

If You Don't Come in on Sunday, Don't Come in on Monday

A review by
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1976

Labor educators are always looking for an effective film with which to launch a course in labor history. This may be it. It is an hour-long story, told in photographs, documents, and historical footage, of workers in America from the settling of Jamestown in 1607 to the struggle of the United Farm Workers today. With a broad brush, it paints the contribution of workers to the survival of the colonies before the Revolution, and to the growth and development of the United States afterward. Nor does it omit a discussion of slavery or the exploitation of women and children that began with the Industrial revolution.

How can the history of the labor movement, from the first union of Philadelphia shoemakers in 1792 to the present, be told in one short film? Of necessity, much is omitted; generalizations are inevitable. But the high points are there, starting with the 1805 court decision declaring unions "conspiracies." The bulk of film time is devoted to the one hundred years following the Civil War, when national unions developed in response to the robber barons, and big business perfected its use of the ironclad oath and yellow-dog contract, the lockout, use of strikebreakers and spies. Some of the film high points include the Railroad Strike of 1877, the Knights of Labor, the Haymarket tragedy, the Homestead and Pullman strikes, and the birth of the American federation of Labor.

The film turns, using footage used in *With These Hands*, to the story of the triangle Shirtwaist Fire, when 146 workers, most of them women, burned to death because windows and doors were bolted shut and fire ladders were too short. The Progressive Era and its emphasis on labor legislation can be better understood in this context.

The key fight of workers has always been for union recognition. In a turn unusual for most films, some of the women who helped in this fight are included here: Mrs. George Rodgers of the Knights of Labor, Mother Jones, women who organized the ladies' and men's garment unions, Frances Perkins, and the Women's Emergency Brigade of the 1930s. Using newsreel footage, the film covers labor events of the twentieth century, from the Industrial Workers of the World and the Lawrence strike of 1912 through the tragic days of the Great Depression, then into the New Deal and the organization of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

The final portion of the film brings the viewers to the present (1976), discussing the impact of World War II in bringing new groups of workers into the labor movement, the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955, and the newest union members, public employees. The final thrust of the film summarizes the accomplishments of the labor movement, but also states the problems that remain, of which union recognition for the millions still unorganized and full employment are two of the most critical.

While the film is excellently narrated by Alexander Scourby, unionists will also appreciate the brief interviews that open and close the film: the words of veteran organizer and ILGWU educator Pauline Newman. Now eighty-four, she began work in the garment plant in 1901, took part in the shirtwaist workers strike in 1909, and has been a union leader ever since. She gives the film its title when she explains how, back in 1901, her heart would sink when the employer tacked to the wall the dread notice: "If you don't come in Sunday..." the second part always read "... don't come in Monday."

"What choice did we have?" she asks, and answers the question herself: "None." Today, workers in union shops have choices and options that yesterday's workers did not have. The film makes clear at what cost these were won, and how much more there remains to do.

While this film undoubtedly will be used in union meetings where there will not be time for discussion, it could be valuable as a discussion starter for labor history classes or sessions on current labor problems. It points up effectively how many of the gains of workers have come through legislation that unions have supported...

Labor educators will want to know how this film compares with the old standby, *The Inheritance*, now twelve years old but still important as a labor history film. The newer film has the advantage of bringing labor up to date, and putting fresh faces (figuratively speaking) on the screen for an audience of whom many have seen *The Inheritance* at least once.

While *The Inheritance* still is a dramatic and original film, there is a world of history that has taken place since it was made. Both films run about an hour and provide a wealth of discussion material.