

the CA for thirty-three years had abandoned the open shop” (p. 312). Employers in other industries also signed contracts with unions in 1936 and 1937. In response to labor’s resurgence, the CA reformulated its strategy. For example, in June 1934 it established the Minneapolis Bureau of Industrial Relations (MBIR) to provide guidance to employers. In December 1936 the CA changed its name to the Associated Industries (AI) to dissociate itself from its former belligerence. It promoted peaceful labor relations and employee representation plans. Its new objective was to neutralize the Teamsters’ direct-action tactics. With assistance from the National Association of Manufacturers, the Teamsters’ Daniel Tobin, and the antiradical Smith Act, the AI and its newly created parent, the Civic Council, worked successfully to rid the local (now Local 544-CIO) of its radical leadership. The coup de grace for militant Minneapolis labor came with the passage of the Minnesota Labor Relations Act in 1939, supported by Republican governor Harold Stassen. In 1947 an anti-secondary boycott law was passed under Governor Luther Youngdahl, a former pro-CA district judge. Minnesota labor law became the model for Taft-Hartley. As a result, organized labor’s militancy atrophied across the country.

A Union Against Unions is an important and welcome book for historians interested in the employer side of industrial relations. Historians would be wise to pursue additional studies of employer groups in other locations in order to arrive at a theory of employer behavior. One minor grievance: to reduce density and repetition, the book would have benefited greatly from reorganization along thematic lines and from the exclusion of unnecessary details.

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Sharon Beder. *Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR*. London: Zed Books, 2001. viii + 292 pp. ISBN 1-85649-884-0, \$65.95 (cloth); 1-85649-885-9, \$25.00 (paper).

Why do students want a “marketable” degree? Why do so many of us build our identities through our marketplace activities of occupation and consumption? Sharon Beder plumbs these and other questions important to business historians and world citizens more generally. In exploring connections between the concerns and values that energize people and the “underlying cultural imperatives for

production and consumption” (p. 1), Beder ranges widely, across centuries and across the Western world. She wants to explain how paid labor came to be central to so much of our lives. That a reader might hold Beder’s project suspect only reinforces the need for it; after all, we ask, how could work *not* be central to our sense of self, as well as to our very survival?

Since 1989 Beder’s scholarship has ably engaged real-world debates through publications—like this book—accessible to both scholarly and popular audiences. Her international reputation results largely from scathing revelations about environmental degradation by Australian businesses and civil authorities who violated explicit promises and betrayed public expectations. She came to question the merits and inevitability of the work ethic because preserving jobs consistently trumps environmental and lifestyle concerns in the public discourse.

In *Selling the Work Ethic*, Beder shows that paid employment, and therefore training for such employment, defines human identity in the mainstream of Western culture not by necessity but as a product of historical contingency. With remarkable clarity, given the brevity of her historical expositions, she outlines how getting and keeping jobs evolved to measure human value. What Beder calls modern capitalism, more than mere trading for profit, “requires a system of values that revolve around economic meanings and goals” (p. 24). The Protestant Reformation first brought “moral support and legitimacy” to people holding an “interest in raising the status and influence of commerce and industry” (p. 26). Whether faith or ambition came first matters less than that they reinforced each other.

Benjamin Franklin early abandoned the religious component of the capitalist ethos, but he helped build a secular tradition of assigning virtue to occupational efforts and success. Beder surveys the histories of several ideologies, including *laissez faire* and Social Darwinism, to show how they have promoted work’s worth. She later focuses on “how to get workers to work long and hard” (p. 145), especially when the misery of jobs overpowers the work ethic. For instance, cultural authorities and civic policies have stigmatized and minimized state welfare as an “alternative to low-paying, unpleasant jobs,” and employers have hired “engineers, psychologists, and sociologists” to maintain productivity (pp. 168, 97).

Beder’s analysis includes the lure of abundance as an impetus to toil—visible at every turn, abetted by easy debt, and fueled by constant invitations to form and burnish identities through consumption. She weaves in consumption as the third strand, perhaps now stronger than religion and virtue, to a braid of internalized value systems that together promote work. Beder’s observations are well

framed but not original regarding the attractions of consumption that keep us at work. Back in 1929 Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd headed a brilliant chapter of *Middletown* with the question, "Why Do They Work So Hard?" Before and since, many have decried overwork in pursuit of industrialized abundance, observing capitalism's reciprocal needs for consumption and labor. Daniel Bell's conservative *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1978) lamented that the drive to consume had corrupted the once sacramental drive to work, and currently Jerome Segal advocates for the voluntary simplicity movement and work directed toward personal fulfillment. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, on yet another tack, has contrasted two means to affluence found among human societies: wanting and producing much, and wanting and producing little. Beder's analysis shows how the world has moved toward wanting and producing much as its goals, as if this were the only natural course. Why should U.S. vice president Richard Cheney *not* equate energy conservation with rationing?

Beder contributes fervently and effectively to the tradition critiquing this course, synthesizing a vast array of histories and social science studies. The expansiveness of her bibliography and notes gives this book considerable credibility and usefulness. Although business historians will not find new primary research here, they could well find references to new, possibly international, materials. Everyone will find breadth, insight, and challenge. Profoundly felt, passionately argued, and remarkably supported, *Selling the Work Ethic* shines as an example of reasoned partisanship. Beder makes no pretense of disinterest, but neither does she wallow in platitudes. This is a case of scholarship in service of citizenship. Such forthright plain speaking could encourage pluralism in both the academy and the polity.

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