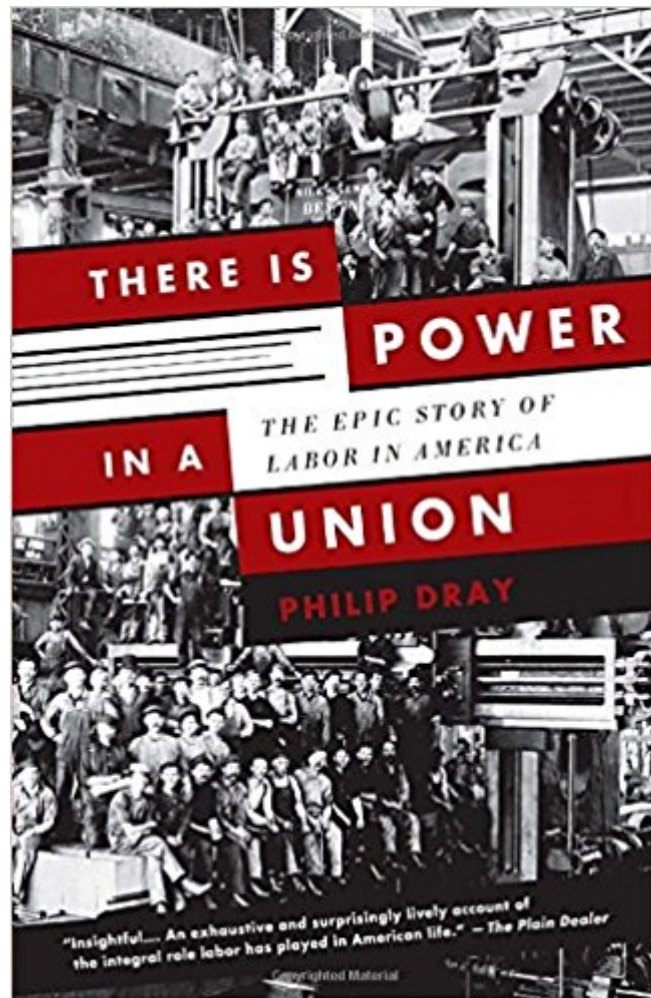


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There Is Power In A Union: The Epic Story Of Labor In America



Synopsis

From the nineteenth-century textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, to the triumph of unions in the twentieth century and their waning influence today, the contest between labor and capital for the American bounty has shaped our national experience. In this stirring new history, Philip Dray shows us the vital accomplishments of organized labor and illuminates its central role in our social, political, economic, and cultural evolution. His epic, character-driven narrative not only restores to our collective memory the indelible story of American labor, it also demonstrates the importance of the fight for fairness and economic democracy, and why that effort remains so urgent today.

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Customer Reviews

This stirring study situates one of the most subversive yet profoundly American of social movements at the heart of the nation's history. Historian Dray (*At the Hands of Persons Unknown*) follows organized labor from the struggles of early 19th-century female textile workers to the present-day retreat of organized labor following the failed 1981 air traffic controllers' strike. His episodic narrative, structured around major strikes, shows labor's heroic age as an era of naked class warfare: strikers died by the dozens in pitched battles with police, soldiers, and Pinkerton agents, and such charismatic organizers as Eugene Debs, Big Bill Haywood, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn braved prison and worse. The post-WWII period, by contrast, is a story of union conservatism, corruption scandals, and one rout after another at the hands of union-busting corporations abetted by government indifference. Organized labor's legacy, the author argues, is as much political as

economic; it challenges bedrock American values of self-reliance while championing civil liberties--IWW speakers faced mass arrest for their public square orating--and bringing rights to the workplace. Packed with vivid characters and dramatic scenes, Dray's fine recap of a neglected but vital tradition has much to say about labor's current straits. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Dray traces the history of American trade unionism from the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 1820s to unionism's decline in the 1980s and the current status of organized labor, which the author suggests "may have been reduced to a whisper of its former greatness." He explores such issues as what workers in different eras felt were their rights, what kind of future they envisioned for themselves and their families, the tension that erupts between skilled and unskilled labor, the impact of immigration, and the changing role of government in labor issues. The reader learns about recent labor concerns, including decades of globalization, which allows U.S. businesses to relocate production overseas using lower-cost workers and creative personnel practices such as massive hiring of temporary and part-time employees, who do not receive pension and health benefits. He notes that security of full-time employees is also threatened in our 24/7 workplace dominated by computers and e-mail, which he dubs "the electronic collar." A thought-provoking book. --Mary Whaley --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Philip Dray's powerful book lives up fully to its subtitle -The Epic Story of Labor In America. Few books move with the power and ease of "There is Power In A Union." Filled with unforgettable characters who claim monumental places in American history, Dray captures the personalities that carved the labor movement into the annals of American history. Bill Haywood, Mother Jones, Elizabeth Flynn, Albert Parsons, Joe Hill, Frank Little: some of them died, all of them made huge contributions to give American workers the benefits they have today. The unions may not be the powerful forces they once were in American history, but this book stirs up the ghosts and brings the historic battle between labor and capital back to life. I have read lots of history - few books stand up to the splendid work of this one. It is impossible to appreciate the anatomy of the labor fight in America without reading this book.

