

Slaughter, Jane (Ed.) *A Troublemaker's Handbook 2: How to Fight Back Where Your Work – And Win!* Michigan: Labor Notes, 379 pages.

Right off, I love the title. There are good ideas for troublemakers everywhere but *A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work* is designed for union and workplace activists. Edited by veteran union journalist Jane Slaughter and published by the American left-wing labour group, Labor Notes, the Handbook is a must have for anyone trying to do progressive work in a union or a workplace. It is a well organized, easily accessible handbook for making trouble in almost every way you can think of.

As the foreword written by farm labour organizer Baldemar Velasquez says, "This book walks you through countless tactics, strategies and stunningly creative approaches to the new realities faced by our rapidly changing workforce."

No matter what you are trying to do from organizing a union to challenging the labour leadership; from including immigrant workers to challenging homophobia; from shop floor tactics to community union solidarity, *The Troublemaker's Handbook* provides the reader with chapter and verse. Every chapter has stories where union activists have succeeded and sometimes failed; step by step approaches to the tasks at hand; boxes throughout with special notes; action questions and further resources. Many chapters look back at history for what we can learn but the book focuses on today's workplace with its multi-cultural workforce, insecure working conditions and bureaucratized labour leadership.

It's wonderfully written and inspiring. Here is the introduction to Chapter 2: The Basics of Organizing:

Organizing is an attitude. It's the attitude that you and your co-workers together can do something to make things better. It's the attitude that action is better than complaining.

But the strength of the book are the many and varied workers voices explaining how they took on the boss, organizing their co-workers, fought discrimination and built alliances with the community. Each chapter moves from those stories into easily accessible steps to dealing with the problems and barriers activists face every day.

While every chapter tells stories of imaginative approaches to dealing with issues and problems, there is one called Creative Tactics that opens with:

The great union organizer and troubadour Joe Hill once observed that nobody walks around reciting a leaflet to themselves. Put your message into a song.

Then it proceeds to teach us how to write a song and what to do when leaders are reluctant to see creative tactics for fear that workers will laugh at the union. There are great ideas and observations like this one from labour cartoonists, Mike Konopacki and Gary Huck.

Bosses hate being caricatured. They're not like politicians, who, from time immemorial, have weathered the jabs of political cartoons. Bosses are used to being cloistered in their executive privileges. So when they become objects of derision, it drives them nuts. And workers love it.

The book is so up to date it even has a story about a transgendered worker fighting discrimination in his workplace. The chapter on Fighting Discrimination: Building Unity is one of the longest in the book and has some excellent stories and ideas about combating sexism, racism and homophobia.

There are also several chapters in the book that take on current neo-liberal realities. It suggests and gives examples of contract campaigns as a way of putting more power into collective bargaining. One I particularly like is the 15-Minutes strike. In addition to the traditional tactics of strikes, the book explores and assesses new strategies and tactics like Corporate Campaigns to tarnish the image of the company in alliance with community groups; single issue campaigns like the living wage campaigns; and multi-issue coalitions.

One of the most extensive chapters tackles lean production and outsourcing. There are stories about nurses fighting deskilling, Miners resisting surveillance, and public sector workers fighting privatization and outsourcing.

The book does use some Canadian examples like the CAW Local 222 plant occupation in 1996, but it is primarily an American book. In the sections on union/community solidarity work, no Canadian examples are used despite the long history of such coalitions in Canada.

While the book does give advice on challenging the union leadership on a number of levels from creative tactics, to running for office, it doesn't offer much a critique of the existing labour structures. Maybe Labor Notes is concerned that labour leaders won't distribute the book if it is too critical of the labour leadership but it is hard to motivate people to action without acknowledging the problems they will face are pretty systemic ones.

Nevertheless *The Troublemaker's Handbook* is a wonderful resource that should find its way into the library of every activist whether involved in the labour movement or not. With its focus on organizing ordinary people, the Handbook is rich with ideas of how to turn despair into hope, complaints into action and protest into effective transformational action.

Reading about the myriad of actions of resistance that workers are organizing across the United States and Canada offers the reader hope for change, especially in the belly of that most terrifying beast, the United States of America. Whether you use the book as a reference every time you need advice on a particular kind of organizing or read it from beginning to end to get ideas and inspirations, it is well worth the read.

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