

Both authors are historians/economists in the U.S. Department of Labor and perhaps it should have been expected they would use an administrative history approach. It leaves their work as somewhere to look something up—and only if you had to.

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Brave New Workplace. By Robert Howard. New York: Viking Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1985.

The workplace utopia being planned by today's "technology managers" is no more deserving of our support than the one that Aldous Huxley described in *Brave New World*. This, at least, is the conclusion of Robert Howard in his informative account of what is happening to workers in all corners of the electronics industry.

Workers in the allegedly glamorous world of high technology are not enjoying either occupational health and safety or job security. The "enchanted corporations" of Silicon Valley, Howard reports, are poisoning not only workers but surrounding communities as well. Meanwhile, he shows, the touted Technology Change Committees at AT&T and the Bell companies take a back seat to such "cutting edge" innovations as remote computerized circuit-testing (SARTS), line repair (LMOS), and operator performance monitoring (AWT).

Most of the workers studied by Howard are women, most of these minorities; but men are affected as well. AT&T's telephone repair work is being controlled by a computerized file system that reduces contact with crews to one-way computer communications. At Eastern Airlines, management has been engaged in a running battle with machinists over programming and operation of CNC equipment. At General Electric's Aircraft Engine Group in Lynn, Massachusetts, direct numerical control (DNC) directs production and production workers as well. In short, Howard's book supports the Braverman thesis about deliberate de-skilling with an abundance of examples that both show the effects and, at times, trace the causes. He quotes one technology manager, for example, as follows: "If the logic of design and drafting rules can be programmed into a computer, then by definition it's unskilled labor."

Howard is at his best recounting the many fronts on which technological innovation is impacting negatively on the conditions, if not the

very possibility, of employment. The fact that workers are being monitored, manipulated and maimed by control-hungry profit maximizers is, in Howard's account, no accident. The ultimate goal of those who take an engineering approach to productivity is maximum worker displacement. The interim is maximum production per unit of time. In this context, the right to go to the bathroom on the basis of personal need is as hard for telephone operators to win as it was for industrial assembly line workers. Not the office but the office workers are being automated; and without the collective strength of a union, says Howard, their personal woes may move readers (and occasionally juries) but not company officials. On the other hand, Howard faults U.S. unions for not blunting the impact of technological innovation on their members. Compared to Scandinavian unions, he argues, American unions have been much too open to technological change, accepting management rights clauses in contracts and acquiescing, as did John L. Lewis for the Mine Workers, in technological changes that eventually decimate the workforce.

Brave New Workplace is a readable, journalistic account of problems workers are having in the face of new technology.

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Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty. By Greg J. Duncan. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1984. 184 pages. \$24, cloth, \$14, paper.

Regardless of their own areas of expertise, most labor educators at some time are called on to teach economic issues concerning workers and their families. Given the resurgence of hard times, interest in economic issues has risen sharply in the last few years. The problem for most non-economists, however, is that much of the literature is far from accessible. Greg Duncan in *Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty* has, fortunately, provided an important and readable guide.

Duncan's work is based on the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, an ongoing study that has traced 5,000 families since 1968. As he correctly points out, this method of tracing actual families over time is considerably superior to linking statistical snapshots given to us by the Census or other such static research. In fact, this longitudinal project often reveals findings quite counter to accepted belief.

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