

On Strike at Hormel: The Struggle for a Democratic Labor Movement, by Hardy Green. Labor and Social Change Series. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. xv, 368 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WILSON J. WARREN, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Among many democratic activists and interested observers, the year-long strike at the Hormel meatpacking plant in Austin, Minnesota, in 1985–1986 sparked a renewed hope in the possibility of a resurgent rank-and-file labor movement. Hardy Green's book on the strike is a solid testament to this perspective. As a consultant for Corporate Campaign, Inc., the firm that aided Austin Local P-9's strike effort, and with insights informed by his experience as a labor journalist, Green's account provides an intimate look into the Hormel strike and events that reverberated from it. Based on his assessment of the strike's significance, he argues that organized labor must renew itself by building on the democratic and "communitarian" attributes of locals like P-9 instead of "depending upon bureaucratic coercion" (300). While offering a gripping narrative account that only an informed insider to the strike events might be able to provide, Green's version nonetheless falls short of providing an analytical framework that adequately explains the meaning of the Austin strikers' contribution to America's languishing labor movement.

One important shortcoming of Green's analysis is his failure to thoroughly note just how unique the "communitarian" political culture of Austin's packing community has been compared to most working-class communities in twentieth-century American history. For nearly all of this century, Austin's packing community consisted of overwhelmingly white, native-born workers of northern and western European extraction. The cultural homogeneity of the blue-collar community was combined with a solidarity that grew out of the fact that Hormel had provided nearly all of the manufacturing jobs in the town since 1891. This type of long-term commitment to a single city has by itself become a rarity in today's economic landscape. Outside of a few other one-industry midwestern cities such as Albert Lea, Mason City, Ottumwa, and Sioux Falls, all of which also had relatively powerful twentieth-century labor movements, the bulk of not only most midwestern industrial communities but most of those in the country have had much less advantageous community profiles than Austin. Tremendous social, cultural, and racial diversity as well as divisions among workers stemming from their multiple places of industrial employment have typically combined to create apprehension, not solidarity, among workers throughout this century.

In positing his notion that workers need to depend less upon "bureaucratic coercion," Green underestimates the historic significance of the favorable New Deal political climate and resulting supportive legal environment in the creation of America's modern labor movement. This sympathetic federal political and legal environment in turn encouraged militant CIO unions to channel their energies into forming aggressive but tractable bureaucratic entities that could best confront their corresponding corporate bureaucracies to gain workplace and economic benefits for their members. As scholars such as Christopher Tomlins have argued, the gains that workers made in industrial communities such as Austin in the mid-twentieth century would not have been possible without this supportive environment. Of course, in coming under the protective hand of the federal government, unions sacrificed a good deal of their independence. Then, once the federal government became less supportive of organized labor, particularly during the Reagan years, unions saw a tremendous erosion of their earlier gains. If nothing else, the Hormel strike of 1985-1986 truly illustrates the profound contradictions that have emerged from the "devil's bargain" that organized labor struck in the New Deal period.

Although Hardy Green's book on the Hormel strike certainly captures the spirit of the workers who participated in the event, his analysis of the meaning of these events for the rest of America's labor movement is less compelling. Exhortations for workers to rely upon "selfless mutual support" (300) cannot by themselves overcome the divisions that exist among workers or the decline of federal government support for an organized labor movement.

History and Public Policy, edited by David B. Mock. Public History Series. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 1991. x, 218pp. Notes, tables, index. \$22.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY TIMOTHY WALCH, HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

It is a truism to say that readers should neither judge books by their covers, nor assume that titles describe contents. *History and Public Policy* proves the truth of those maxims. Although the title is broad and expansive, the contents are tightly focused. The contrast between the two leads to confusion over the purpose of the book. This is not to say that this eclectic collection of essays, reviews, and articles is mistitled. In fact, *all* of the contributions in this volume *do* discuss the history of specific public policy issues, the value of historical analysis in the development of current public policy, the literature of public history,

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