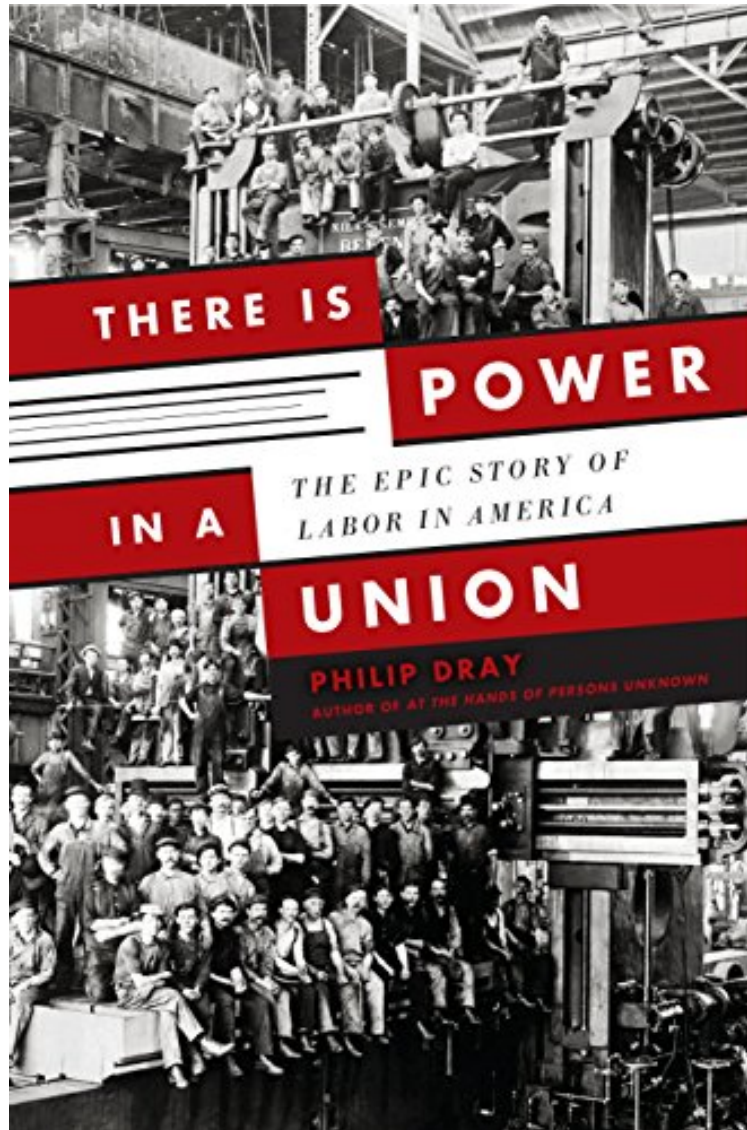


There is Power in a Union

Philip Dray

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Philip Dray : There is Power in a Union before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised There is Power in a Union:

32 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant Labor History - A Must Read By Benjamin Brockwell 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.⁸ of 8 people found the following review helpful. More relevant than ever

By G. Brozeit
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.⁵⁰ of 53 people found the following review helpful. The rise and fall of the American labour union

By Paul Gelman
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.

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.

From Publishers Weekly
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 copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist
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

PRAISE FOR THERE IS POWER IN A UNION
Kirkus (starred): Exemplary history of the American labor movement, from its time-shrouded beginnings to its murky present. Working in the tradition of Eric Foner and Studs Terkel, Dray (Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen, 2008, etc.) tells a story of heroes and villains. At the dawn of the republic, he writes, came the "country's fervent hope that its democratic virtues would forge sufficient regard between labor and capital." Alas, it would not be so, and the author locates the origins of a homegrown labor movement in that early avatar of the Industrial Revolution, the mill town of Lowell, Mass.; a movement that was launched by "an unassuming young woman off the farm" who would not take being oppressed by the bosses. As the narrative progresses, a few trends become apparent: the continued recalcitrance of capital when it came to sharing wealth and the increased militancy of labor, especially when its ranks were swelled by immigrants who had been oppressed enough in their home countries. During the nation's centennial year, there were massive strikes and demonstrations. One sterling example was a "standoff" in Susquehanna, Pa., over fair pay, which showed to the workers how powerful they were in their ability to halt commerce over vast distances; and showed to the bosses how "clearing railroad tracks of belligerent people required soldiers with guns." Dray revisits some of the usual stations on labor's way, from Lowell to Ludlow, from Haymarket Square to the ill-fated 1981 PATCO strike, but he also capably introduces lesser-known incidents and characters into the picture, as well as unexpected foes of organized labor, such as Bobby Kennedy. In the end, Dray's account is evenhanded; not all bosses are bad, not all activists good; but it is clear...