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After the Strike: A Century of Labor Struggle at Pullman

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two countries—an unexpected finding that will likely inspire further investigation by other researchers.

In a collection of this breadth, it is difficult to tease out universals across the countries studied, but some do exist. Displacement disproportionately affects men and lesser-skilled workers in all countries, and in all the countries studied in the volume except Japan, the incidence of displacement declines with rising job tenure. Japan is a notable exception, with older and more tenured workers at greater risk of layoff than younger workers. Women and the lesser-skilled experience more joblessness following displacement than do other groups, with the lesser-skilled and particularly the high-tenure lesser-skilled facing new job alternative wages that may not compare favorably to their unemployment insurance benefits (at least over the period of benefit eligibility). In this vein, another universal is the rise of earnings losses with job tenure. Perhaps the commonality that is most striking, given the wide institutional variation across countries, is a purely numerical one: in all ten countries, about 4–5% of employed workers are displaced each year.

This volume further strengthens the already important role of the W.E. Upjohn Institute in organizing and publishing the highest-quality book-length studies of worker displacement and adjustment policies. Interested readers now need a long bookshelf for these studies. *Losing Work, Moving On* will be of interest not only to scholars studying displacement, but to any economist or social scientist interested in labor market dynamics.

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History

After the Strike: A Century of Labor Struggle at Pullman. By Susan Eleanor Hirsch. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. x, 292 pp. ISBN 0-252-02791-4, $44.95 (cloth).

This well-researched and concisely written volume offers one sort of narrative rarely encountered in current labor history scholarship: a sustained account of changing labor relations at an important U.S. corporation over the span of decades. With great care, Susan Hirsch probes shifting labor dynamics at the Pullman Company from the late nineteenth century through the post–World War II years. In the process, she sheds light on many of the difficulties that unions have faced in twentieth-century America.

As Hirsch makes clear in this volume, the Pullman Company provides an excellent subject for this sort of long-range study. Labor relations at Pullman played a critical role at two important junctures in U.S. labor history. The first was an 1894 strike by Pullman's car-building employees that sparked the famous Pullman Boycott. That conflict destroyed the nascent American Railway Union, landed its charismatic president, Eugene V. Debs, in prison, and, along with the Homestead steel strike of 1892, signaled the rise of the open shop era. The second juncture came in 1937, when the company finally gave in after years of struggle and signed a contract with its black service workers' union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), led by the gifted A. Philip Randolph.

In-between these two major turning points, the Pullman Company employed a wide range of tools to retain a loyal and flexible work force. From the 1880s through the 1950s, the common thread of labor relations at Pullman was management's ceaseless drive to exclude or weaken unions and maintain the greatest flexibility in the deployment of its labor force. The Pullman Company pursued these goals with different strategies over time. By the 1880s Pullman had already perfected the tactic of the "runaway shop" by relocating car repair shops from strong union cities like Elmira, New York, to areas where unions were less well entrenched and labor was cheaper, such as Wilmington, Delaware. Pullman also famously built a model company town in Chicago in the 1880s and pursued what Hirsch calls an "environmental approach"—an effort to "create the perfect environment for producing unorganized skilled workers" (17).

When the bloody 1894 conflict heaped discredit on the company town approach, the Pullman Company embarked on a two-pronged labor strategy in subsequent years. First, the company developed and expanded on a wide range of corporate welfare programs offering educational, health, pension, and insurance benefits. Second, it developed bureaucratic methods of internal labor market organization and control, offering complex bonus systems that were linked, in its car building shops, to the introduction of scientific management techniques.

These efforts worked well until the United States entered World War I. Then a host of new

federal labor agencies began to interfere with the freedom that employers had previously enjoyed in defining their labor relations policies. During the war Pullman shop workers, like railway shopmen around the country, took advantage of the government's protection and the favorable labor markets to flock into unions. But the Pullman shop workers' organization, System Federation #122, was defeated in the epic 1922 national railway shopmen's strike. This defeat did not restore a *status quo ante bellum,* as Hirsch points out. Rather, the World War I upheavals changed labor relations at Pullman by prompting its managers to hire larger numbers of black workers and move them into skilled positions in its shops even as it developed more sophisticated welfare and bureaucratic labor control policies.

Hirsch's available evidence indicates that unions might have been kept at bay for decades more had it not been for the combined impact of the Great Depression, the amended Railway Labor Act of 1926, and World War II. The Depression undermined the company's ability to keep its promises to its workers; federal legislation gave workers the power to challenge managerial power; and the war produced changes in the labor market and levels of government intervention that further weakened the company's ability to control its labor force. Even so, divisions of race, skill level, craft, and ideology frustrated efforts by Pullman workers to develop a unified labor movement during the 1930s and 1940s. So too did divisions within the house of labor, as the AFL's BSCP competed with the CIO's United Transport Service Employees of America. Through it all, Pullman's company unions, which were generally seen by employees as racially progressive, retained the loyalty of a significant portion the company's work force. Such factors help explain why the entire blue-collar Pullman work force was not finally organized until 1950. It was at precisely this moment, however, that the Pullman Company and passenger rail service in general began to decline. This is just one of many ironies that emerge from Hirsch's narrative.

Several features distinguish this book. One is Hirsch's special attention to race and gender dynamics within the Pullman work force. While the book does not shed much new light on the role of gender (as female workers remained confined to a narrow range of jobs for most of Pullman's history), it does tell us a good deal about the important role that race played at Pullman. Racial divisions in the company's labor force helped structure Pullman's non-union environment over decades. These divisions were so profound that they complicate Hirsch's effort to integrate the stories of sleeping car porters, dining car employees, car builders, and repairers into one cohesive narrative. To her credit, Hirsch succeeds quite well at this task.

Hirsch's account is similarly alive to the power of state intervention in shaping Pullman's labor relations at critical junctures and attentive to changes on the shop floors of Pullman's car-building facilities and in the composition and cohesiveness of their surrounding communities. All of these features help make this an uncommonly informative case study of changing labor relations at a trend-setting U.S. company. Historians of U.S. labor or business history will profit from reading it and pondering its many insights.

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Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century. By Robert J. Steinfeld. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xi, 329 pp. ISBN 0-521-77360-1, $59.95 (cloth); 0-521-77400-4, $22.95 (paper).

Historian Robert Steinfeld has set himself a daunting task. He proposes to "radically" revise the history of "free labor" by arguing that the traditional distinction between free and unfree labor is incoherent. "One of the basic assumptions underlying the traditional narrative of free labor," the author argues, "is that there are two fundamentally different kinds of labor, free and coerced. The two are thought to be opposites of one another, not different in degree but different in kind. The line that naturally divides the two is thought to fall at the point where physical violence or bodily confinement is used to extract labor" (pp. 10–11). In place of an either/or distinction, Steinfeld proposes a continuum on which the location of employment relations at any time is the product of "political, legal, social, or economic conditions" (319) as employers seek to control employees. In the course of making his larger point, Steinfeld reviews a great deal of evidence about the legal structure of employment relations in nineteenth-century Britain and America. Even for readers like me who are unconvinced by Steinfeld's basic thesis, the book serves as a valuable ac-