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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Eastern Airlines Strike: Accomplishments of the Rank-and-File Machinists and Gains for the Labor Movement* by Ernie Mailhot, Judy Stranahan and Jack Barnes

Review by: Alex Kondra

Source: *Labour / Le Travail*, Vol. 32 (Fall, 1993), pp. 344-346

Published by: Canadian Committee on Labour History and Athabasca University Press

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direction of the discussion. The stories of the women, moreover, contain significant historical information about a wide variety of experiences. Lupe Hernandez's description of her struggle to raise nine children as a widow, Cecelia Sneezy's memories of her Apache girlhood, Irma West's obvious pride about her work within the Mormon community and other accounts offer important insights to historians of women. Such evidence also challenges those who continue to conceptualize the American West as populated by a cast of cowboys, miners, and "Indians" both proverbial and male.

The accessible and sympathetic tone of *Doing What the Day Brought* is not, however, achieved without cost. First, Rothschild and Hronek do not problematize or theorize personal recollections as a source. Yet anyone who has ever heard a family story retold can testify that spoken memory has a form and narrative genre of its own. Greater attention to how historical memories and personal narratives are constructed would have done much to explain the women's stories upon which *Doing What the Day Brought's* very premise depends. Ultimately, oral history will remain of limited value until historians pay greater attention to how memory and oral tradition are themselves formed and employed.

If the form of spoken memory is treated uncritically, the content of women's recollections are equally presented in a wholly celebratory manner. Whether discussing women's domestic work, political activities, or experiences of settlement, Rothschild and Hronek are concerned with illustrating how women "fashioned much of what Arizonans now hold dear about their state." (xxxvii) While there is no doubt that women contributed greatly to Arizona's development, surely neither women's activities nor the heartstrings of contemporary Arizonans are above scrutiny.

Ultimately, *Doing What the Day Brought* is an example of how the celebratory "contribution" style of women's his-

tory that characterized the 1970s continues to thrive in the 1990s. It is tempting to explain this as an unpleasant but unavoidable result of the newness of Rothschild and Hronek's subject. Yet recent works of challenging scholarship on women in the American West — such as the essays contained in Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson's 1987 collection, *The Women's West* — suggest otherwise. *Doing What the Day Brought* does offer some important information and a model for others wishing to combine oral history with topical narrative. Its contribution to the growing canon of women's history, however, is limited by a perspective that privileges celebration above analysis of either the form or content of women's past.

Adele Perry  
York University

Ernie Mailhot, Judy Stranahan and Jack Barnes, *The Eastern Airlines Strike: Accomplishments of the Rank-and-File Machinists and Gains for the Labor Movement* (New York: Pathfinder Press 1991).

THIS "BOOK" may be more aptly described as a pamphlet collection of three essays, one from each contributor, and includes: (1) "A strike that won gains for all working people" by Ernie Mailhot, a self-described "rank-and-file Eastern Airlines striker," (2) "'One day longer': How the Machinists defeated Lorenzoism," by Judy Stranahan, a writer for the *Militant*, and (3) "Capitalism's march toward war and depression," by Jack Barnes, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party. Despite the fact that this is a collection of works, there is a distinct unity of voice which is undeniably Marxist. The articles range from a chronicling of the 686 day Eastern Airlines strike to a general discussion of all that is wrong with capitalism and the American system. The essays are filled with words and phrases such as

"American Imperialism," "boss class," "employers' war against the working class," "class collaboration," and "exploitation of the working people" that clearly signal the authors' political views. Undoubtedly some of these criticisms are quite valid but the generally conspiratorial tone detracts from some of the valid points made throughout the book. The authors are firmly convinced that the "ruling capitalist class," the government, courts, police, media, big business, and the "officialdom" of the union movement are in league to suppress and exploit the working class.

A more appropriate title for this book, particularly in light of the first two essays which describe the strike from a militant striker's point of view, may be *The War Against Frank Lorenzo and Eastern Airlines*. Frank Lorenzo became the focal point for the strike and the painting of Lorenzo as a ruthless villain undeniably encouraged the solidarity of the strikers. When Lorenzo was removed from the head of Eastern Airlines by the bankruptcy court, the first major "victory" of the strike, celebrations spontaneously erupted on the picket lines but the rallying cry of the strike quickly shifted from last-*ing* 'One day longer than Frank Lorenzo' to 'One day longer than Eastern Airlines.' Although the removal of Lorenzo, probably the premiere union buster in the 1980s, from the helm of Eastern could easily be construed as a victory, it is unclear that the demise of Eastern could also be considered a victory, as the authors do. It was believed that the demise of Eastern signalled the strength of the union movement and potentially curtailed other firms from proceeding down the same confrontational path during labour disputes. Fighting the forces of evil was obviously more important than retaining jobs. One goal of the strikers was stated to be the prevention of Lorenzo operating a profitable non-union airline. While unclear, the only alternative the strikers appeared to offer was the continued operation of an unprofitable union airline,

which would ensure the end of the airline as much as concerted strike action and the generally poor state of the airline industry would.

