of the [neoclassical] model...all point to the conclusion that

child labor neither hurt nor degraded families. Poverty—not actions to alleviate it—caused degradation” (p. 157).

More disconcerting is the fact that Nardinelli's central thesis has a tentative, perhaps exploratory, quality. In his critically important chapter on child exploitation, he concedes that the direct measure of neoclassical economic exploitation remains so difficult that it is “necessary to use various indirect measures” (p. 71). Discounting volumes of anecdotal evidence and high urban mortality rates among children, he claims that a table showing days of work lost for 1,806 cotton workers in 1818-19 and later 1833 survey showed children under the age of fifteen were at least as healthy as older workers and perhaps healthier than the rest of the British labour force (pp. 78-79). His conclusions, then, rest on evidence which he concedes is “admittedly fragmentary” (p. 102).

Nardinelli's contention that child labour has been overemphasized in studies of the Industrial Revolution remains unconvincing. In 1835, 56,000 children under the age of thirteen worked in British textile factories and, if thirteen and fourteen-year-olds were included, children represented over 20% of the textile work force. After a period of declining numbers, child labour began increasing in the 1860s and peaked in 1874 when child textile workers totalled some 122,000 in England and Wales. Although the number of children employed may have represented only 8.4% of the total child population, the numbers them-

selves were substantial, especially by the 1870s.

Readers of this journal will be disappointed by the author's treatment of the educational alternatives to factory labour. In Nardinelli's terms, schools amount to “investing in human capital” (pp. 38, 63) and state education was less attractive to children than factory labour because of its relative “opportunity cost.” Child labour, he argues with little supporting evidence, allowed children to acquire practical skills and did not necessarily destroy “children's future prospects” (pp. 89-90).

Nardinelli challenges with limited success the notion that child labour contributed to illiteracy. In spite of the barriers to education, he claims that by the 1880s nearly all young people in Britain were literate (p. 90). His evidence is suspect, however, consisting solely of the findings of Lawrence Stone in a 1969 *Past and Present* article (p. 177, fn. 86). And even the author concedes that attributing literacy to industrialization, as he does, represents a “preliminary and tentative” conclusion. Clearly, his assertion that literacy was not tied to formal schooling but to industrialization remains problematic. Indeed, Nardinelli would be well advised to consult recent British and Canadian research on labour and the acquisition of practical knowledge.

Clark Nardinelli's *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution* is sure to, as the dust jacket cover proclaims, “spark heated debate.” The author sets out to dispel the so-called myths surrounding child labour and, by all accounts, should relish the ensuing

debate. His book offers a cold analysis of a troubling aspect of British industrialization and, as such, will convince few.

Paul W. Bennett
Upper Canada College

John Willinsky. *The New Literacy: Redefining Reading and Writing in the Schools.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

What's new about the "New Literacy"? It is, says author John Willinsky, "a different form of education in reading and writing," an empowering literacy, "intended to engender expression and individual voice, to establish a sense of community and discourse," a literacy dedicated to the active, collaborative construction of meaning, a literacy that transforms the roles of teacher and student, and that offers new challenges to research. As if that were not enough, it is a literacy that, argues Willinsky, "has within it a potential for social change that extends far beyond the classroom" (p. xviii).

Lest this begin to sound suspiciously like a sales pitch for some cure-all educational snake oil ("Here are a series of programs that will prepare students for turning literacy to their own ends, whatever situation they find themselves in") the New Literacy (capitalized throughout) is also, as Michael Apple stresses, "inherently contradictory." A progressive peda-

gogy which struggles for acceptance in conservative times, the New Literacy attempts to chart a perilous course between providing the kind of "functional literacy," a "literacy as ability," which inclines invariably towards reproducing existing economic, socio-cultural, and political arrangements, and engendering what's been variously termed "empowering," "higher-order," or "critical" literacy—a literacy as social praxis driven by meaning, purpose, and agency.

Willinsky's project in this book is to grapple directly with these and other contradictory elements within the new literacy—to, in his words, "stop for a moment, amid the enthusiasm and support (for the new literacy), and grow far more cautious and critical...to raise questions about its shortcomings, in classroom practices, research findings and theory." Willinsky's stated intent is "on one level...to inform readers of the challenge and promise posed by the New Literacy. But on another level, it [is to] step into the fray, contributing to its cause by uncovering the venerable roots of its claim on literacy and then, too, challenging it with questions about the latent politics of this new power which advocates of the New Literacy have yet to ask" (p. 13).

Willinsky does a convincing job of drawing together the often seemingly diverse and disconnected practices which together comprise the New Literacy, illustrating concretely and explaining theoretically its educational appeal and he is impressive, if at times also rather dizzying, in the number, kind, and complexity of the references and citations deployed in his account. Which is all to say that this