

Preface

WORK, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT SERIES **Series Editors: Charles Levenstein and John Wooding**

While we stand at the beginning of a new millennium, it is clear that the brave talk of a new era is—for many—the empty rhetoric of promises unfulfilled. Around the world workers and communities are increasingly the victims of unsafe workplaces and polluted environments. In all countries, too many remain without jobs or under-employed. In the United States, many workers need more than one job to lift themselves beyond the poverty level. In much of Europe, unemployment rates appear to be intractably high. In Asia and much of the developing world, workers are slaving in factories at wages that are appallingly low. In Africa, ravaged by AIDS and war, only the lucky few can still put bread on the table. In most of the globe, the threat of environmental catastrophe, the erosions of indigenous cultures, and exploitation of workers continues unabated. Recurrent economic crises continue to threaten those who have made small gains and stability can only be achieved with loans from the IMF and international capital that come with stringent conditions. In the era of the triumph of the market, all is not well.

This is not to say that gains have not been made. Medical advances and public health initiatives have ended the fear of disease and early death for many. Standards of living have improved for some, and the awareness of threats to health and environment has made many more willing to fight for healthy lives. But much remains to be done and the “free marketeers” attack the role that democracy and government can play in protecting the lives of citizens throughout the world. The “market” cannot solve all these problems. The “market” never will.

So, does this mean that there is nothing we can do? Of course not. Rather, that we have an especially difficult task ahead. We must understand this era with good analysis and innovative strategies. We cannot look back to a golden progressive age or halcyon socialist past, nor can we forget the lessons we learned. What we must do is engage and understand what is going on in the world, and develop and propose viable alternatives and progressive strategies. This in essence is the purpose of this book series and the point of our focus.

We have titled the series *Work, Health, and Environment*. The conjunction of topics is deliberate and critical. We begin at the point of production. Work is

Foreword

This study was launched with the support and interest of David Wegman and Barbara Rosenkrantz when I was on leave from the University of Connecticut and enjoying a NIOSH traineeship at Harvard School of Public Health. Everett Mendelson in Harvard's History of Science Department further encouraged the work. Ian Greaves, now at the University of Minnesota, Les Boden, now at Boston University School of Public Health, and Margaret Quinn, now at UMass Lowell, were important participants in the intellectual ferment that contributed to the study. Our ad hoc "seminar on the history of occupational lung diseases," sponsored by the Occupational Health Program and the History of Science Department, involved graduate students and some faculty in what was ostensibly an antiquarian discussion, but one which rapidly became political. Financial support from NIOSH enabled me to continue to work on the project at Harvard and to continue to commute to the University of Connecticut in Hartford. At UConn, the interest of Peter Barth, Russ Farnen, and Ray Elling permitted me to give time and energy to this study. Over the years, the critical reading by Eve Spangler of Boston College, John Wooding of UMass Lowell, Dom Tuminaro of NYCOSH, and other friends, colleagues, and students have been important to me and to this work. I know no way to estimate the value of the moral and intellectual support of Fred Sperounis of UMass Lowell for me and for this project.

One great contribution to the work occurred on the day that Mark Ayanian, a student at University of North Carolina, provided me with the documents concerning Peter Shrag's experience in North Carolina. Another boost to the work came from Ira Burnim and the Southern Poverty Law Center when they asked me to serve as an expert witness in a brown lung case in Alabama. The hospitality and interest of Len Stanley, Chip Hughes, and Charlotte Brody, as well as the Brown Lung Association in Alabama, were important to me. I owe a great debt to the textile workers of Opelika, which I hope this book will help to pay.

The libraries and librarians at Yale University and Harvard University, particularly Countway Library and Baker Library, provided advice and great service.

Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge that a kernel of inspiration for this work came from the 1950s research of Skipper Hammond on textile worker organizing in the South.

Charles Levenstein

essential to all our lives. Work is where things are made, good things as well as bad things. While work brings income and meaning, it also brings danger and threats to health. The point of production is where goods and services are produced but it is also the source of environmental contamination and pollution. In other words, work, health, and environment are intimately linked. In this series we will publish works that analyze and describe the relationship between what goes on in the workplace, the consequences for the public health, and environmental degradation. We define health and environment broadly. Health is not limited to the absence of disease or to individual health. It must also mean a healthy and sustainable economy, a democratic and participatory politics, a workplace where the rights of workers are respected and enforced, and communities that are sustainable, crime free, and nurturing of the physical and mental health of all.