A portion of the book is devoted to the condemnation of "union officialdom" who were viewed as more of a hindrance than a help to the striking workers, and as collaborators in the demise of the working class. The impression is given that these two great labour victories (the removal of Lorenzo and the permanent shutdown of Eastern) were achieved despite union officials. The basic criticisms of union officials, not just at the International Association of Machinists but across the country, were threefold: (1) too quick to accept concessions demanded by management, (2) failure to organize large scale picketing and secondary boycotts to increase pressure on firms during labour disputes, and (3) a willingness to rely on court proceedings rather than on direct labour action. Concessions gained by Chrysler in 1979 were cited as an example of the first point yet Stranahan fails to recognize the potential demise of Chrysler and the transfer of jobs to the Far East that would undoubtedly accompany such a development.

Marxists may find the book a bit depressing with the dismal assessment of the state of the U.S. labour movement but may find some inspiration in the solidarity of the union movement illustrated throughout the book. The *Daily News* and the Eastern Airlines strikes were held out as examples of labour solidarity and the various authors spin a convincing tale of how the working class can deal a serious blow to firms who attempt to thwart the objectives of the labour movement. This assumes a unity of working-class interests, which is a stretch of the imagination, but may occur where the average individual views the employer in question as particularly ruthless and greedy. Unfortunately, any activity that attempts to preserve American jobs and maintain the viability of a firm or industry that is rapidly proceeding to dissolution is unlikely to

be viewed with the disdain necessary for concerted action against a firm, much to the chagrin of the authors.

The last essay by Barnes is more concerned with the labour movement as a whole rather than just the Eastern Airlines strike. His concern centres on the lack of voice the common man has in the machinations of government. He quite rightly points out the elite nature of Capitol Hill decision makers, but instead of calling for a democratization of the system to allow for greater input by average citizens, he calls for class struggle. He talks of taking decision making to the streets and to the factory floor and of increasing class consciousness. Unfortunately the mechanism for converting these activities into political power is left unclear.

Alex Kondra  
University of Alberta

Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1992).

*RETHINKING SOCIAL POLICY* is a collection of previously published essays by Christopher Jencks on topics such as affirmative action, welfare, genetics and crime, and the urban poor. The book is especially timely, Jencks tells us, because it supposedly provides a "neutral" approach to the highly polemicized problems of race and poverty. Indeed, judging from the tone of the book, he seems to take delight in his ideological eclecticism, rejecting and adopting at whim what he regards as "liberal" and "conservative" views on race and poverty. He claims to stand above ideological debates, arguing that his selection and use of data is driven only by scientific inquiry and not politics. A central theme which ties these essays together is the need for greater specificity in social science. Each case needs to be studied in its specific context and detail, and quantitative and

qualitative questions should be treated as inseparable.

The first chapter was originally published as a critique of Thomas Sowell's approach to affirmative action, though his primary goal is to argue against both liberal and conservative positions on entitlement programs. While acknowledging that discrimination exists, he claims that white liberals engage in reverse discrimination by manipulating quotas in order to hire less qualified minorities. Particularly disturbing in his comparison between white and black male wage earners is his suggestion that employers are, indeed, justified in their discrimination of black males. Though he admits to no "hard data," he is convinced that black workers tend to have worse performance records, exhibit dissatisfaction on the job (which affects their work habits), and their "propensity to break the law may also indicate that they are more likely to break company rules." (39) Some of his assertions are blatantly offensive: "if young black men were to approach their work in the same way that they approach contraception and parenthood, employers would have a good reason to avoid hiring them for responsible jobs." (39) Ultimately, Jencks concludes, what appears to be outright racial discrimination is often just rational decision-making based on objective statistics regarding "black behavior." Because African-Americans presumably have higher rates of arrest, violence, alcoholism, etc., one should not expect employers to ignore these "facts." It is discrimination, he admits, but discrimination based on economics.

In his critique of Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*, Jencks sides with liberals who argue that the welfare state is not the cause of persistent poverty, but takes an extremely conservative position that building a safety net for single mothers who do not work ultimately undermines the Protestant work ethic and the nuclear family. Jencks, therefore, does not call for the abandonment of the welfare state — just reform. He feels that the only useful