

BOOK REVIEWS

FREEMAN, JOSHUA B. BEHEMOTH. *A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York (NY) [etc.] 2018. xviii, 427 pp. Ill. \$27.95; £22.00.

It is an interesting time to write about factories. The once very popular industrial workplace has lost its charm for labour historians with the geographical and thematic broadening of the field. As theoretical interventions encompassing transnational dimensions brought forms of non-wage and non-industrial labour to the fore, labour historians have moved away from the industrial workplace. Just as the large Fordist factory ceased to be the political and cultural reference point for policymakers, employers, and organized labour, writing about factories has largely gone dormant.

Joshua B. Freeman's newly published book takes the giant factory as a vantage point to capture the political, economic, and cultural nexus that shaped the past three centuries. His central point of departure is "an exploration of the logic of production that led at some times and places to the intense concentration of manufacturing in massive, high-profile facilities and at other times and places to its dispersion and social invisibility" (p. xiv). His main argument is that the model of industrial "giantism" was kept alive through its re-emergence in new places with new factors of production and conditions of backwardness to be exploited, resulting in overlapping cycles of giant factory development spread across time and space. The selection of cases follows from this theoretical argument, while a long-term perspective allows the book to identify the major turning points of this re-emergence.

The book is arranged chronologically, and divided into seven chapters, each corresponding to a distinct stage in the history of industrial giantism. Reviewing the development of large factories from England in the eighteenth century to the American textile and steel industries in the nineteenth, the automobile industry in the early twentieth century, the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and the new socialist states after World War II, and, finally, the contemporary giant factories in Asia, the author manages to navigate skilfully between a fine chronological analysis and the identification of longer-term trends through a multiplicity of interesting case studies. The size of the giant factories is measured by the number of workers they employed – a natural criterion, Freeman notes, for a labour historian interested in the experiences of the workers.

Each chapter addresses a principal question through the historical details of a few factories. In the first chapter, Freeman revisits a widely debated topic: Why did the large factory reign over the century-long myriad arrangements of technology, scale of production, and business organization although there was no direct relation between mechanical innovation, social organization, and production scale? By citing a combination of factors, the chapter reads as a good summary of the rise of industrial capitalism in England.

But what happens when the giant factory re-emerges in a different environment? This is a question Freeman addresses twice in the book, first with regard to the emergence of the New England cotton mills following the template of the British cotton mills, and second with regard to the Soviet factories. In Chapter two, the question as to whether oppression

was inherent to the factory system or whether its nature changed with its environment is addressed through the juxtaposition of the coerced labour practices in early British cotton mills with the corporate paternalism of the American industrial workplaces.

With Chapter three, Freeman moves to the second half of the nineteenth century, the age of steel, when the size of the iron and steel factories surpassed that of textile factories. An analysis of the labour process, technological and technical developments, and capital concentration in the rising steel industry is presented along with the change in the popular imagery and representation of the industrial labourer. The literary and artistic expressions of iron and steel works also followed this imagery by portraying iron and steel factories as markers of national greatness and the advance of civilization.

Although factory design and architecture are covered in all chapters, they are especially strong themes in Chapter four, where Freeman does a good job of connecting physical layout to labour process and technological changes. The dramatic increase in scale, together with the assembly line, turned the factory into one huge, integrated machine the representations of which contributed to a strong public romance of industrial giantism in novels, factory paintings, photographs, and films.

What stands out in Chapter five is the portrayal of a very dynamic world of transfer of technology, design, and industrial expertise between the Soviet Union and the West. The question whether the outer context of state regime changed the internal relationships within the factory arises once again. Freeman answers, "A bit, but not too much" since the factory "proved remarkably impervious to its surroundings" (p. 224). Although this question implies an expectation of betterment of working conditions in socialism, the extent of the role played by the forced labour of the so-called special resettlers in the record-quick construction of the Stalin Magnitogorsk Metallurgic Complex points to the divergence in the opposite direction rather than the convergence of industrialization processes. Another divergence was that, at a time when American corporations moved away from ever-upping the scale of industrial enterprises towards smaller, dispersed factories, industrial giantism marched on in the Soviet Union and spread to Eastern Europe. Freeman explains this through the relationship between industrial concentration and labour conflict. However, in time, that relationship worked against the Soviet idea of rapid urban development through the operations of giant factories in the countryside, as seen in the Polish giant steel factory Nowa Huta's serving as a crucible for the Solidarity movement.

Although Freeman carefully avoids a nostalgic outlook on the giant factories of the past, the bleak picture he portrays of the Asian factories of today makes the previous examples look relatively more benign as the tone of celebration of industrial giantism present in the previous chapters wanes in this part of the book. The Asian giants, which employ more workers than many earlier giant factories did together, appear as places to hide from the public rather than as objects of national pride to exhibit. Why, then, the giant factory? Freeman returns to the question he raised earlier in the first chapter – this time through a skilful analysis of the current dynamics of capital accumulation. His explanation of the plight of capital and the rise of the merchants as the key player in the organization of manufacturing is based on carefully selected examples and a rather surprising reference to an 1892 book in which the economist Alfred Marshall described a large factory as "only several parallel smaller factories under one roof" (p. 290). After "one huge, integrated machine" like Fordist factories, the giant factory nowadays appears as a combination of relatively simple assembly lines without mechanical pacing of production, on which workers use simple hand tools. In line with this, the bland, boring, and repetitive structures

of these workplaces of hyper-giantism are far from the aesthetic awe; the nature of the products they produce has no connotation of progress, and their mostly female workers do not carry any heroic overtones associated with earlier large-scale projects.

