

question relevant to working people, what kind of question do you think we need answers to?

JD: If I had to ask the president one question about labor, about working people. I would ask him how can he help protect the rights of the working men and women of this country? How can he help working men and women maintain the dignity and respect that they deserve? And how can they enjoy a piece of the American dream and be able to have free association with people that they want to associate with?

And then, if I was asked to have a follow-up question, I would ask him this: How would he ensure us having a level playing field? Because you already know that the American worker can outwork anybody in this world. And we're all in favor of the employer making a profit. But all we want is our fair share of it. I'd love to be able to ask him that question.

Q: And, given what you know about the Republican candidates, what would you ask or say to them?

JD: I'd paraphrase what they said to Joe McCarthy: "Have you no decency? Have you no soul?" You know, Mitt Romney's father, the governor of Michigan? He wasn't the greatest labor guy in the world, but he understood the labor movement. He had respect for the labor movement. How far has his son come? He made his money off the misery of people. He didn't build something, he didn't create something. He made his money off of people's misery. I believe he doesn't care about working people.

Q: Is there anything that you'd like to add?

JD: I think, in the next couple of years, we have an incredible opportunity to change the face of our region. To have our own little version of Silicon Valley, to make an educational Mecca here, with the medical schools, with the colleges.

But, if we don't come together, business and labor, as equal partners, for the betterment of our community, we're going to lose a whole generation of people. A whole generation. And all that will be left here are the very poor and the very rich. And that would be an absolute disaster.

I worry about our community. It's a real concern. But, at the same time, I think we have a unique opportunity to change this place for the better and make it wonderful. Because we have so many brilliant people and great natural resources, and a really smart workforce. But we need to harness that for the good of the people.

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BOOK REVIEW

Making Trouble in the Workplace and the Novel

Troublemakers: Power, Representation, and the Fiction of the Mass Worker, by William Scott. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Russell Harrison

Take This Job and ... The desire to find a job did not seem to be with me.
— Chares Bukowski

William Scott's excellent new book is an examination of U.S. proletarian literature – at first glance reminiscent of books like Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States: 1900-1954* and, to a lesser degree, Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* and Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations*. Like those books, it discusses the socio-historical context of American literature in the first half of the 20th century. But its importance lies in its emphasis on the working-class's "power at the point of production," i.e., in the factory, on the assembly line, in the mill. Moreover, Scott's focus is on the mass industrial worker. It is the CIO/UAW worker, not the AFL worker. As Scott writes:

"Such projects (the work of Janet Zandy and Laura Hapke, for example) treat working-class fiction as mainly a documentary record of different types of work. However, when it comes to narratives about workers who refuse to work – by exercising power on the job in a number of ways that are unrelated, and often in direct opposition, to their productivity as workers – these studies have had relatively little to say. What challenges, then, might such refusals to work pose for the novelist who wants to represent workers? How should one represent workers who are in the act of resisting the category of work itself?" (5-6)

Scott interestingly uses "represent" in both its aesthetic and political senses in his book. The failure of political representation, either through the union hierarchy or the formal political structures (Congress, the president, the courts) is paired with the failure of artistic representation. Writing of mass-worker novels by Dalton Trumbo, Jack London, and Upton Sinclair, Scott notes that: "As workers' degradation increases through the means used to increase the speed and efficiency of industrial production, the availability of forms to represent them adequately in a novel or a political party appears to diminish" (57). In an odd metaphorical use of the defense mechanism identified as "the internalization of the aggressor," Scott notes that, for example, Robert Cruden's novel, *Conveyor* (1935)

"...instead glorifies the mechanized worker while castigating the tyrannical bosses who drive their men like so many galley slaves [...] machine technology and the Fordist assembly line function not as the stock villains they are usually taken to be – the inhuman symbols of workers' alienation and oppression, the instruments of their total subjugation under the forces of capitalism – but as the real heroes of the novel, particularly at those moments when workers and machines are shown working together in productive harmony." (82)

