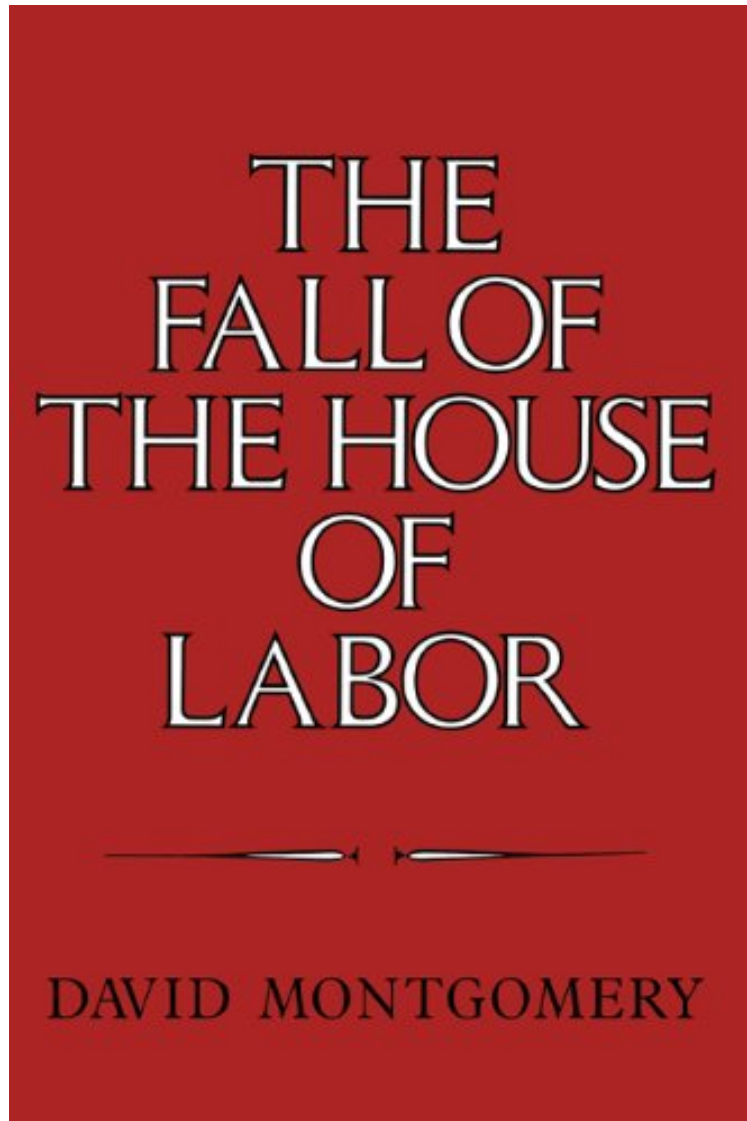


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## The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865ndash;1925

David Montgomery

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**David Montgomery : The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865ndash;1925** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865ndash;1925:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy deez\_nutzMust read for everyone concerned about labor rights.13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Absence of socialist and unionist American political

parties By G. M. Montgomery's study examines the different kinds of labor and how these affected the laborers' relationships not only to production, but also to unionization. What he has uncovered is a lack of uniformity and no exemplary relationship; instead, the type of work done played a highly influential role, as did myriad other factors such as race, gender, and age. He has built an immensely impressive body of research and has constructed a powerful study of American labor history. He insightfully separates labor groups and examines them singly: craftsmen; common laborers (or "ditchdiggers"); and operatives. This allows him to construct the clearest picture of turn-of-the-century American workers; instead of approaching them as a uniform, and therefore anonymous, whole. Montgomery's statistics reveal that technological innovations actually increased the number of common laborers needed and used, while it reduced the amount of skilled workers needed, especially in the iron industry. The (very new) electrical industry was the most progressively innovative in all aspects of production and business--though, without the benefit of "Fordism" or mass production--and employed a high number of women. It is this section of his book where Montgomery is most successful at showing the utter lack of conformity from one factory to another, as well as the nearly total absence of job safety. Depending on which factory she worked in, a woman would receive different pay for the exact same work, since it was arbitrarily within the foreman's full discretion. This is indicative of the total lack of coherence, even within the same industries. Throughout his book, Montgomery acutely delineates how the specific type of work influenced the resultant process of unionization. This meant that the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor required more than just one comprehensive unionization program: what addressed the issues of the iron roller missed the mark for the brick hauler or the filament threader or the cloak maker. Montgomery has woven together all the disparate worker groups and has created a fuller image of industrialized and industrializing America. There are very few weak spots in his study and they are, for the most part, trifling. What would improve the picture the House of Labor creates is information on "decent" wages and the standard of living. He includes pay amounts, but does not explain how much was needed to support an individual or an average family of five relatively well. Otherwise, he leaves no stone unturned--including immigrants, race, gender, and youth in his egalitarian analysis. Montgomery is accomplished at taking a job and concisely illustrating how that job was created and evolved, producing a clear and linear image of the work. He is likewise successful at explaining the disparateness of the American working class and its unionization, which reveals how socialist political parties never truly developed in the United States. In all, *The Fall of the House of Labor* is an exceptionally nuanced portrait of turn-of-the-century industrial America.<sup>31</sup> of 33 people found the following review helpful.

