

Review

Jeppe Tønsberg: *Brede Klædefabrik. I.C. Modeweg & Søn A/S 1810-1956. Den danske klædeindustri i international belysning* (Brede Cloth Mill. I.C. Modeweg & Son Ltd. 1810-1956: The Danish Cloth Industry in an International Context). 256 p., ill., with an English summary. Erhvervsarkivets Forskningsfond, Århus 2004. ISBN 87-89386-744.

By Lars K. Christensen

During its 146 years of existence, the cloth mill of I.C. Modeweg & Son was one of the largest in Denmark. Founded in Copenhagen in 1810 it was relocated to Brede, in a rural area along the Mill River in North Zealand, in 1831. Known as Brede cloth mill, the factory grew steadily, and became the centre of a small community, including workers dwellings, kindergarten, school, grocery and canteen. At periods, the cloth mill employed more than 500 persons. However, as several other Danish textile companies, Brede cloth mill was unable to compete in the more liberal economy following the second world war, and was closed down in 1956.

The present book is a revised version of a dissertation, for which the author was awarded the PhD at the University of Copenhagen. The first part of the book is a detailed history of the factory, with emphasis on technological change. Developments at Brede cloth mill are compared to other Danish cloth mills, in order to determine what is typical for the industry, and to what extent Brede is a special case. Generally, Brede is described as a technological fore-runner in a Danish context, but typical in the sense, that most other factories seemed to follow the same path, if sometimes in a slower pace. In opposition to Kristine Bruland who has argued, based on the Norwegian example, that Britain was the main provider of technology for the European textile industry, Tønsberg demonstrates how German machinery became dominant in the Danish cloth industry from around 1870.

The second part of the book is dedicated to Brede as a manufacturing community. Especially the development of workers dwellings is described in great detail. Since there are quite few such communities elsewhere in Denmark, it is clearly outstanding in a national context. However, taking the comparison beyond national borders, to such well-known European examples as Saltaire in England and the different "Werksiedlungen" established by Alfred Krupp in Germany, the author rightly remarks that in this context Brede is not insignificant but also not remarkable.

Brede cloth mill is often presented as a prototypical example of industrial paternalism in Denmark around the later 19th and early 20th century, and paternalism is the issue in the last part of the book. Based on an overview of international literature on the subject, Tønsberg discusses the management strategies of I.C. Modeweg & Son, describes the life in the manufacturing community and compares the company to other Danish cloth mills. According to Tønsberg, industrial paternalism should not be explained as a tradition, left over from an earlier period. On the contrary, the paternalism of the late 19th century is an answer to a contemporary problem: the rise of the socialist labour movement. In this respect the author is in

concurrency with another recent study, namely that of Burmeister & Wain shipyard by Niels Jul Nielsen. However, Tønsberg underlines that contrary to other cases, paternalism was in effect at Brede well into the 20th century. It coexisted along with trade unions, and at least for this period it cannot be explained mainly as a counter-measure against the labour movement. Instead, the author argues, this is an example of another important aspect of paternalism: the quest to recruit and maintain a loyal workforce.

Considering how the author explains industrial paternalism in general, the labour movement plays a strikingly insignificant role in the study. Throughout most of the study, labour is considered as a resource for production, which has to be managed – not as group with its own agendas and aspirations. There is a very short account of how and when a trade union was formed. But there is almost no analysis of the effects trade unionism had on the management-labour relationship in production or on life in the community in general. Furthermore, the establishment of modern industrial relations based on industry-wide collective bargaining, that took place very early in Denmark, was of course setting the premises also for individual factory management. Already from the late 19th century, a national agreement stipulated conditions for introducing new technology, such as more loom systems in the textile industry. It would have been fruitful, if this had been taken into account by the author, in the overall discussion of technological change in the cloth industry.

Apart from this weakness, the present book represents a very thorough study of Brede cloth mill, based on a large source material. It is carried out with great attention to detail. In the same time, it has a broad scope due to the comparisons made with both other Danish cloth mills as well as European manufacturing communities. It should be mandatory reading for anyone with an interest in Danish textile industry, but it will also be relevant for those with a general interest in issues such as industrial paternalism.

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