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Moral aspirations cannot always overcome self-interested or immoral tendencies. As Jesus of Nazareth told Simon Peter, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Much like humans everywhere in all places, nineteenth century French workers found their actual choices and actions did not always live up to their ideals. Jacques Ranciere, in his The Nights of Labor, strongly sympathizes with the cause of French workers as they opposed capitalism, but he describes their frequent failures to live up to the enlightened, unselfish, work-glorifying code of values they upheld.

Ranciere's work itself is written in a decidedly unconventional form. It definitely draws upon recent post-modernist theories on literature, and represents the influence of the latter upon historiography. His skepticism about a positivistic historiography is sounded on p. 19: "For it is in the moments when the real world wavers and seems to reel into mere appearance, more than in the slow accumulation of day-to-day experiences, that it becomes possible to form a judgment about the world." His notes are sparse, and his literary style is rather wandering and long-winded, which takes time getting used to. For example, after describing the depressing conditions of workers in the 1846-48 recession (p. 357-360), which encouraged people to create the Icarian commune, he gives the disillusioning failure of the community as described in a Parisian legal document before going on to give an account of what happened at the commune historically (p. 368). Certainly E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class has a much more clear, direct, easy-to-follow narrative by comparison.

Repeatedly, Ranciere champions the cause of nineteenth century French workers (his account focuses largely on the 1830-60 period), and believes them to be exploited harshly by a selfish, egotistical capitalist economic system. If you dislike seeing frequent value judgments in a work of history, it is not advisable to turn to Ranciere first (for example, p. 305).  $\wedge$  The capitalist order keeps workers from developing their full potentials (p. 92), it subjugates them by consumption (p. 84), it makes workers hire out their bodies, who try to keep this from

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alienating them (p. 76). The body is nourished at lunch "so that it can continue an activity that has no purpose but its nourishment" (p. 61). Producer co-ops allow workers to be "liberated from exploitation by a master" (p. 306). And what is the source of all the workers' miseries? "This convergence itself pinpoints well enough the one and only source of all social ills: the fundamental ill that economics calls competition and morality calls egotism" (p. 69).

However, this work is not just a mere anti-capitalist diatribe. Ranciere repeatedly shows workers as being co-opted into the system, as desiring to become bourgeois themselves, as disliking their work intrinsically, or succumbing to their own egotism. The community of Icarus failed largely due to workers involved having only half-hearted commitments to the commune, illustrated by the jeweler who rushed back to a business that he had left behind in France due to the outbreak of the 1848 revolution (p. 364). Workers got ensnared by dichotomies that were hard to escape completely, such as the Icarians who condemned idleness as selfish, wanting people to be rewarded according to how hard they worked, while other Icarians condemned this as selfish since it did not reward people according to their needs, and threatened to set up a "new aristocracy of bureaucrats and bourgeoisie" (p. 384). Ranciere's discussion of the failures of producer co-ops in the 1848-52 period gives examples of workers making profits off their helpers (p. 342), which had managers determined to rip-off workers or the government that financed the co-op (p. 336-337), or featured the disillusioned outlook of Corbon, formerly a great champion of the producer co-ops, who now says <sup>workers</sup> will always dislike their work, and are not ones to stay motivated in seeking liberation from capitalists (p. 345-348). Ranciere maintains workers' plans to reform society go awry because the workers themselves are not reformed morally enough for their ideals to work (p. 127, 369).

Hence, Ranciere gives much for labor historians to rethink, in that while the workers' cause may be noble, the workers themselves often were not.

*is this a term he uses?*

*This is why I question "co-optation" Ranciere.*