attacks on labor activism By James B. Seymour Jr. David Montgomery analyzes the United States between 1865-1925 in terms of the conflicting social classes that fought for control of industry and labor relations. He argues that class consciousness permeated all levels of social interaction both inside and outside of the workplace. Labor struggles with management about working conditions, wages, and for control of the shop floor. Montgomery focuses on the workers' lives in his investigation of this battle. Montgomery delineates three different type of workers in the nineteenth century. Skilled workers, such as iron puddlers, maintained a degree of control over the workplace because of their specialized knowledge. Common laborers, such as railroad builders, provided the muscle that shaped industrial America. They exerted power because industry depended on them to survive. Operatives, or unskilled laborers such as textile workers, filled an interim position. Mostly women, these workers operated under a piecework system and possessed limited power over their jobs. The changes in industrial society reduced the power of skilled craftsmen and swelled the ranks of operatives. Industry used a variety of methods to transform the workplace in order to marginalize skilled workers and increase the numbers of more easily controlled operatives. Scientific management served to explain, guide, and justify this transformation. Scientific management separated the mental component of commodity production from the actual work. This separation de-skilled workers and decreased their control over the industrial environment. The open-shop drive consolidated middle class opposition to the workers. Their hostility led to the inability of workers to enact reform legislation to remedy managerial encroachments into the shop floor. Welfare capitalism diverted workers attention from collective action and solidified their support for the company rather than class consciousness. Montgomery deplores scientific management, the open-shop, and welfare capitalism because they detracted from labor's traditional control in the workplace and limited their response to the problems of industrialization.

This book studies the changing ways in which American industrial workers mobilised concerted action in their own interests between the abolition of slavery and the end of open immigration from Europe and Asia. Sustained class conflict between 1916 and 1922 reshaped governmental and business policies, but left labour largely unorganised and in retreat. The House of Labor, so arduously erected by working-class activists during the preceding generation, did not collapse, but ossified, so that when labour activism was reinvigorated after 1933, the movement split in two. These developments are analysed here in ways which stress the links between migration, neighbourhood life, racial subjugation, business reform, the state, and the daily experience of work itself.

From Library Journal After the Civil War, American workers struggled to gain a voice in how the workplace was run, and to create strong labor unions. Montgomery concentrates on what was happening on the shop floor, rather than in

the union hall or the factory office. He shows how craftsmen, machine operatives, and common laborers developed separate codes of job conduct related to their backgrounds (many were immigrants) and neighborhood cultures. At the turn of the century, big companies adopted management styles designed to weaken unions, while radicals competed with unions. By the mid-1920s, the labor movement was in retreat, radical movements were discredited, and workers mostly unorganized. Recommended for subject collections. Harry Frummerman, formerly with Economics Dept., Hunter Coll., CUNY Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. "David Montgomery...both exemplifies and transcends the recent trend toward painstakingly detailed social history...he has undertaken a far vaster project than most contemporary labor historians would attempt: American labor activism of all varieties and locales, from the time when American workers organized the first tentative but recognizable trade unions, in the mid-nineteenth century, to the emergence of the working class as an insurrectionary force during the first two decades of the twentieth century, to its humiliating defeat in the years following the First World War...the closest thing we have...to E.P. Thompson's monumental book, *The Making of the English Working Class*." Barbara Ehrenreich, in *The Atlantic* "...the most sweeping portrait of working-class life to emerge from the new labor history...a subtle, complex, often brilliant study..." Alan Brinkley in the *New Republic* From the Back Cover "This book offers the most sweeping portrait of working-class life yet to emerge from the new labor history. It is a subtle, complex, often brilliant study, which demonstrates how far labor scholarship has moved in a generation." --Alan Brinkley, *New Republic*