

portrayed him as the initiator, his mother's stories were about suffering events she had no ability to control. She too had to change names. When she came to Germany during the war and was enrolled as a citizen, the Germans considered her name, Sara, too Jewish, and she took the name Margarethe.

This book, despite its title, tells the story of two people who lived through the war years, and later constructed their identities through the stories they told. The book is, however, much more than a biography. It implies that we all construct who we are by our memories and our stories. In a real sense, we are all constructed.

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Janis Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War Manitoba*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. x + 249. Softcover, \$27.95.

Mennonite-owned manufacturing companies loom large within Manitoba's economy. The three companies studied by Janis Thiessen – Friesen Printers in Altona, Loewen Windows in Steinbach, and Palliser Furniture in Winnipeg – employed between them at least 6600 workers in 2003. Yet, in one of Canada's most heavily unionized provinces, where a series of New Democratic Party (NDP) governments have made it easier for workers to unionize than almost anywhere else in the country, these three firms have never been unionized. So, what are relations like between these Mennonite capitalists and their mainly Mennonite work force? This is the key question that Thiessen explores in her finely nuanced study of the ways in which Mennonites experience social class relations.

Thiessen observes the importance of religious belief for Mennonites and the ways in which it affects both discourses and practices of labour relations. She is careful to demonstrate that, despite efforts by Mennonite elites to unite members of the faith behind conservative, supposedly faith-based values that denigrate trade unionism as contrary to the values of Christian brotherhood, most urban working-class Mennonites supported the NDP in the Schreyer years and beyond. Rural Mennonites, including members of the working class, proved more conservative but sometimes demonstrated some restiveness with employer paternalism.

Thiessen outlines the efforts made by the major Mennonite employers to persuade their workers not to unionize, particular after

union drives at Friesen Printers in 1972 and Palliser Furniture in 1996. They introduced profit-sharing plans and employee share ownership, winning praise from the Winnipeg media for their supposed enlightened, spiritually-based views. But Thiessen's close examination of these practices suggests that these employers were no less exploitative than non-Mennonite capitalists. Indeed, they placed no workers on their boards of directors and gave workers no opportunity to determine independently whether the owners were living up to their promises to share profits. Worse, "when their profit share declined because of circumstances beyond their control (a rising Canadian dollar, for example), shop-floor workers were punished financially to a degree that management and owners rarely were." (159)

The underlying reality of Mennonite owners' relations with their workers was that they were no more prepared than any other owners of capital to share their wealth. They were quick to point to scriptures to defend their view that efforts to view the world in terms of labour and capital, rich and poor, created an adversarial division that Jesus would reject. They were also relatively careful to hide their wealth to some degree rather than flaunt it and to speak modestly of themselves and their holdings. But that was generally a thin disguise for a lack of concern about glaring income inequalities between themselves and their workers.

Certainly some Mennonite workers accepted the interpretation of scriptures that employers and many church leaders propagated that made membership in trade unions suspect, if not completely immoral, even in the period after the Mennonite Church ended its formal opposition to unions. Some who worked for non-Mennonite firms that were unionized fought unsuccessfully in the courts to be excused on religious grounds from having to pay union dues; the courts ruled that all who benefited from the activities of a union in their workplace were required to pay dues whether or not they chose to associate directly with the union.

But Thiessen does not take the rhetoric of the most successful Mennonite businesspeople at face value. She demonstrates that while they used phraseology that fit with Mennonite scriptures, their beliefs were completely compatible with those of non-Mennonite corporate figures who were more likely to extol greed and the acquisition of goods and money. Similarly, over time, working people whose faith tradition was Mennonite but who became tired of employers and church officials telling them to repel trade union organizers, began to read scriptures in ways that made them more than compatible with trade unions and with social justice views more generally. The result was a growing rift within the Mennonite faith between free marketeers and social justice advocates, both of whom used an understanding of Mennonite

teachings about peaceful relations among people to justify economic views that, in both cases, were compatible with either the conservative or progressive views of non-Mennonites.

Mennonite studies rarely delve into social class relations, or when they do, they imply that religion trumped class. Janis Thiessen demonstrates, with many examples, that in fact material needs and spiritual views were often not clearly in sync and that a degree of hypocrisy was common on the part of wealthy, anti-labour owners as they invoked scripture in efforts to change the subject from concrete grievances raised by their workers. This book and this author make an important contribution by lifting the veil of pretend consensus among Mennonites regarding desirable social values on this earth, and beginning a conversation about how Mennonite employers treat their workers and whether trade unions are not needed to protect the latter from the former.

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Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 340. Softcover.

Horse and buggy Mennonites maneuvering through dirt jungle roads of southern Mexico, Belize and Bolivia; Old Colony men dressed in overalls selling cheese in the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza; a bakery in the Guatemalan mountain city of Quetzaltenango selling *Zwiebach* with Low German-speaking cashiers. These are my images of Mennonites from Canada who settled throughout Latin America during the twentieth century and in his latest work Royden Loewen sets out to provide the historic context of such images. In this first attempt to map this hemispheric event, Loewen does not present a comprehensive history of this transnational story but rather highlights some of its pivotal moments over a ninety year period. Utilizing personal travel diaries, Mennonite archives, oral stories, and secular and Mennonite newspapers, Loewen recounts the departure of thousands of Old Colony and other conservative Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan following their modification of aspects of the 1873 *Privilegium*. Following a traditional historical narrative, Loewen reveals the complex internal factors inherent within their movements, creating a socio-political geography as he charts their migrations to Mexico, Paraguay, Belize, Bolivia, Argentina, and back north to Canada and the United States.