BOOK REVIEWS

Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century
Ruth Milkman

General Motors, like few other major American manufacturers, has been the subject of extensive research and speculation. Both industrialists and scholars have studied this behemoth's attempt to remain globally competitive despite years of poor management and confused strategy. Their observations suggest that in-depth study of this company will illuminate, and perhaps ultimately mitigate, similar struggles for other troubled American manufacturers. Within the industrial sector, ongoing issues include motivating workers amid layoffs, ensuring procedural justice during the frantic moments when the line is down, and increasing market share while pruning product lines. On all counts, GM has offered copious examples.

Ruth Milkman is one such scholar seeking to delve into the difficulties faced by General Motors, especially the effect of its turmoil on production workers. Her latest book, *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century*, examines the plight of the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 595 at GM's Linden, New Jersey plant. While her historical trajectory begins with the vestiges of Fordism, her book focuses primarily on the plant since the early 1970s. By illuminating the daily challenges confronting the rank and file, Milkman suggests insights for both the American labor movement and industrial sector employers at large.

Milkman aims to fill a research gap on deindustrialization, a term she uses to describe the current era. Although such concepts as lean production and participatory management have been well researched, the voices of affected workers are noticeably absent from many studies. In direct refutation of such scholarship, Milkman proves that despite the slowly changing attitudes among management and union leadership, the rank-and-file workers themselves yearn for an atmosphere of greater justice, respect, and opportunity for participation in managerial decision making.

In the introduction, Milkman outlines her desire to challenge the current body of literature that eschews worker participation programs as a new form of exploitation. Likewise, Milkman also rejects the sentimental romanticism that some scholars use to construct a long-lost golden age of mass production, because her research makes clear that the end of such an era cannot be worth regretting. She asserts that Linden's auto workers were, in fact, so desperately unhappy with traditional assembly work and adversarial union-management relationships that they embraced any opportunities for positive change, such as GM's Employee Involvement Groups (EIGs). Though some Linden workers took advantage of an employment buy-out prior to the introduction of these sweeping changes in the late 1980s, those who remained experienced varying degrees of disappointment as the promised changes were gradually abandoned. By the conclusion of Milkman's research in the mid-1990s, most line managers had entirely reverted to their coercive ways, thus rendering useless months of extensive training in worker participation, while reinstating years of abusive, coercive power.

Milkman provides a thorough history of the plant, which opened in May 1937 on 85 acres located 15 miles south of New York City. In its early days, the plant built Buicks, Oldsmobiles, and Pontiacs, but during World War II it was retooled to construct Navy fighter planes. During the postwar boom, Linden resumed production of some prewar auto lines and also served as the only plant outside Detroit to make Cadillacs. Prosperity and job security thrived into the 1970s, but by the end of that decade Linden had begun to experience many of the same difficult pressures faced by the entire American industrial sector.
Chapter 3, "Adversarialism and Beyond: The UAW in Uncertain Times," describes the rise of a militant faction within Local 595 during the 1970s. Known as LAW (Linden Auto Workers), these mavericks struggled for years to gain credibility among plant workers. Only gradually did they enjoy a measure of official local authority by winning some top union office elections in 1982, thus procuring the requisite power to bolster their agenda. Unfortunately for LAW, however, their gains were undermined in 1984 by two concurrent threats: locally, members of the old guard were reelected to offices; nationally, the UAW faced "its greatest crisis since the end of World War II ... the implications of economic restructuring and globalization" (p. 86).

Such intense upheavals, both economic and political, arose at Linden in the early 1980s and form the cornerstone of Milkman's in-depth research. Using interviews, surveys, archival material, and other impressions gathered between 1982 and 1991, Milkman configures a series of detailed, personal accounts of the grossly dehumanizing conditions at Linden. What emerges is a complex portrait, replete with raw and vivid recollections from front-line workers, who likened their work to bonded slavery despite GM's attempt to update its management style. One worker remarked that even after weeks of training on cooperation, workers were frustrated and management was "still stupid, and they still don't listen to people! This bullshit about working together! I mean, there is more anger in that plant now, you know. Now it's supposed to change, and that's what's offending people. In the old days, you knew you were going to get screwed by your foreman, so you always came in prepared for it, and you almost accepted it" (p. 169).

The shop-floor conditions were not entirely bleak, however, due to union gains made several years earlier. For example, Milkman lauds the compensation system at Linden as exceptionally egalitarian in its narrow spread across job classifications and low emphasis on seniority. The relatively high pay that workers enjoyed for years, however, was clearly part of a trade-off achieved by union negotiators, who, on behalf of the rank and file, accepted bleak working conditions in exchange for handsome hourly compensation (i.e., there was a compensating wage differential). In addition, high entry wages served to lure in young workers, who then witnessed the low opportunity for advancement. Though wearied after a few years of assembly line work, they felt compelled to stay out of fear that few employers in the area could match their salaries. As a result, workers felt as if they were serving a life sentence at Linden, bound by excellent hourly rates and fringe benefits in exchange for daily humiliation and abuse. One worker summarized management's attitude as, "You're here, you weren't asked to come here, you came here on your own, so you got to do what you have to do in order to make the money. You know, you can't make this money on the outside, because you're unskilled labor. So we'll treat you how we want to treat you" (p. 47). As additional evidence of the abhorrent conditions on the production line, Milkman documents that workers generally coveted any position, no matter how dull, that took them away from the drudgery of assembly work. In fact, by nearly twofold, "mean seniority levels are much higher in the inspection, material, and maintenance departments -- where almost all jobs are off the line -- than in the four assembly departments" (p. 29).

Thus, Milkman's perspective tacitly suggests that the UAW's negotiators are partly responsible for the prison-like atmosphere at the plant. Though the union pursued high wages and job security for its largely unskilled work force, it did not proactively seek a healthier work environment. Inevitably, as difficult economic times usurped the UAW's ability to maintain its traditional agenda, concession bargaining became a part of factory life. But rather than experience the massive lay-offs that crippled other plants, in 1986-1987 Linden employees were presented the choice of a permanent buy-out from their jobs (cash payments ranging from $10,000 to