I felt compelled to read up on my labor history following the recent (and ongoing) anti-union

initiatives in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states across the nation. Philip Dray has written a compelling history of the labor union movement that helps us to understand how vital it has been to the country and citizens everywhere. I only hope more of those working for union representation will take the time to read this book. As Dray observes in his concluding chapter, we need "to treat seriously the need for unionized workers to be aware of the larger political and economic forces affecting today's global markets, and to know the history of labor itself." Reading this book will motivate them to continue fighting for the justice working people deserve. Dray also pays much needed tribute to the hundreds of thousands of nameless, faceless workers who made the ultimate sacrifices for their fellow workers and humanity. His vivid, compelling retelling of the stories of, for example, the Lowell factories, the Haymarket Massacre, the Pullman Strikes, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire and important figures like Big Bill Haywood, John L. Lewis, Walther Reuther, and especially Eugene V. Debs, make the story complete. He also doesn't shy away from the corruption and malfeasance of leaders within the movement who have done so much to damage the popular perception of unions today. Dray makes a strong argument of how labor must work together to educate all citizens about the value of their (or, more accurately, our) cause to all Americans. He rightly laments the loss of a vital connection between labor and average Americans, "Gone missing is the communal purpose that animated America in the mid-twentieth century, leading workers into unions and creating fundamental trust in government sufficient to bring about not only the benefits of the New Deal but the advances of the 1960s, such as the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, Medicaid, and the National Endowment for the Arts, among many other programs." As we observe the elevation of ignorance into public policy by supporters of the "tea parties," anti-tax at-all-cost Republicans, and spineless "Democrats," let us hope that more will read this book to begin to regain the communal purpose that has served this nation well through times hard and good.

In this new book by Dray, there are an endless number of episodes relating to the struggles between the big business and the American workers from the nineteenth century onwards. Murder, greed, corruption, sacrifice, farcical trials, personal courage and many interesting narratives are at the core of this story. Many mythical figures populate the pages here, among them Eugene Debs, Mother Jones, Walther Reuther, Jimmy Hoffa and others. It is worth quoting a passage which can easily represent the general message of this important opus. The following words were uttered by another well-known figure, Big Bill Haywood during his trial after being charged with conspiracy: "We are conspiring to prevent the making of profits on labor power in any industry. We are conspiring against

the dividend makers. We are conspiring against rent and interest. We want to establish a new society, where people can live without profit, without dividends, without rent and without interest if it is possible; and it is possible, if people will live normally, live like human beings should live. I would say that if that is a conspiracy, we are conspiring" (p.366) The workers were also concerned about their safety and in the period between 1880-1910 fifteen thousand American workers a year perished in on-site accidents, with thousands more injured or sickened, mostly in connection with mine and railroad work. Many anarchists joined the workers in their struggle and one of them, Alexander Berkman, even added that "the removal of a tyrant is not merely justifiable; it is the highest duty of every true revolutionist". At the urging of Congress, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer targeted suspected Bolshevik sympathizers and labour radicals across the country especially during WW1. What we take today for granted after getting hired in various jobs-social benefits, health care- was achieved only with many efforts and struggles, as this superb book makes it clear.

This is a fascinating history of labor in America.

Classic and well orchestrated historical documentation of the time when people stood together to stop labor abuse and insure quality of life was put before the "bottom line" of business.

I love this book. It is full of so much fascinating, important information. I feel like it's a crime that they don't teach most of this history in grade or high school. This is important history. Really great if you've read *A People's History of the US* by Howard Zinn and want more on labor. Fascinating stuff on Frances Perkins, the first woman in the US cabinet, and other people and movements. I read it from the library, but loved it so much that I wanted to order myself a copy that I could keep and look back at to refresh my memory. I'm not the fastest or the slowest reader and it took me about 3 weeks to read the almost 700 pages.

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