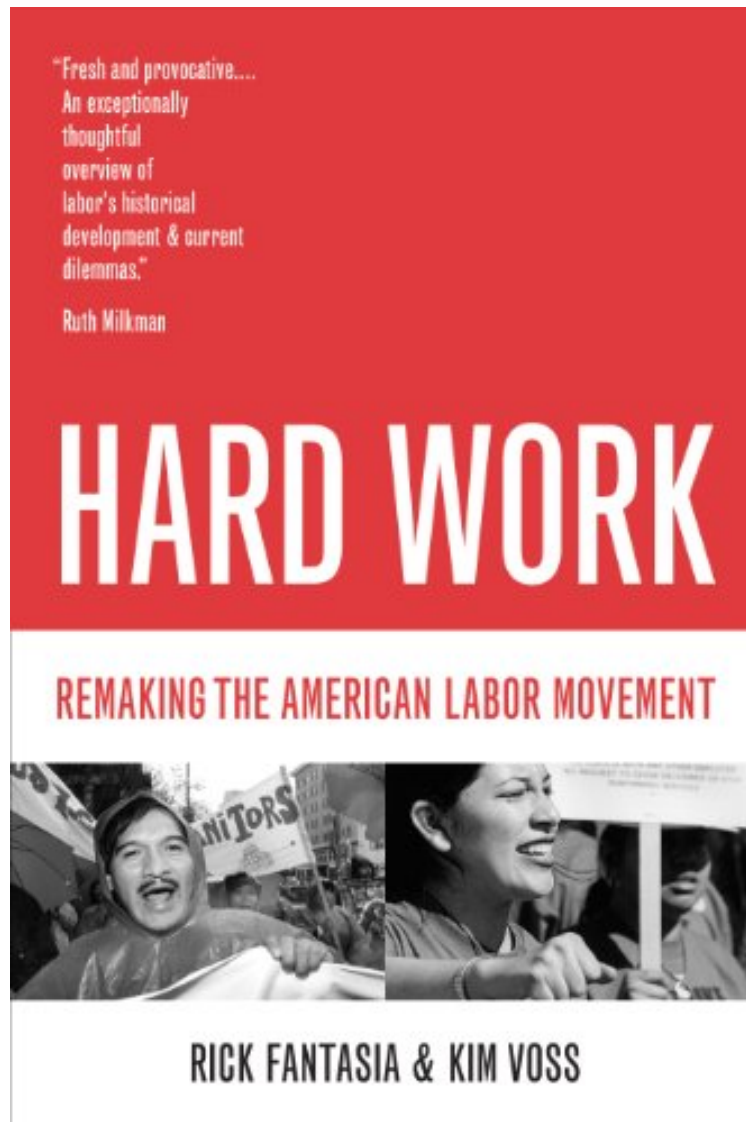


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Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement

Rick Fantasia, Kim Voss

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Rick Fantasia, Kim Voss : Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement:

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Hard WorkBy Deleta WalkerHard Work by Fantasia and Voss book gave us an insight of the work place and the different Labor Unions who have attempted to help their workers fight off bureaucratic tactics practices by Business Owners. In the beginning of the chapter The United States Work Benefits was compared with the Europeans Work Benefits and the Europeans offer were more appealing. The book went on to say the the United States is a capitalistic country, because they are more interesting in making profits than taking care of

their workers. Businesses use tactics such as globalization and hiring immigrants to work for them so that they can avoid the labor unions. Labor unions who are supposed to protect their workers are sometimes bought out at the bargaining table. If business owners continue to get their way, then there are going to be more uprisings of social movements, more standardized jobs and a cripple in the political forces. No one is really sure what the future entails for the labor unions. Labor unions need to be stronger and do what is right to protect their workers from business owners' practices.

