

THE LONG DEEP GRUDGE

A STORY OF BIG CAPITAL, RADICAL LABOR, AND CLASS WAR IN THE AMERICAN HEARTLAND STUDY GUIDE

Gleanings (Preface and Introduction)

1. Look at the excerpt from Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make* at the very beginning of the book. What does it tell you about the meaning of the book's title? Think back on this passage as you read through the book and encounter some of the people and events that Algren refers to.
2. What evidence does the author cite to demonstrate the labor movement's collapse since the mid-twentieth century, and why does the author see that as a problem?
3. In the preface, the author introduces what she calls the "singularly radical" Farm Equipment Workers union (FE). In this early section of the book, what do you learn about the union that supports this characterization?
4. In the preface, why does the author call the rift between the FE and the United Auto Workers (UAW) "the pivotal conflict within modern American unionism?" At this early point in the book, how do you feel about the different philosophies of these two unions?
5. How is the violent event described at the beginning of the book's introduction connected to the 1952 FE strike against International Harvester (IH)? What does this strike tell you about the nature of the relationship between IH and the FE?
6. What do you learn in the introduction about the history of IH, the behavior of its management, and the characteristics and beliefs of the FE's top leadership?

Part One: Weeding Out the Bad Element

1. McCormick Works, according to the author, "did not simply manufacture products: it also made history." Why was the mechanical reaper, and the factory where it was produced, so significant?
2. The author says that in McCormick Works in the nineteenth century, "skilled workers were indispensable to production, and they knew it." How is that evident?
3. The author argues that young Cyrus McCormick II, once he took charge of the company in 1881, "set out, in unmistakably radical fashion, to remake the way work was done" within McCormick Works. Why, and with what methods, did he do this? In what sense were McCormick's actions "radical"?
4. How does the author establish the disparities in wealth in 1880s Chicago? Why was Chicago at the time considered "the capital of American radicalism?"
5. What new forms of organizing and new ideologies contribute to the workers' victory in the 1885 strike at McCormick Works? How does Cyrus McCormick II then endeavor to "weed out the bad element among the men"?
6. What are the explanations for the rise, and then collapse, of the eight-hour day movement in 1886?
7. Why do you think the author has chosen to highlight August Spies and the "Chicago Idea" promoted by the Haymarket anarchists? How are they related to "the long deep grudge" in the book's title?
8. What role did personal relationships between wealthy families play in the formation of International Harvester? How did the corporate merger movement of the early twentieth century reshape the American economy?
9. What various threats to capital's control had arisen by the 1920s? How did American industrialists respond to them?
10. What comparisons and contrasts can you draw between the economy in the 1920s and the situation today?
11. Why does the author choose to focus attention on an obscure figure like John Becker?
12. How did International Harvester's Works Councils serve management's interests? How did the promotion of "economic laws and facts" factor in?

Part Two: The FE Lays Down Roots

1. The author discusses the “sweeping and interrelated changes” that affected the federal government, the labor movement, and the radical left during the 1930s. What were those changes?
2. How did the sources of power for industrial workers in the CIO era differ from those of skilled workers in the nineteenth century, and what impact did that change have on labor’s organizing strategies?
3. How was early union organizing conducted at Tractor Works? What was the role played by the Communist Party in the FE’s breakthrough there? How did this early radical influence shape the FE’s character?
4. “Against the odds,” the author says, the FE managed to win bargaining rights at five additional IH plants, including McCormick Works, in 1941. What factors contributed to the union’s victory?
5. What were the various ways in which WWII affected International Harvester and the FE? What role did the federal government play in the conflict between the company and the union during this period?
6. The author argues that the piecework system at IH was “every bit as much about control as it was about compensation.” How was that the case? Why did IH maintain such a complex wage system? In what ways did piecework affect the FE’s character?
7. Why did the allowance issue cause such conflict between IH and the FE and why do you think the author focuses attention on it?
8. What is the size and significance of the 1946 strike wave? To what extent were labor’s objectives realized?
9. Fowler McCormick and International Harvester’s management “adopted what were at the time sophisticated strikebreaking tactics” during the 1946 strike. What were these tactics, and how did they relate to past managerial practice at IH?
10. How did the FE secure its contract gains in 1946 and what was the significance of the provisions won by the union?