The book thus comes to a conclusion while leaving behind a seemingly linear and complete history of the giant factory. But this closed-circuit narrative creates a certain element of unease. As with any history of this kind, nit-picking about what is covered at the expense of what is not would be unfair and small-minded. However, when all the major labour control mechanisms are explained through the internal dynamics of industrial giantism, the problem ceases to be a simple matter of omission. Let me explain.

Freeman recognizes the role of coercion and unfree labour in the rise of the factory system in his first two chapters. He recognizes that industrial giantism was bound at least in its origin to unfree forms of labour by citing the conscription of women and children from the workhouses as the primary source of labour for British cotton mills and the importance of slave labour as the source of raw material for the cotton industry. The recognition of unfree labour stops here, however. For example, the utilization of African-American forced labour in the large industries in the South, where, by the 1880s, as many as 10,000 African-American forced labourers were working is not cited, although “the resubjugation of black labor”, among other factors, was critical to the industrial success of large corporations such as US Steel.¹

The parts on scientific management are similar in that Freeman depicts the giant factory as the place of origin for the more systematic management of labour. “Systematic management”, writes Freeman, “grew out of a quest for internal corporate controls and increased productivity, a sweeping effort at reorganizing production” (p. 107). The emergence of piecework pay and Fredrick Taylor’s scientific management, he continues, was the result of industrial managerial attempts to overcome “soldiering” as the paramount obstacle to efficiency and profits (p. 127). He thus follows the mainstream historiographies of modern labour management that locate the emergence of modern labour management techniques in the factories.

Moving away from this internalist argument, recent scholarship has revealed earlier attempts at labour management methods from contexts of non-industrial and physically coerced labour.² In their ground-breaking study on the entanglement of racial and managerial knowledge, Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger begin with antebellum studies on managing slaves instead of the northern factory and powerfully illustrate the centrality of racial knowledge to industrial managerial knowledge.³ Interesting to note here is a quote Freeman takes from Marx in his depiction of discipline and punishment in giant Asian factories: “Punishments naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages,

1. D.A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York, 2008), p. 95.

2. For an overview of this literature and a quite striking example of the use of stopwatch and norm-determination techniques on a plantation in the 1830s, see M. van der Linden, “Unfree Labour: The Training-Ground for Modern Labour Management”, in *idem*, *Global Labour History: Two Essays* (Delhi, 2017).

3. Interestingly, they also note that the word “factories” was first used for the staging areas in West Africa for the slave trade and the production of cotton as raw material for the textile industry before it came to designate the mills of England and New England (p. 23). D.R. Roediger and E.D. Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (New York, 2012).

and the law-giving talent of the factory Lycurgus so arranges matters, that a violation of his laws is, if possible, more profitable to him than the keeping of them" (p. 303). Had Freeman started the quote from the sentence immediately preceding this one, the connection between the management of work under slavery and in the factory would have become obvious: "The place of the slave-driver's lash is taken by the overlooker's book of penalties."⁴

Freeman's focus on the large factories implies that industrial giantism created all major developments in labour control mechanisms and has acted as the major *tour de force* of capitalism since the eighteenth century. The underlying argument that the giant factories and the developments they instigated were a product of Western capitalism associated with freedom leaves the reader with an oft-repeated narrative of a more or less straightforward progress of industrial capitalism. It is sad to see that Freeman misses the valuable opportunity to show how industrial giantism rose on, got inspired by, and reproduced the various existing forms and knowledge of labour control developed outside industrial giantism.

Despite these critical comments, this book deserves the attention of the scholarly community and also of the general reader with an interest in the history of capitalism. As Freeman incorporates many colourful examples and writes eloquently but without pretence, undergraduate as well as graduate students will enjoy this book, which could easily be incorporated into a variety of courses. For the scholarly community, the most compelling aspect of the book is Freeman's success in going beyond what he calls a "narrow exercise in the study of architecture, technology, or industrial relations" and writing an inspiring history of the giant factory that brings labour history closer to other disciplines, such as design and architecture, history of migration, science and technology, cultural history, urban history, state politics, and political economy. Freeman has successfully proven the potential of the factory as a fruitful unit of analysis to delve into multiple important themes; a potential that should be further explored by labour historians. For this, and other reasons, the book deserves to be widely read and discussed.

Görkem Akgöz

re:work (IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History), Humboldt University
Georgenstr. 23, 10117 Berlin, Germany
E-mail: akgozgorkem@yahoo.com
doi:10.1017/S0020859019000191

DALY, JONATHAN. *Crime and Punishment in Russia. A Comparative History from Peter the Great to Vladimir Putin.* [The Bloomsbury History of Modern Russia Series.] Bloomsbury Publishing, London, New York 2018. xx, 236 pp. £19.99 (paperback), £11.87 (E-book).

The Russian criminal justice system frequently comes under international scrutiny for serving the repressive goals of the government instead of actually offering justice. The most recent of these cases of injustice on political grounds – the imprisonment of the

4. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (Berlin, 1990), p. 370.