

Joan Sangster. *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2010. Pp. 416. Paper. \$35.00.

In *Transforming Labour*, Joan Sangster, Professor of History and Women's Studies at Trent University, critically assesses the development of the relationship between women and paid labour in Canada during the post-war period. With over thirty years of research experience in labour history, Sangster applies her knowledge as well as primary materials such as reports, surveys, and papers to create a thorough representation of the lives of working women in Canada after the Second World War. Sangster offers an in-depth analysis on a previously overlooked topic within the post-war historiography of Canada and ultimately deepens our understanding of women's experiences within labour history.

Sangster begins by outlining the difficulties that women faced after the conclusion of the war; as not only was it a "confusing time for what the identity of a woman should be" but also her role within workforce. World War II saw women take a prominent role in the workforce of Canada, as well as other key positions in the army or as nurses. These shifting boundaries were particularly evident for married mothers, who sought to return to work despite the impact of popular culture emphasizing the critical importance of stay-at-home mothers. Statistical data and survey reports displaced this "norm" and provide insight into the life experiences of Canadian women and how they changed. Following this, a chronological evaluation of the historiography highlights interpretive differences that have occurred over time as Sangster seeks to build on the revisionist strain that surrounds gender history.

Another strand that is apparent throughout *Transforming Labour* is Sangster's ability to address the realities Canadian women faced in the workplace as well as how daily struggles against discrimination were still prominent even after the Second World War. The development of a "sexual division of labour" restricted women to 'second tier' jobs, which often had unions that had limited power to make any real difference. Sangster uses the case study of Dupuis Frères, a department store in Montreal, to

show how poor working conditions existed and ultimately led to extreme consequences with a strike in 1952 in order to force working women of the store to receive better terms of employment. This was especially evident with the store's in-house magazine *Le Duprex* that attempted to create a paternalist workplace.

Sangster switches towards addressing intersectionality and discusses how the transformation of post-war labour differed for women who belonged to an ethnic minority group within Canada. The case study of the Dionne girls, a "group of displaced" European immigrants who had arrived in Canada to escape the drastic consequences of warfare as a result of Canadian MP Ludger Dionne, perfectly exemplifies this argument. Sangster successfully debates the severe problems that existed between immigration and labour, as Dionne girls were classed as unfree immigrants and forced by contract to an employer. Employers took advantage of the situation that many refugees found themselves in by restricting their liberties as well as giving them significantly lower wages. As a result, some companies were able to make considerable economic gains solely through the exploitation of ethnic minorities within their labour force.

Overall, the work of Sangster is extremely impressive. Her expertise surrounding gender and labour history allows the book to comprehensively cross-examine secondary material which enables the reader to understand how the perceptions of women within the workforce adapted and evolved over time. As a result, *Transforming Labour* succeeds in documenting the key issues and misconceptions that have existed, especially within the historiography of gendered labour. With the effective use of primary sources and case studies, Sangster supports these arguments to show the transformation of labour in Canada after the Second World War. The structure of the monograph allows the reader to fully immerse themselves into the lives and experiences of these Canadian women. This book would be useful to historians that want to gain a critical understanding of the historiography surrounding gender history in Canada.

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