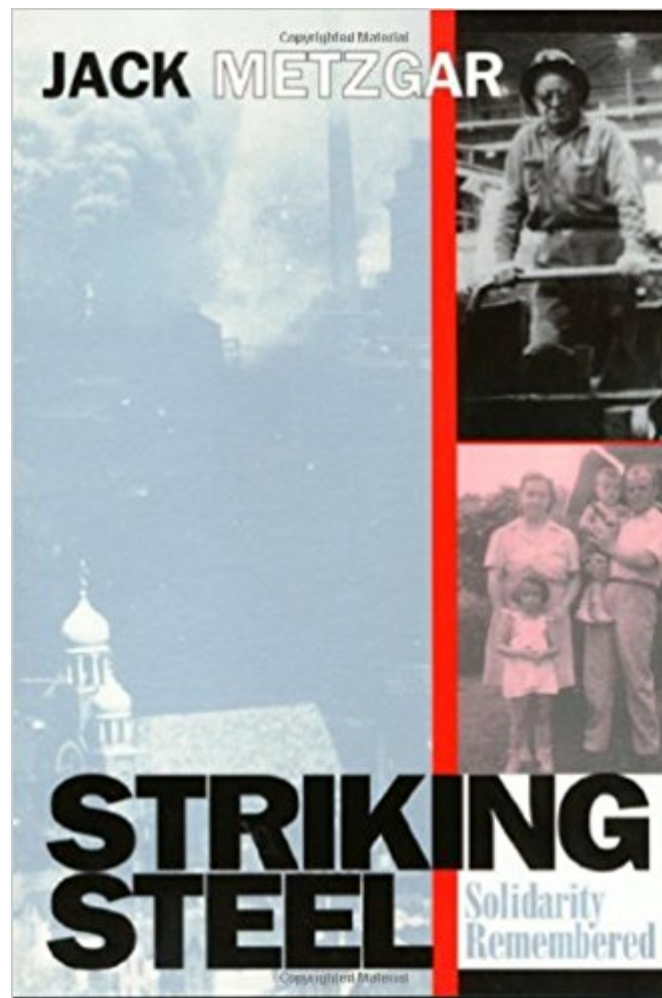




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# Striking Steel (Solidarity Remembered) (Critical Perspectives On The Past Series)



## Synopsis

Combining personal memoir and historical narrative, this work argues for the reassessment of unionism in American life during the second half of the 20th century. Jack Metzgar traces the history of union steelworkers after World War II and draws on his father's experiences.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...sharply drawn profiles of relationships inside a working-class family and a marvelously complex description of union culture and work practices in a 1950s steel mill."-Dissent "Striking Steel is a history of the era of collective bargaining in steel, and, despite Metzgar's modesty, very good history it is."-The Journal of American History "The publication of Striking Steel adds to a growing literature about the post-war working-class identity and ways of life. It is the kind of class studies scholarship that labor educators should become acquainted with and use in their teaching."-Robert Bruno, University of Illinois "Through its compelling portrayal of one family, one union and industry, Striking Steel vividly brings to life the spirit of the American labor movement. and in its brilliant reinterpretation of one of the most misunderstood eras in our nation's past; it makes a potent case for organized labor's continuing role in helping to shape the next American century."-Roberta Lynch, International Vice President of AFSCME and co-author of Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community "Jack Metzgar is a fabulous writer whose memoir of his own steelworking family illuminates a now distant shopfloor universe of moral conflict, cultural change, and working class power. Striking Steel is full of insight, wisdom, and passion. read it and you will turn the pages with

eagerness and appreciation."-Nelson Lichtenstein, University of Virginia "We have here an informative, engaging, perceptive, sometimes controversial and always challenging history of the 1959 steel strike and the union struggles of the '50s. A thought-provoking review of a much neglected period and event, its results and its implications."-Lynn Williams, past President of the United Steelworkers of America "Striking Steel is part memoir, part history of the steelworkers and their union. It is a unique addition to the literature on American labor. Although I disagree with Metzgar's spirited defense of the union, this is an indispensable book for any student of American labor and of recent American history!"-Stanley Aronowitz, author of From the Ashes of the Old: American Labor and America's Future

Jack Metzgar is Professor of Humanities at Roosevelt University.

While personally involved in the period of the book at Mainstream Access and the layoffs in Johnstown, I am looking forward to reading the fascinating account. The only objection I have is the treatment of the Mainstream Access service that was somewhat under acknowledged in the book. The examples used by the author hid the fact that a dedicated staff of the firm including many locals did an outstanding job of placing individuals into meaningful work in spite of often hostile resistance by local officials and the requirement to get candidates to overcome their beliefs that the layoffs were merely temporary and that the company would be hiring them back soon. I am proud of our work and resent the downplay of our contribution by the author. I was office manager and did counselling as well.

Excellent read

I am writing a creative non fiction novel about events in labor History. tThis text provided some good background and bibliography

Striking Steel is well written. The author did a massive amount of research and shows an understanding of the deeper underlying labor issues. While we may not always agree on the issues, I came away with a better understanding of why it is sometimes necessary for unions to strike. Even though Mr. Metzgar did not drive the point that all of us--even those of us with comfy office jobs--have better working conditions because unions have demanded them, his recitation of working conditions in the 20th century, made me realize this is so. It is when he brings the issues

home--literally--to show how they shaped his family and neighborhood that the book takes on life. Statistics, theory, and conjecture are fine--but the reality of the lives of the workers is where the book has its greatest impact.

Metzgar's opening salvo: how does the biggest strike in American history in 1959 rock our Leave it to Beaver understanding of the 1950s? He shows how union power and affluence went hand in hand in this book that is a meditation on how class works, how unions functioned, the industrial golden age, and the decline of steel. Part memoir, part historical analysis, and part political economy, Metzgar explains how the deal worked back when it worked--as well as how it broke down. There is an almost transcendent understanding of the subject matter. Metzgar is somehow empathetic and extraordinarily balanced in his analysis. You won't soon forget his father, Johnny, and the world we have since forgotten.

This is interdisciplinary writing at its best--honest memoir, perceptive sociology, informative labor history, clear economics, and tough-minded politics. I not only learned a lot from reading this, but it was engaging and enjoyable, and it made the crucial decades of the 20th century--especially with regard to working class life--come alive for me. It serves as a reminder of how deeply and intensely issues of economics and government policy intersect the human complexity of everyday life.

In these memoirs by the son of a steelworker union rep, Metzger does a great job explaining how steelworkers and their Union created a middle class in steel towns across the U.S. by repeatedly striking during the 1950's. He brings to life the dry legalistic contract language, that steelworkers walked off the job for 119 days to protect and shows how when backed by a strong union and dedicated union reps, these words gave ordinary workers the tools to get respect on the job even when the boss wasn't keen on giving it. His history of the 1959 strike is well documented and he does a good job explaining why so many others got it wrong.

Jack Metzgar has achieved a rare feat with "Striking Steel" in that he writes a wonderful memoir of his childhood, his family and his father, Johnny Metzgar's days working as a unionized steel worker in Pennsylvania. A must read for anyone who is trying to comprehend their own father and for students of labor history. Its a wonderful read.

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