

Lane Windham. *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. 295. Hardcover. \$32.95.

Lane Windham discusses the origins of labor's crises from the latter third of the twentieth century into the twenty-first. Windham, Associate Director at Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, attributes the new economic divide to the rise of globalization and the increasing hardship for union building due to employer resistance. Despite the nation's overall low union membership in the private-sector, Windham sheds light on those driving unionization efforts since the 1970s—a new working class made up of mostly young baby-boomers, people of color, and women. Windham argues against scholars who highlight a steep decline in labor union membership for the past half century. Many historians attribute the decline to “bureaucratic unions, which they portray as inept and complacent, and a working class that they believe lost interest in organized labor” (6). However, Windham focuses on motivated workers in the 1970s and ‘80s ready to unionize their workplaces as a result of a newfound consciousness of racial and gender equality following the social upheavals in the 1960s. Many of these workers began demanding access to the best working-class jobs denied to them before and organized for labor reforms.

Part One portrays the new working-class of the period emphasizing the need for collective bargaining in order to receive many of welfare capitalism's benefits. However, this became increasingly difficult as employers narrowed unions' opportunities by passing key legislations such as the Taft-Hartley Act and acting on labor law weaknesses. Windham then shifts focus onto the working-class who were crucial to the organizing drives from the 1970s and onward because civil rights and equal employment opportunity legislation protected women, people of color, and immigrants their entry into unions. Part One ends with employers reacting to the pressures of globalization by strategizing to resist unionization in their industries and higher costs due to higher wages and benefits unions demanded. Employers hired anti-union business consultants, repeatedly

broke labor laws, and formed political organizations together, eventually leading to the “narrow door” workers overcame in order to organize.

After Windham establishes the larger economic context of the period, the new working class’ enthusiasm to unionize, and employer resistance to them. She includes specific cases wherein workers attempted to unionize displaying the dynamics of capital-labor disputes during the period of globalization and shifting markets. The first group, Newport News Shipbuilding workers, shows a unionization attempt among the new working class as an outlier as they were able to form their union and collectively bargain—however, not without some employer resistance—because the shipbuilding industry was still domestic in the late 1970s. Another case contrasts mostly Black workers’ unsuccessful attempts to unionize at the Cannon Mills, with the shipbuilding workers due to the U.S. textile industry becoming replaced by mostly retail and service. Windham examines workers in the new growing industries where specifically, Woodward and Lothrop’s retail workers were able to win the right to bargain and the right to bargain as company employers did not use intense anti-union campaigns as many other retailers used during the period. Similarly, women workers in the non-union clerical industries attempted organizing using nontraditional tactics gaining them protection from gendered injustice in the workplace.

*Knocking on Labor’s Door* draws from a wide range of sources including statistics from the National Labor Relations Board, union bulletins, news reports, and interviews. Windham successfully explains why labor saw a steep decline and takes globalization and employer resistance into account rather than blaming complacent union bureaucrats. She contextualizes the 1970s using globalization as motivating employers to mobilize against labor’s demands. Global competition and the shift from manufacturing toward finance decreased profits for many owners explaining why employers looked to shut out collective bargaining which allowed workers to gain welfare plans. These impacts proved to have a domino effect in many American industries since unions set higher wage and benefits standards for not just their members but for other companies in the same industries. Overall, Windham’s monograph may be useful for

those interested in labor, capitalism, race relations or anyone who wants to better understand the causes of weakened union power leading to economic inequality in the twenty-first century.

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