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Edited by Bert Altena and Marcel van der Linden
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Preface

BERT ALTENA AND MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN

As Christopher Johnson rightly argues in the introduction to this collection of essays, de-industrialization is not a recent phenomenon. It has attracted much interest among historians, but that interest has focused primarily on its economic causes and consequences. The social, cultural, and political aspects of de-industrialization have attracted less attention – perhaps because our discipline is more concerned with the *formation* of social relationships and social movements and less with their disappearance. Do the close ties between social historians and social movements play a role here? Does their involvement blind them to the process of decline? Significantly, the most famous and impressive analysis of an anti-de-industrialization movement sheds little light on that aspect; it was the radical resistance to the parallel process of industrialization that captured the author's imagination.[1]

Whatever the precise reasons for this relative lack of interest in the social, cultural, and political aspects of de-industrialization, it is only recently that social historians have begun to show a strong interest in the subject. Having discovered de-industrialization, they initially focused on the "classic" labour history, concentrating first and foremost on the role of employers, trade unions, and strikes.[2] It did not take long before other aspects began to be studied, and Christopher Johnson's own *The Life and Death of Industrial Languedoc, 1700–1920* (New York, 1995) was a landmark in this respect too.

Three elements in particular seem to have gradually drawn the attention of social historians in recent times. First, the often dramatic consequences for those working-class households affected: gender relations within families could change as a result, as could relations between parents and children. New forms of income had to be found, and, for example, the wives and daughters of men who were previously breadwinners began increasingly to undertake paid work. Sometimes, subsistence agriculture and cattle breeding became more important too. And if these proved

1. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).
2. See for example Donald Reid, *The Miners of Decazeville: A Genealogy of Deindustrialization* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), and John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1988).

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insufficient, individual family members, or entire families, might sometimes even have to migrate to forge a new future elsewhere.[3]

Secondly, politics was an important element. What role did local authorities play in the process of de-industrialization? What determined their policy and room for manoeuvre? And where political parties existed with the support of labour, what influence did de-industrialization have on their supporters and the political functioning of these parties?

A third key aspect is the industrialized and de-industrialized region as a whole. Demoralization, impoverishment, and migration might lead to the potential for recovery in de-industrialized regions being compromised, as is painfully evident in a number of areas throughout the world. Long-term unemployment can encourage defeatism or xenophobia. Migration leads to depopulation and an ageing of the population that remains. Sometimes the sociocultural character of a region is altered for a very long time.[4]

None of these aspects can be considered outside the regional, and often even the global context. In the course of time, capital has moved farther and farther across the globe. Industrialization and de-industrialization are therefore two sides of the same coin. If the value of a concept like "global labour history" is apparent anywhere, it is here, in research into de-industrialization. De-industrialization also means that the vicissitudes of groups of labourers in different parts of the world are connected in complex ways.[5] The great challenge to historians now seems to be to link the local (material *and* cultural) aspects of de-industrialization with the "larger picture" of ongoing transnational capital mobility. We hope that the essays presented here will help in preparing the ground for such an analysis.

3. Shireen Moosvi, "De-industrialization, Population Change and Migration in Nineteenth-Century India", *Indian Historical Review*, 16 (1989–1990), pp. 149–162; June Nash, "Global Integration and Subsistence Insecurity", *American Anthropologist*, 96 (1994), pp. 7–30; Thomas Dublin, "Working-Class Families Respond to Industrial Decline: Migration from the Pennsylvania Anthracite Region since 1920", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 54 (Fall 1998), pp. 40–56.

4. David Washbrook, "Economic Depression and the Making of 'Traditional' Society in Colonial India, 1820–1855", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3 (1993), pp. 237–263; Geoffrey Beattie, *Hard Lines: Voices from Deep within a Recession* (New York, 1998).

5. A pioneering study that reveals some of these connections is Jefferson R. Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1999).

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