

REID, DONALD. *Opening the Gates. The Lip Affair, 1968–1981*. Verso, London [etc.] 2018. xvi, 492 pp. Ill. £32.00.

The Lip Affair, which began in a watchmaking factory in Besançon in 1973, is one of the most famous post-1968 workers' struggles in France. But this book by Donald Reid, Professor of History at Chapel Hill and leading American historian of French labour history, is the first to take into account the whole development of the process. Reid had already carefully studied the process of deindustrialization in Decazeville, a small southern city that saw the decline of coal mining.¹ In this new book, he moves to a north-eastern town where male and female workers and employees fought to preserve their jobs through innovative action. Using impressive documentation, important archival materials in Besançon and Paris, and interviews with a large number of protagonists, Reid has written the definitive monograph on the Lip struggle.

His first chapter focuses on the watches enterprise, from its foundation in 1867 by an Alsatian-Jewish entrepreneur, Lipmann. His grandson, Fred Lip, aimed to be a modern employer by developing a new paternalism, and moved the factory to the new Besançon quarter Palente in 1962. Lip was the leading French watch producer at the beginning of the 1960s, but faced the technological challenge posed by quartz watches and economic problems. In 1973, when the Swiss Ébauches SA seized the enterprise, the managers wanted to lay off some of the 1,427 employees, including 691 workers and 269 technicians. But, as Chapters two and three show, this workforce had already been mobilized by their CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) and CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail) trade unions. Moreover, an action committee driven by a worker-priest was created and progressively increased the degree of mobilization, especially among female workers and employees. This process of both mobilization and radicalization allowed the Lip workforce to act illegally: by June 1973, the workers occupied the factory in order to safeguard the means of production, briefly sequestered the two provisional administrators, decided to hide 30,000 watches, and started up production. Thirty-five commissions were established for production, watch sales, the restaurant, etc. Although a different working process was created, with a slower pace and more rotation in the most tiring activities, about 25,000 watches were assembled during the conflict. By August 1973, 40,000 watches had been sold throughout the whole country. In fact, these illegal decisions and the work-in contributed immediately to the popularity of Lip among the French working class and the New Left. By contrast, the Communist Party and the CGT national leaders strongly opposed the work-in and this self-management experience.

This form of class struggle hurt the Gaullist government, which, in August 1973, sent in the police to remove workers occupying the factory. In spite of this opposition and difficulties, the community created in the conflict rejected the confederations' practice of responding to layoffs by negotiating for severance pay, retraining, and jobs elsewhere for laid-off workers (p. 146). This innovative choice was possible because of the huge support for the Lip workers, which Reid emphasizes in Chapter five: visitors who bought watches, press journalists, left-wing militants, famous film makers such as René Vauthier, Chris Marker, Dominique Dubosc, and Carole Roussopoulos, theatre

1. Donald Reid, *The Miners of Decazeville: A Genealogy of Deindustrialization* (Cambridge, MA, 1985).

artists, etc. Among this impressive national support, Reid rightly emphasizes the role of a small political organization, Les Cahiers de Mai, which promoted the creation of a daily bulletin, *Lip Unité*. Lip workers successfully maintained their jobs with the foundation in 1974 of a new enterprise, the SEHEM, managed by Claude Neuschwander, a left-wing employer. Thus, the factory reopened in Palente, hiring more than 500 workers and obtaining good results until the second half of 1975. But it was hurt by the sharp hostility of the government: the nationalized bank Crédit Lyonnais and the national constructor Renault withdrew their support, engendering the SEHEM's bankruptcy in April 1976. Prime Minister Jacques Chirac then declared "the fate of Lip is no longer a government matter" (p. 293).

