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Labor Bookshelf

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Labor Bookshelf

Abstract
[Excerpt] As everyday labor reporting has deteriorated, an alternative labor media has begun to emerge. The publication of these four books is evidence of this trend, as they exemplify the need for detailed and sophisticated analysis of labor's many problems and possibilities.

Keywords
labor reporting, media, press, journalism

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Inhuman Relations: Quality Circles & Anti-Unionism in American Industry
by Guillermo Grenier, 232 pp., 1988. (Temple University Press, Broad & Oxford Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19122.)

Choosing Sides: Unions & the Team Concept
by Mike Parker & Jane Slaughter, 230 pp., 1988. (Labor Notes Books, 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, Michigan, 48210.)

On Strike for Respect: The Yale Strike of 1984-85
by Toni Gilpin, Gary Isaac, Dan Letwin & Jack McKivigan, 94 pp., 1988. (Charles Kerr Publishing Co., 1740 W. Greenleaf Ave., Chicago, IL 60626.)

With Our Hands: The Story of Carpenters in Massachusetts
by Mark Erlich, 239 pp., 1986. (Temple University Press, Broad & Oxford Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19122.)

Once upon a time most newspapers and many magazines had labor reporters whose sole job it was to cover the various doings of America's unions. As the union percentage of the work force has declined, however, so has press coverage. Unless you're indicted or involved in a strike that disrupts the lives of a significant segment of "the public," don't expect to read about your activities in the major media.

What always seems to get coverage, however, is something called "the new industrial relations." Every week, it seems, some employer discovers the humanity of his employees, vows to be a nice guy from now on, and finds that this change of heart produces higher productivity and better profits. It is a heart-warming story, one which a lot of people would like to believe, but one which four recent books, in one form or another, show to be false.

As everyday labor reporting has deteriorated, an alternative labor media has begun to emerge. The publication of these four books is evidence of this trend, as they exemplify the need for detailed and sophisticated analysis of labor's many problems and possibilities.

Giving the lie to the media's tales of employer humanism is *Inhuman Relations: Quality Circles and Anti-Unionism in*

American Industry by Guillermo Grenier and *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept* by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter.

Grenier bases his study on his own experience as a research assistant for a quality of worklife program at Johnson & Johnson several years ago. As a graduate student in sociology then, Grenier was attracted by the humanistic rhetoric of the Johnson & Johnson program. But as he observed it in action, he came to understand that its purpose was to divide the workforce and resist a union organizing drive. With a sociologist's grasp of the complexity of human motivation and of organizational dynamics, Grenier reveals the dark psychology behind today's "human resource management."

Based on more than a dozen case studies, most of them from the auto industry, *Choosing Sides* reveals the beginnings of a major reorganization of work that may be coming soon to a workplace near you. Out go numerous job classifications and "rigid work rules" to be replaced by teamwork and what Parker and Slaughter call "management-by-stress." Many of the cases studied are precisely those which have attracted the most media coverage of the "new industrial relations"—the GM-Toyota joint venture in Fremont, California, the "Mazda Miracle" in Flat Rock, Michigan, and others. The autoworkers Parker and Slaughter study have seen the future, and it works—very hard and very fast.

If it's a heart-warming story you want, look to *On Strike for Respect: The Yale Strike of 1984-85*. This pocket-size book reads like a novel as it tells the story of how 2,500 clerical and technical workers at Yale University organized and then won a first contract with as tactically creative a strike as the labor movement has seen in this decade. This is the new workforce, majority female in white-collar jobs, and it was self-organized with assistance from a new generation of organizers committed to a patient process of one-on-one organizing and a democratic leadership structure that emphasizes the union as the *voice* of its members rather than a *service* to be purchased by dues.

Finally, Mark Erlich's *With Our Hands: The Story of Carpenters in Massachusetts*. Erlich wrote the lead article and was a guest editor for this issue of *Labor Research Review*. If you liked that article and this issue of the *Review*, you'll love *With Our Hands*. When I first picked it up, I was expecting a typical yeoman's local history, full of the names of the first person to do things I don't care about in places I don't know. Instead, by carefully recounting the history of one union in one place, Erlich tells a universal story of the dignity of labor and the continuity of its struggle, concluding with a searching contemporary analysis that asks "who

will build the future and how?"

Factory workers, clerical and technical workers, construction workers—each needs to understand how each other works and fights. For all the differences, it is one common struggle. And since you can't read about it in your newspaper or see it on TV, these books and those like them need to be read and studied and loaned out to friends.

—Jack Metzgar

Labor Film Shelf

Collision Course

Available for rent or purchase in video or 16mm film from: California Newsreel, 630 Natoma Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

The ongoing battle between Machinists District 100 and Eastern Airlines is one of the most scrutinized labor-management struggles in recent U.S. history. Publications ranging from *Labor Notes* to *The Harvard Business Review* have covered it, and *Labor Research Review #4* (now out of print) was devoted exclusively to it—the first major coverage of the subject.

The story is a microcosm of the crisis in American labor relations: Beset by poor management and deregulation, Eastern demanded massive concessions from its Machinists, flight attendants and pilots. District 100 President Charles Bryan emerged as the leading anti-concessions unionist and spearheaded an innovative deal in late 1983 giving the workers four seats on the board of directors, a 25% stake in the company, access to the books, and incentives to recover the concessions, in return for 18-22% wage cuts.

The next 18 months witnessed a remarkable flourishing of worker control at Eastern. Lower-level management was substantially reduced, the Machinists succeeded in recovering work that had been contracted out, and a new culture of "shopfloor entrepreneurship" took root, producing record profits for the carrier. But the deal collapsed in late 1985 when the airline's excessive debt and downward pressure on fares caused a new crisis. The non-labor members of the board reverted to hard-ball, demanding new 20% wage cuts or else Eastern would be sold to union-buster Frank Lorenzo's Texas Air. Standing by CEO and ex-astronaut Frank Borman, the board refused Bryan's offer to take the cut if Bor-