Part Three: The FE Against the Grain

1. What were the similarities and differences between the FE leadership and the UAW’s Walter Reuther? What did Reuther’s ascendance in the UAW mean for the FE?
2. Why did American corporations begin opening plants in the American South after WWII?
3. The author says that FE organizers “built a commitment to racial equality into the DNA” of the union’s local at the International Harvester plant in Louisville. How was this evident in the FE’s organizing drive there?
4. “We’re not going to be second-class citizens in the South,” said an FE leader in Louisville. What did he mean by that? How did the union wage its fight against International Harvester’s “Southern differential?” How did the company respond?
5. What was the nature of the disagreement within the FE leadership and between the FE and other left-led unions over the non-communist affidavits required by the Taft-Hartley Act? How do you think the FE should have responded to the affidavit requirement? How did the Taft-Hartley Act affect the labor movement generally?
6. Why did the FE become so heavily involved in the Progressive Party campaign of 1948? What were the benefits, and the costs, of that involvement? On balance, do you think the union made the right choice?
7. Why did the FE enter into an affiliation with the United Electrical Workers in 1949? What was the significance of the 1949 expulsion of the left-leaning unions from the CIO? How many workers were represented by those unions? How did the CIO’s action reflect the political climate in the US?
8. The author argues that the FE leadership “eschewed the politics of productivity in favor of the politics of class conflict.” What is meant by “the politics of productivity,” and how was that ideology reflected in the 1950 UAW-GM contract—the “Treaty of Detroit”? How did the FE’s contracts with IH embody “the politics of class conflict”?
9. How did the UAW’s “raiding” campaign affect the FE? Given that the FE was “outstaffed, out-financed, and outcast from the mainstream labor movement,” what accounted for the sustained loyalty Harvester workers demonstrated toward the union?
10. The author notes that “between 1945 and 1954, more than *one thousand* work stoppages took place at IH plants represented by the FE,” a far higher figure than at IH/UAW plants. What were the reasons for this difference? The author also discusses “strikeless strikes.” What were they, and why did the FE leadership begin to encourage them?
11. For the Louisville FE, the author says, “interracial solidarity became not an abstract construct but a daily practice that delivered tangible and immediate benefits to the union membership.” What does she mean by that? How did International Harvester’s employment practices factor in to the relationships between white and African Americans in the FE in Louisville?
12. Jim Wright, an African American FE leader, said that white workers at the Louisville IH plant were initially

“*real* racists” but membership in the FE instilled “a religious feeling of them sticking together” with Black workers. How was this manifested inside the Harvester plant, and in the community? How did the FE’s “constant

campaign” to promote interracial solidarity affect personal relationships in segregated Louisville? Does the FE’s experience in Louisville affect your thinking about white working-class racism?

Part Four: Reaping the Whirlwind

1. What was the significance of John McCaffrey’s elevation to the CEO’s position at International Harvester? How did McCaffrey and IH management prepare for 1952 negotiations with the FE?
2. What concerns were raised by Louisville FE leader Jim Wright in advance of the 1952 strike?
3. FE leader DeWitt Gilpin wrote that in sit-down strikes workers “get an insight into the potential of their class.” How was this apparent in the 1952 sitdown strike at the IH Twine Mill? Given the outcome, did the sitdown strike make sense?
4. In 1952, the FE said that International Harvester proposed “a new contract with wage cuts written into it and the means to oppose them written out of it.” What exactly were the changes IH sought, and why was the company so determined to achieve them?
5. An FE flyer in 1952 proclaimed that “a strong picket line is the best negotiator.” What was meant by that, and how was that belief manifested in the union’s conduct during the International Harvester strike?
6. Why did the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hold hearings in Chicago in 1952, and what impact did the HUAC appearance have on the strike at International Harvester?
7. Why did “the foreman’s crusade” launched by International Harvester in 1952 generate so much attention? How did it comport with past managerial practice at IH? What impact did it have on the strike?
8. In what ways did Harold Ward’s arrest and his subsequent murder trial reflect both the strengths and the weaknesses of the FE by 1952? How did Ward personally embody much of what the FE represented?
9. The 1952 strike ended in “a victory for the company” and what the author calls “a triumph for the labor establishment as well.” In what ways did both the company and the labor establishment prevail? Could the FE leadership have done anything differently to achieve a better outcome for the union? Some members of the FE leadership had argued for returning to work without signing the contract. What do you think of that idea?
10. Following the 1952 strike, what were the various factors that led the FE leadership to seek to merge with the UAW? What do you think of that decision?
11. The author argues that “IH management and the labor establishment found it a bit harder to wipe the FE’s traces clean than had been expected.” In what ways did the FE’s legacy continue to affect workers at International Harvester and UAW members generally?

