

information limited, their press credentials could be revoked, or they could even be charged under military law. The case study of Normandy is an interesting one in that it focuses on the coverage of three negative cases – the killing of Canadian prisoners of war, the massacre of Black Watch at Verrières Ridge, and instances of friendly fire. While the “tendency to obscure and sanitize unpleasant issues continued...” Balzar notes that the Canadian government “demonstrated considerably more caution than did the army about releasing news of two of these incidents” (146). While not wanting to project on a book something the author had not intended to cover, I think this interaction between the Canadian political and military realms could have been developed a bit more throughout.

The book suffers from some of the common ailments when transforming a Ph.D. dissertation into a book: with the choice of organization the chronology section feels a bit stifled because information is being held back for the case studies. It sounds a bit “thesis-ish” in places, and when talking about Verrières Ridge, it seems written for the specialist, especially when referring to the historiography on *The Valour and the Horror* which is complex and difficult to distill. Nonetheless, Balzar should be commended for providing a useful addition to the historical literature, if perhaps a little bit too academic in its tone for the average reader.

Michael K. Carroll
Grant MacEwan University

Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

In *Transforming Labour*, Joan Sangster has provided an expansive and impressive inquiry into the experience of working women in Canada in the decades that followed the Second World War. This key period, which saw women move into the paid labour force in record numbers, has been the purview of public and scholarly conjecture rather than detailed archival research—until Sangster’s book.

Ambitious in temporal and geographic scope, the overriding strength of *Transforming Labour* is the extent of Sangster’s primary research, as she mines dozens of archival collections to create a remarkably broad yet detailed picture of working women’s experiences in postwar Canada. This substantial empirical research is fused with skilful analysis that engages a wide body of theoretical literature, in history as well as sociology, cultural studies, law and society, and gender studies. The product is an important and overdue contribution to the historiography of modern Canada and diverse historical fields: women’s and gender history; labour and working-class history; and social, cultural, and political history.

Sangster opens the book with an exploration of the contradictory representation confronting working women in postwar Canada—inducement to wage labour alongside enduring cultural imagery tying femininity to domesticity and the preservation of “the nuclear, hetero-normative family.” According to Sangster, the “‘Leave It to Beaver’ culture of happy patriarchal families and female domesticity was never as hegemonic as popular culture suggested...” (17).

Popular images of women and gender in mass circulation magazines are examined in parallel to depictions of working-class women in diverse occupational settings, in trade-union publications as well as union beauty pageants. These events reflected labour’s postwar “search for respectability” and “largely reproduced the idealization of white, European beauty” (43-44).

Turning to detailed case studies, Sangster illuminates diverse historical themes as revealed through the experiences of distinct groups of workers: immigrant women workers at the Dionne textile mill in Quebec; retail clerks at Montreal’s Dupuis Frères department store; telephone operators at the Bell Telephone company; and Aboriginal sugar-beet pickers in the Prairies. A chapter on the Cold War provides original material on anti-communism in unions of fur, electrical, and textile workers, which included many women in their ranks. According to Sangster, “Communism apparently masculinized women and feminized men” (103).

The scope and breadth of *Transforming Labour* is the book’s greatest strength and greatest weakness. In seeking to harness the diverse experiences of working women across Canada in the postwar decades, and in linking expansive empirical research to theory, Sangster constructs prose that is at times quite dense. In places the work seems to privilege analysis over narrative, providing a synthesis of examples that lack firm grounding in place and time. Nonetheless, Sangster’s prose includes rich and effective description – notably in her engaging case studies of the Dionne, Dupuis Frères, packing house, and Bell workers.

Several chapters stand out for their original contribution to the field of labour and working-class history generally, including a path-breaking chapter on the grievance and arbitration procedures that emerged as a hallmark of the Wagner model of collective bargaining in Canada. Grievances revealed the “tensions, disputes, discipline, minor rebellions, and resistance that characterized women’s daily wage labour” (146), while also revealing the gendered dimension of industrial legality.

Tying a perceptive analysis of social inequality to the political economy of postwar Canada, Sangster persuasively argues that “contingent, marginalized labour ... was part and parcel of the process of capital accumulation that shaped the Fordist accord” (74). Indeed, “more women workers stood outside the virtuous circle of Fordism than within it” (276).

Among the most innovative material in the book is Sangster's challenging but essential chapter on Aboriginal women workers in the Prairies (prefaced with the honest admission: "Where are the women workers?" [205]). Sangster opens with a useful materialistic reading of colonialism before exploring how indigenous women experienced "social disruptions" tied to "state interventions of a decidedly paternalist nature," which were aimed at "managing, re-orienting, and reforming Aboriginal labour" (229). From the decline of hunting and trapping at mid-century to a discussion of informal forms of women's labour in the family economy, Sangster examines state policies that were shaped by the often contradictory goals of assimilating, "improving," and "civilizing" Aboriginal women—from migration schemes for sugar-beet workers to programs aimed at domestic and clerical work.

The final chapter provides an important analysis of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, moving from the preceding emphasis on the workplace to the decidedly political space of the Pearson-appointed Commission of the late 1960s. In this effective bookend to the work, Sangster examines the Commission's structure, proceedings, and contradictions through the lens of class, discussing the implications of excluding a labour-aligned commissioner and the distinct contributions of unions, "traditional" women, and individual women workers to the cross-Canada discussion on women's place in the labour force and society.

Challenging the prevailing historiography on the women's movement, Sangster identifies "streams" rather than "waves" in Canadian feminism: "Throughout the twentieth century, different streams (rather than waves) of women's equality-seeking organizing waxed and waned, often promoting divergent visions of women's equality" (235). While waves imply a homogenous movement, streams allow space for class and racial distinctions that overlap in space and time, complicating the picture of efforts toward women's equality.

This is the essence of Sangster's project (in *Transforming Labour* as well as in other works): "to reconstruct a new historical materialism with the transformative insights of feminism, to re-inscribe the 'social' in our explorations of women's lives in this post-, postmodernist academic era" (274).

This potentially hazardous intellectual path—linking Marxism and feminism, bridging political economy and culture, seeking continuity in forms of struggle for emancipation from class and gender exploitation, breathing political commitment into otherwise cautious scholarly work—seems to be rare and important in this "post-, postmodern academic era." Kudos to Joan Sangster for her exemplary research and for challenging us to pursue this path.

Benjamin Isitt
University of Victoria