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Xavier Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France. Class Structures, Economic Development, the State and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1750-1914*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2019, x + 311 pp. \$156.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9789004276321.

Review by Roger Price, Prifysgol Aberystwyth University.

The subjects of volume 189 in publisher Brill's Historical Materialism Series are the "transition to capitalism and its impact on the making of the working class in France" (p.1). In "an essay of historical and political sociology" (p.10) Lafrance adopts a Marxist focus to "the Social embeddedness of economic activities" in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The author also describes his approach as "consequentialist" involving an amalgam of the classical social interpretation of the French Revolution with the revisionist historiography of the 1950-1970s, to conclude that the revolution was "bourgeois," but not capitalist. Although internal barriers to trade including feudal land tenure, internal tariffs and urban guilds were abolished, market structures remained fragmented due to poor communications and protectionism. Competitive pressures were thus insufficient to stimulate systematic innovation and price competition in manufacturing. Slow population growth and urbanisation imposed further limits. Artisanal production, as well as commercial capitalism remained dominant until the 1860s. Liberal economic and social values only slowly took root. Agricultural growth similarly remained extensive rather than intensive, agrarian capitalism less developed and innovation more limited than in England. Output, although rising, was barely sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of a growing population. Food supply difficulties were to be a significant cause of wider economic and political crises until the mid-1850s. Furthermore, in a society and political system which continued to be dominated by privileged elites, liberal reforms of fiscal and administrative structures faced considerable opposition. Although Lafrance's approach to the transition to capitalism is based on a generally discriminating review of a substantial secondary literature, it does not constitute a clearly structured historiographical essay. Its conclusions hardly advance beyond those of Ernest Labrousse who, in summarising the conclusions of a lifetime's research in *Aspects de la crise et de la dépression de l'économie française au milieu du 19e siècle* posited the existence until well into the nineteenth century of an *ancien régime économique et sociale*. [1]

Lafrance is particularly interested in the evolution of market dynamics, and more specifically the complex of developments which included investment in communications and the development of financial markets, as well as the move away from tariff protection, as means of securing greater market integration, intensifying competition and stimulating technological innovation and the concentration of production. He identifies a key transitional period in France during the Second Empire and particularly from the 1860s--whilst the creative achievements of the 1840s are not

sufficiently considered. It had already been evident to contemporary observers that more rapid and sustained economic development was in progress in Britain as a result of easier access to waterborne communication and the beginnings of rail construction (although the pace of this can easily be exaggerated). This stimulated a process of capitalist industrialization involving continuous technical innovation and the development of more intensive mechanized factory production. As Lafrance stresses, in the aftermath of the long mid-century crisis and the 1848 Revolution, the Emperor Napoleon III and his advisors, influenced by the British example and a liberal (and Saint-Simonian) economic and political discourse determined that competitive international processes of state-building created an imperative and urgent need for accelerating industrialization. Achieving this objective required a programme of improved communications (road, waterway and rail), financial reform, trade liberalization, and the development of integrated and more competitive national and international markets as part of a more general capitalist restructuring of the economy. This would be accompanied by partial democratisation, enhanced employment opportunities, and the modernization of the state, together with a major programme of urban renewal and the establishment of Paris as a world-city.

If the making of capitalism was gradual, so too, according to Lafrance, was the formation of the French working class, a process taking place within varied non-capitalist and capitalistic contexts. Lafrance maintains that historians have failed to recognize that, even after the liberalising reforms associated with the Revolution and Empire and in spite of the liberal discourse adopted by the central state, local regulatory institutions including JPs, municipal councils, commercial tribunals, and *conseils de prud'hommes* imposed respect for local trade usages and made it possible for workers in the setting of both craft workshops and factories to negotiate their working conditions with employers as equals. In comparison with Britain where, according to Lafrance, the judicial system and state coercion reinforced labour management systems, in France, he maintains, intensification of the division of labour, the imposition of greater work discipline, and technological change were all slowed. His account of growing working-class consciousness particularly following the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the establishment of the Third Republic in the late 1870s however suggests an accumulated resentment of exploitation and the re-emergence of a more combative political culture, rather than labour in a "congenial environment" (p.136).

#### NOTE

[1] Ernest Labrousse, *Aspects de la crise et de la dépression de l'économie française au milieu du 19e siècle* (Paris: Persée, 1956).

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