The questions below relate to the book’s concluding chapter— “The Rank and File Loved That Union”—and/or the book overall.

1. In the conclusion the author says that communist-influenced FE leaders “thought differently than did their non-communist counterparts.” How would you describe the ideological disagreement between the FE’s radical leadership and labor’s non-communist establishment? How were those differences reflected in union contracts and in shop-floor activity? What were the consequences, for unions and for working people in general, of the eradication of left-wing influence within the American labor movement?
2. The FE’s philosophy, according to one of its leaders, was that “management had no right to exist.” To what extent was this translated into practice within the FE? In your opinion, does such an approach make a union more or less effective? Is it possible for a union to uphold that belief and survive within a capitalist economy? Do you think workers would be better off if management ceased to exist? How would workplaces—and the economy—be organized?
3. The author states that the labor establishment’s embrace of “the politics of productivity” has undermined efforts to achieve a shorter working day and crippled the fight against capital flight and plant closures. What is the basis for the author’s argument, and do you agree with it?
4. “One of the FE’s fundamental tenets,” the author says, “was a genuine commitment to all-inclusive unionism, something labor organizers confronting the McCormicks’ dominion had been grappling toward since the nineteenth century.” What are the different forms of working-class organization discussed in this book, and how and why did they evolve over time? What does the author mean by “all-inclusive unionism” and to what extent did the FE achieve it?
5. The membership of the FE, as the author notes, was majority white, yet it was African American Frank Mingo

- who proclaimed that “the rank and file loved that union.” How did the communist affiliation of the FE’s top leadership affect the union’s approach to racial solidarity, in both theory and practice? What were some of the specific actions taken by the FE—for instance in union governance, in contract terms, in organizing practices, in policy positions—that generated Black support for the union? How was the FE able to institute these practices without entirely alienating the union’s white membership?
6. In the conclusion the author argues that the FE’s “hyper-militancy” as reflected in its “trigger-happy walkout policy” was a source of strength but ultimately also a liability for the union. What do you think of that assessment? Why does she suggest that “strikeless strikes” may have been a more effective form of resistance?
 7. The conclusion states that capitalism is “a social organization presided over by a class with an ‘effective will to power.’” What is meant by that? How does the history of International Harvester demonstrate this “effective will to power?” What were the various methods by which the company helped establish “the hegemonic notion that the elites of the sort running IH were uniquely entitled to ‘operate the complex economic apparatus of modern society’”?
 8. This book’s main focus is on IH and the FE, but throughout the story there are other key actors as well. What role did local and state authorities and the federal government play? What about the police and the press? Were those forces always supportive of the company, or were there variations in different locations and/or changes over time?
 9. The author suggests that “the move into the UAW in 1955 was certainly a capitulation but by no means an indication of abject failure.” Why does she say that, and do you agree?
 10. The author argues that “possibly no other union was as animated by its own history as was the FE, or more cognizant of how struggles from distant decades laid the groundwork for later triumphs.” What evidence does the author provide for this? How does this statement relate to “the long deep grudge” in the book’s title? To what extent do you think knowledge of history is necessary to build and sustain working-class power?
 11. In the book’s introduction, the author indicates that “the deep grudge between the FE and IH was rooted in a long-standing struggle over how work would be done in each of the company’s plants, what each job was worth, and who would benefit from what was produced.” How has she demonstrated this “long-standing struggle” over the course of the book? What does the first section of the book, which ranges from the early nineteenth century through the 1920s, contribute to your understanding of the FE, and of the modern labor movement in general?
 12. What do you think of how the author weaves her own personal connections into this larger history? How did you feel about the various people—both well-to-do and working class—that are introduced in the narrative? Were there particular stories or personalities that stood out for you?
 13. In the preface, the author indicates that she hopes to demonstrate the FE’s “deep-rooted and present-day significance” and that its story offers an “alternative vision, not just of how unions can fight to win, but just what they should be fighting for.” Has the author convinced you that the FE—which has been largely forgotten—has “present-day significance,” and if so, in what ways? What lessons do you draw from the book that might be applied to present struggles?