I have, to this point, given something of a synopsis of the first part of Scott's book, entitled, "The Making of the Mass Worker." But it is the second part, "Strategy and Structure at the Point of Production," that most intrigues. Scott first offers readings of earlier novels, which he characterizes as either IWW novels, syndicalist in outlook, or '30s CIO novels, i.e., economic. He then analyses the representation of sit-down strikes and the idea that in that tactic the workers have found the most useful weapon in their possession. In the theretofore unsuspected tactic of shutting down production, workers have gained a powerful tool. This, of course, is because with the introduction of largely de-skilled workers and a technological system wherein every part is connected to another part, a stoppage in any one moment of production shuts down the whole factory. Writing in the context of a discussion of the Firestone tire plant strike of 1936 in Akron, Ohio, Scott summarizes the pithy dialectic at play in the mass-worker factory: "In short, the degree of workplace bargaining power that workers possess seems, at least in this case, to be directly related to the degree of degradation – monotony, mechanization, deskilling, and alienation – they must endure on the job" (189). The sit-down strike proved to be a valuable weapon in the 1930s and 1940s. But in another historical twist, it to some degree fostered its own demise. Many such strikes had, as their goal, the formation of a union to represent the workers. But this proved a two-edged sword because:

“As soon as companies began to grant official recognition to these unions industrial workers found that they were being disciplined by the very same union organizers who had encouraged their previous acts of resistance. From this point on, the function of unions changed dramatically; instead of planning and coordinating acts of resistance among the rank and file, their new aim was to enforce the conditions of the contracts that they had fought so hard to procure for the workers they represented.” (234-35)

CIO unions then became management’s tool for enforcing the contract, preventing wildcat strikes; “the struggle over consumption” notes Scott, quoting C.L.R James, is substituted for “a struggle in production.”

Scott’s impressive last chapter, “Making Trouble on a Global Scale,” connects the struggles of the 1930s and 1940s to the Italian Autonomist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. He discusses Nanni Balestrini’s 1971 novel, *Vogliamo tutto* (We Want It All), about an Italian autoworkers strike. He makes the salient point that this movement had as its goal, a refusal of work tout court, something worlds apart from any of the novels analyzed in the earlier chapters. After WW II, the rise in labor militancy as reflected in strikes increased “exponentially” (241). In response U.S. auto firms moved their factories to less militant areas of the world. But “where capital goes, conflict goes” (243). For the Italian mass worker (Turin’s Mirafiori Fiat plant had 150,000 workers), the alienated nature of the job led them to conclude that, in Mario Tronti’s words: “The only connection individuals have to the forces of production and to their own existence – namely work – has lost every appearance of personal expression for them. Their enemy is therefore not only the capitalist but also work itself” (249).

To say the least, Scott’s book is thought-provoking. One question that comes to mind is that, if the sit-down strikes were so spectacularly effective, why did they lose favor with the American working class? As suggested above, it was the fact that the union demand focused almost solely on pay and benefits. The horrible jobs remained horrible. Tying the increased pay package to increased productivity (as the American working class did), with no change in the brutal nature of the job nor in the hours of work was a ball-and-chain bargain that severely hobbled any progress towards a reduced work week which would have been the most obvious demand of a refusal-of-work ethos. (One important moment here was FDR’s reluctance to fully back the Black-Connery thirty-hour week bill in 1933.) Here the position of the American working class differs from the European. Volkswagen’s 28-hour-a-week contract in the 1990s, France’s recent 35-hour-a-week law and the various relatively early retirement programs of a number of European countries are significantly more attractive than the Puritan intensity with which American firms react to the issue of reducing work hours. I am always amazed when, on hearing that some group (teachers, state workers) have decent benefits, the hue and cry goes out to take such benefits away rather than demand similar benefits for ones selves. Not what one would call solidarity.

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