14 of 19 people found the following review helpful. A great introduction to the American labor movement. In this book, Fantasia and Voss--two long-time, respected labor scholars--provide a great overview of and introduction to the American labor movement. The book was actually originally written for a French audience, so they assume you know very little about the American labor movement, explaining things like the National Labor Relations Board and the Taft-Hartley Act, instead of assuming you know about them. They also at times contrast the American labor movement with those in Europe, which is also frequently illuminating. Building upon Voss' previous work, they address the question of the supposed exceptionalism of the American working class--the fact that, unlike European working classes, they never developed a militant labor movement that fought for the interests of all workers and embraced socialist or social-democratic politics; instead, the labor movement has fought primarily for benefits for its members and embraced mainstream politics. But, Fantasia and Voss argue, the American labor movement was not always like this--in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the American labor movement was as militant, broad-minded and radical as its European counterparts, if not more so. What was exceptional was not the American working class, but the American capitalist class, which was far more hostile to labor than their European counterparts. This hostile social environment, in which any major labor organization that showed signs of a broad vision of social justice was brutally crushed, led to the thoroughly domesticated politics of the AFL-CIO, in which they agreed to act as business' junior partner, gaining increased wages and benefits for their members, in return for abandoning any broader vision and supporting the Cold War agenda. Even at its height, this bargain excluded most workers outside the core manufacturing industries. When the US and global economy began to undergo major changes in the 1970s (changes Fantasia and Voss don't explain well--this is one of the few weaknesses of the book), US business decided this bargain no longer suited its needs, rolling back the gains workers had made, a process that accelerated once the Reagan administration came to power. Traditional labor leaders were totally unprepared for this assault and it looked like organized American labor might go down the tubes. Fortunately, the decentralized structure of some unions, while allowing for local corruption, had also allowed for progressives to survive in some localities. They have responded to the crisis of American labor with innovative new tactics and a new vision that embraces the interests of all workers, not just union members. They have begun working with other community groups and organizing groups unions had traditionally ignored--people of color, women and immigrants. (This is the other big weakness of the book--Fantasia and Voss don't pay enough attention to how deeply entrenched racism, sexism and nativism were entrenched in mainstream unions. They treat these matters casually instead of as central to understanding the crisis of American labor). With the election of Sweeney and the New Voices slate to the leadership of the AFL-CIO, these efforts began to get some official support. It is in this new, social movement unionism Fantasia and Voss see hope. However, it faces huge obstacles, both in the form of the entrenched leaders of many labor unions, leaders who are often conservative, corrupt or both; and the continuing hostility of American business and government to organized labor. Despite the weaknesses I have mentioned, overall Fantasia and Voss do a great job of summarizing the history of the American labor movement, how it got into the mess it is today, and possible avenues out of the mess. The book is hopeful without being naive.

This concise overview of the labor movement in the United States focuses on why American workers have failed to develop the powerful unions that exist in other industrialized countries. Packed with valuable analysis and information, *Hard Work* explores historical perspectives, examines social and political policies, and brings us inside today's unions, providing an excellent introduction to labor in America. *Hard Work* begins with a comparison of the very different conditions that prevail for labor in the United States and in Europe. What emerges is a picture of an American labor movement forced to operate on terrain shaped by powerful corporations, a weak state, and an inhospitable judicial system. What also emerges is a picture of an American worker that has virtually disappeared from the American social imagination. Recently, however, the authors find that a new kind of unionism--one that more closely resembles a social movement--has begun to develop from the shell of the old labor movement. Looking at the cities of Los Angeles and Las Vegas they point to new practices that are being developed by innovative unions to fight corporate domination, practices that may well signal a revival of unionism and the emergence of a new social imagination in the United States.

From the Inside Flap: "Timely and smart, this book should be read by everyone interested in a possible revival of the American labor movement. The working week has gotten longer, more workers hold multiple jobs, gaps between the pay of workers and of CEOs have widened, and employers and their allies in government have attacked both unions and regulations to promote occupational health and safety. Fantasia and Voss demonstrate not only this bad news, but

that new thinking and creative responses have made some headway too."—Craig Calhoun, President, Social Science Research Council

"Fantasia and Voss make an important and persuasive argument for how and why U.S. employment and labor policies set the standard for pushing down wages, labor rights, and working conditions throughout the world. They put forward an enormous challenge to the U.S. labor movement, but one that needs to be met, not just for workers and unions in the U.S., but for their labor and community allies around the globe."—Kate Bronfenbrenner, Director of Labor Education Research, Cornell University

"Fantasia and Voss's long-awaited book offers a fresh and provocative perspective on the possibilities and limits of labor union revitalization in the U.S. They persuasively argue that the ascent of neoliberalism is both cause and consequence of organized labor's decline, and contribute as well to the long-standing debate over American exceptionalism in the context of the new century. *Hard Work* is an exceptionally thoughtful overview of labor's historical development and current dilemmas."—Ruth Milkman, Director, UC Institute for Labor and Employment