

luncheon meeting, at which Mark Lapitsky, a senior lecturer in the Institute of International Labor Studies, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, spoke about "Soviet Historiography of the American Labor Movement in the 1980s." Lapitsky has written biographies of "Big Bill" Haywood and Daniel DeLeon and is now at work on a biography of Walter Reuther. In his speech, Lapitsky lamented the hidebound and doctrinaire treatment of the American labor movement by Russian scholars and looked forward now to a more sophisticated recognition of the complexity and diversity of the American scene by a freer and younger generation of Soviet historians. On that very hopeful note, the conference ended.

## Colloque "Techniques et figures du social d'une guerre à l'autre"

*Anson Rabinbach*  
Cooper Union

The futuristic Cité des sciences et de l'industrie in Paris, a perfect example of "French modern," was the appropriate setting for this interdisciplinary colloquium on new forms of social intervention and social rationalization between the world wars. Held October 12–14, 1989, and organized by the Cité's Centre de recherche en histoire des sciences et des techniques, and by the Musée Social, the conference theme was chosen to emphasize an aspect of modernity frequently ignored by social and intellectual historians: the diverse social practices which became increasingly subject to professionalization and academic discipline and expertise in the interwar period. The organizing concept, *techniques sociales* spanned a wide spectrum of social practices and interventions: state social services, public welfare, social hygiene, industrial psychology, industrial management, pediatric and social medicine, leisure, youth services, scouting, public housing, and a number of other public and private (including religious) initiatives.

Such diversity naturally provoked concern that the conference was either burdened with too broad a theme, or, conversely, that its scope was too narrow to encompass other social techniques such as marketing or advertising, which also became prominent in that era. The difficulty of bringing coherence to *techniques sociales* was capably addressed by the conference organizer, Yves Cohen, a historian of French industrial engineering. In his opening paper on "Techniques, technologies, et ingeniures sociales," he pointed out that in France the interwar period "was one which privileged the formation of industrial and social techniques" and that marked out a domain of thought and action guided by a common set of values and ideals, which can be termed "technical" in the broadest sense. Its watchwords were regularity, efficiency, and professional qualification.

Though the professionalization of social work generally began around 1900, the interwar period saw “decisive advances” in the education, organization, and supervision of a wide variety of social work professionals. This advance can be most readily seen in the proliferation of educational institutions, manuals, and professional conferences, and in the codification of procedures for social investigators and caseworkers. In industry, the spread of “scientific management” with its combination of American Taylorist methods of work organization and European wage systems and moralizing ideologies (Fayolism and Le Playism were the focus of several papers) gave engineers a new and central role in the enterprise. Automobile firms like Citroën established social service departments, and Michelin even provided workers with factory housing and child-care services designed in accordance with the familialist ideology of André Michelin (who, as Georges Ribeill noted in his excellent paper on the firm’s social program, even awarded a *prix Michelin de la natalité* for particularly fecund women employees). As Cohen aptly noted, the obsession with *techniques sociales* was not merely restricted to experts or professional social workers but was a significant component of the general faith in progress, technocracy, and state planning among a wide spectrum of French intellectuals during this period.

The colloquium can be commended for bringing together the work of historians and sociologists concerned with very different spheres of social action. The concept of *techniques sociales* encompasses more than a technical and professional approach to social concerns. It also emphasizes the universalizing model of the natural sciences and the role of the state in establishing social norms and ideal social arrangements. The diversity of themes, the monographic character of many of the papers, and the general lack of comparative perspective often sacrificed coherence to coverage. The connections within “the universe of social services, industry, and education” was largely left to the imagination of the audience. Exceptions were Suzanna Magri’s and Christian Topalov’s paper on “Nouveaux espaces résidentiels populaires, formes et gestion: étude comparative France–Etats-Unis,” and Patrizia Dogliani’s “Techniques sociales des loisirs”; these dealt with public housing and leisure in several national contexts. More attention by participants to the synthetic possibilities of the organizing concept—as Cohen himself attempted—might have brought greater focus to the discussion. Most papers were studies of professional organizations or of prominent figures in social services, done in the traditional manner, with few attempting to work within the broader political and epistemological framework encouraged by the colloquium’s suggestive theme. Lion Murard’s and Patrick Zylberman’s study of tuberculosis, “La philanthropie entre archaïsme et modernité,” while focused on an earlier period, was especially notable for its engagement with the problem of how the formation and dissemination of medical categories simultaneously produced novel social and political techniques and strategies. The few points of real controversy centered on the role of progressive Catholic social services under the Vichy regime, and on the function of the foreman in the industrial enterprise.

Aimée Moutet's study of "Problèmes humains de la rationalisation et action ouvrière sous le gouvernement de Front populaire 1936–1938" was particularly memorable for placing the issue of factory personnel management in the context of economic crisis, industrial militancy (the strikes of 1936), and stricter surveillance of work time and productivity.

Finally, the conference should be praised for its own *technique sociale*, a strict adherence to the humane organizational principle of distributing the numerous and lengthy papers to all participants well in advance, and for restricting presentations to fifteen-minute summaries. This allowed for sufficient discussion of the individual papers, and for a significant reduction of the fatigue quotient of the audience.

## Western Society for French History

*W. Scott Haine*

The American University

The October 1989 meeting of the Western Society for French History included two sessions and several individual papers on working-class history, covering such diverse subjects as immigration, neighborhood solidarities, municipal socialism, women's work, and popular culture.

On the thirtieth anniversary of its publication, Barrie M. Ratcliffe (Université Laval), offered a systematic critique of Louis Chevalier's classic in his essay "Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle? The Chevalier Thesis Reexamined." While recognizing the richness of Chevalier's images, especially in his references to the "pathological" city and his attempt to evoke the "lived experience" of urban life, Ratcliffe argued that the data does not support the argument. The direct connection that Chevalier drew between immigration and crime has been seriously questioned for a number of years. The theory of urban alienation in a "strange" environment has been undermined by urban historians of Paris and other cities who have shown that, even in poverty, urbanites find ways to forge solidarities. The fundamental question Ratcliffe's critique raises is, What dominant metaphor can replace "laboring classes and dangerous classes?"

Christine Piette (Université Laval) in her "Immigration et pauvreté à Paris pendant le première moitié du XIXe siècle" used a hitherto underutilized source, the admission registers to Parisian hospitals, to argue that the link between immigration and poverty was very strong. She found that a very high proportion of hospitalized Parisians (76 percent in 1820 and 80 percent in 1850) were born outside of Paris. Piette admitted that these figures are almost certainly an overrepresentation — hospitals in this era still tended to be the preserve of the lower