



Solidarity for Sale: How Corruption Destroyed the Labor Movement and Undermined America's Promise

By Robert Fitch

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A fascinating, definitive history and analysis of American labor union corruption-and an urgent call for social justice-that reads at times like a thriller

American labor unions have been, it turns out, shot through with corruption from their very inception. They never really had a Golden Age. From "Big Jim" Colosimo, the patron saint of Chicago's Mafia, to Brooklyn's Sammy "The Bull" Gravano a century later, organized crime has controlled huge swaths of the mainline labor movement. It still does.

Impassioned, revelatory, prodigiously researched and reported, and thoroughly convincing, *Solidarity for Sale* shows how the American labor movement's decent ends are continually undermined by its tawdry means-a diet of daily corruption longer than the menu at a Long Island diner. By telling the untold histories, uncovering the covered-up scandals, and even recommending a way forward, Robert Fitch builds a devastating indictment and goes beyond it to show that union corruption, stagnation, and decline are not our national destiny. Labor could regain its needed place in American life. But it would require a set of reforms deeper than anything now being proposed; nothing less than a revolutionary overthrow of its culture of corruption and its replacement by a civic culture of accountability and consent.

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Solidarity for Sale: How Corruption Destroyed the Labor Movement and Undermined America's Promise By Robert Fitch Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2940633 in Books
- Published on: 2006-01-23
- Format: Bargain Price
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 1.33" h x 6.92" w x 9.42" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 432 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With this passionate but meandering call for reform, union member and journalist Fitch attempts to expose the systemic corruption—the "private use of public office"—that he deems central to the history of American labor and its current ineffectuality. After two scattered and polemical introductory chapters that put the corruption of American labor unions in a global context, the book traces a century's worth of labor history, from the 1881 founding of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters to the mob-backed looting of the Mason Tenders pension fund in the 1990s. Fitch likens labor unions to fiefdoms and union leaders to warlords while comparing their level of corruption to that of the pre-Reformation Catholic Church. He implicates historical figures from early 20th-century AFL president Samuel Gompers and mid-century Teamster Jimmy Hoffa to Bill Clinton and Rudolph Giuliani, whom he censures for their coziness with unscrupulous union leaders. This sweeping condemnation, though provocative, suffers from the breadth of material and its diffuse thematic rather than chronological presentation. The book's structural flaws make for reading that often proves as frustrating as it is fascinating. (*Feb.*)

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Review

"Nobody has written of trade unionism's fatal embrace with the underworld, and its own demons, more eloquently." -- *Carl F. Horowitz, National Review*, February 13, 2006

AAA slew of keen insights An important read for anyone who cares about the future of organized labor in America. -- *Kirkus Reviews*, December 1, 2006

About the Author

Robert Fitch joined the Laborer's Union, Local 5 in Chicago Heights, Illinois when he was fifteen years old. He eventually traded his shovel for a briefcase and has since taught at Cornell and New York University, organized for the unions, and written for *The Baffler*, *Newsday*, *Village Voice*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The Nation*. Still a union member, he lives in New York City.

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