This first part of the Lip affair is quite well known in the French historiography, but Reid succeeds in adding to our knowledge by including the "second Lip struggle". The workers continued to work in order to save the enterprise and began a second mobilization: on May 1976, a large banner read "We struggle for 900 jobs at Lip and for French watchmaking". As Reid explains, "Lip workers had always rejected the label of job seekers. They had a factory and they had jobs; what they needed was an employer" (p. 327). But their bad reputation in the Besançon area, the employers' reluctance to hire Lip workers, and the economic crisis in this industrial sector impeded any success. Occupying their factory, they managed to produce various goods other than watches. In the summer of 1976, an innovative structure, 4M (Micro-mécanique et matériel médical), appeared, producing micro-mechanical devices, but this split off from the factory to form its own business the following year. Several workshops for wooden objects (like napkin rings and toys) and a pyrography workshop were developed. By 1979, Palente was a kind of supermarket of services, including a car repair shop, a hairdressing salon, a printshop, and a childcare facility. These working activities enabled a Lip community to be maintained. Moreover, the social movement continued by developing a network of enterprises in the struggle, fighting for their jobs in occupied factories throughout France. The Lip workers had ties to sixty of them and close relations with a core of fifteen. Within this network, they created a game, *Chômageopoly*, a reworking of *Monopoly* in terms of unemployment. A commission was set up to produce and sell the game with three other enterprises. By early 1977, 1,000 games had been sold, by September 1978 close to 10,000.

In spring 1977, Lip started working again to sell watches. In November, they decided to create a cooperative, Les Industries de Palente (LIP), which was established properly in January 1978. They still had two immediate problems to resolve: it was illegal to create a cooperative in an occupied factory, and they started without any capital but with a large workforce whose employment was its *raison d'être*. In the spring of 1978, the workforce comprised 425 workers: 233 women and 192 men; by spring 1981 there were still 250. In 1979, 500 to 700 clocks were being produced each month and watch sales were the community's primary source of income. But this cooperative project provoked three kinds of opposition. First, the prefect of the Doubs department endeavoured to stop the struggle, which he considered "a dangerous microbe", by confiscating watches. He tried to impede production by cutting the supply of water, gas, and electricity, and by cutting telephone lines. Second, some action committee veterans disagreed with the formation of three lists of employment status in February 1979, which gave precedence to skilled workers and technical staff. Third, divisions appeared among workers in the cooperative: some who fought for a minimum of industrial work, and others, for whom the cooperative could have been a place where workers would have experienced economic, social, and cultural development. Finally, the state-authorized cooperative received approval in June 1980 and moved from Palente to the new factory in March 1981.

Reid's book provides new insights into four main issues. It takes into account the female experience of the struggle, which tended increasingly to become a feminist movement, and the emergence of female leaders (see especially Chapter nine). Hence one female unskilled worker explained: "We are even more attached to our factory than before: now it is really more than a livelihood, it is our life, truly our place" (p. 155). Reid underlines this process of consciousness, which coincided with a social change in the whole country but naturally created some turmoil among Lip workers. Instead of depicting a unified community, he carefully evokes the social and political divisions among them. For example, he insists on the role of the CFDT spokesman Charles Piaget and the other leaders; but he focuses on the ordinary militants too, the rank-and-file experiences, and is careful to mention those who did not fight (especially among the employees) or who chose to leave Lip (p. 362, for instance). Maybe Reid could have focused more on the conservative workers, and Lip's opponents, especially in Besançon. Moreover, the town itself and its inhabitants are missing, as are other factories, like Rhodiacéta, where another important working-class experience developed in 1967–1968.

The main interest of the book is in proving how "the left Catholic culture could be more radical than the efforts organized by the Communists" (p. 12). Reid underlines the crucial role of Catholic education within such traditional organizations as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (Young Christian Workers) and the Catholic network (especially among priests) that helped the Lip workers. This support contrasted sharply with the hostility from or the absence of traditional left-wing parties, especially communists. This is the most striking feature of the Lip experience: unlike the Scottish work-in on the Clydeside in 1971–1972, the first and the biggest work-in struggle in France occurred and developed without any communist support. As Reid explains, "it was a 1968-style movement dealing with what would become the central issue in France during the 1970s: unemployment" (p. 162).

Thanks to Reid's impressive book, the world can now learn more about the fuller context of this epic French working-class struggle.

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BROPHY, ENDA. *Language Put to Work. The Making of the Global Call Centre Workforce. [Dynamics of Virtual Work.]* Palgrave Macmillan, London [etc.] 2017. xii, 306 pp. € 117.69. (E-book: € 91.62).

In her new book *Language Put to Work*, communications scholar Edna Brophy distills five years of fieldwork and more than sixty first-hand interviews with the often-unseen but mission-critical digital laborers employed by a variety of different customer-service call centers in places as diverse as Canada, Ireland, Italy, and New Zealand to paint a vivid, first-hand picture of working conditions and worker resistance within this growing global industry. Students of the social relations of information infrastructures, the political economy of communication, and the organization of technical work will find much to learn here.