Cleveland, Chicago Women in the Trades, and the United Steelworkers’ Women of Steel. The women in the book not only organized as women but also were committed to their unions. Even in the instances where the unions were not as supportive of the women members or had other representational problems, the women workers usually took the position that it was better to work within their unions to create change instead of shunning union involvement. The efforts of these women are instructive for unions seeking ways to improve their representation of women.

*Sisters in the Brotherhoods* is an engaging read for anyone interested in both the historical background and the present status of women’s work in traditionally male jobs. Labor educators will find the book useful in understanding the ongoing challenges confronting the blue-collar women workers in their classes. Sections of the book could also be used to generate discussions on women’s experiences in nontraditional jobs. For academic credit courses on gender and labor, the book would be an excellent addition to the reading list because of its personal accounts and thorough analysis of gender at work.

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The future of organized labor looked bleak in the early 1990s. The national AFL-CIO had atrophied, and it seemed unable to renew itself in the face of steady membership declines that accompanied deindustrialization. Economic despair was overlaid with rapidly changing demographics as many white Angelinos left the unions and their communities after their factories closed. Politicians like former California Governor Pete Wilson and members of the Republican Party successfully exploited recession-induced anxiety to pass Proposition 187, forbidding the undocumented from using education or health services. Moreover, long-time labor allies in the legislature would rotate out under voter-approved term limits.

The premature death of the head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor allowed Miguel Contreras to assume the reins of power some two decades before they would otherwise have been available. The opportunity was fortuitous for both labor and Latinos. Both groups sought to change the existing political paradigm and to establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with.

Contreras began to align organized labor with the developing immigrant rights movement and to partner with the then-new AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and a new state federation leadership to demonstrate new organizational life.

He focused on political action, running candidates in Latino areas. Instead of donating to the candidates, labor placed volunteers in the precincts and used labor’s
financial largesse to fund an aggressive mailing campaign that focused on kitchen-
table economics and tapped into racial resentments at being scapegoated by nativist
politicians. One stunning success led to another, and Contreras began to help elect
African American, Asian, and Jewish candidates from multicultural districts.

Politicians were asked to support worker organizing, to adopt living-wage ordi-
nances, and to use redevelopment funds to build facilities to provide good jobs with
union contracts. Scholars such as Ruth Milkman have labeled this the “L.A. Model.”

The Contreras legacy is expansive. In the political arena, it is personified by the
recent elevation of Hilda Solis as U.S. Secretary of Labor and by the election of Los
Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Neither could have risen to such prominence
without labor’s assistance, and more importantly, without the fundamental changes
that Contreras brought to Los Angeles.

Miguel Contreras: Legacy of a Labor Leader is a beautifully designed and acces-
sible volume. It introduces the reader to this larger-than-life figure as a young UFW
activist in California’s Central Valley and a boycott organizer in Toronto and associ-
ates him with Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Robert F. Kennedy.

The book is heavily illustrated with images of people, artifacts, and ephemera.
These images and the relatively light text (which comprise less than seventy pages
in English and roughly the same number in the Spanish back half of the book) effec-
tively place Contreras in historical context and raise questions for discussion.

This book provides a wonderful first cut at history. Hopefully the authors, or
another scholar, will follow up with a full-length biography. A longer manuscript
would allow for an exploration of a host of issues central to Contreras’ life and times.
Furthermore, it would likely be less celebratory; it is easy to get the sense that this
book is part of a larger effort to canonize a gifted, but very human, man.

Kenneth Burt
California Federation of Teachers

hardcover.
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Labor and organizations do not stop at national borders. Many labor organizations,
particularly in the craft trades, call themselves “internationals,” usually because their
membership includes Canadians. Yet sometimes unnoticed in the study of labor rela-
tions is the work of broader international organizations, such as the International
Labor Organization (ILO). This slim volume, written in conjunction with the nineti-
eth anniversary of the ILO, begins to remedy this shortcoming.

The book is co-written by four authors, each considering one aspect of the ILO’s
work, such as quality of work, social protection, and decent work. By dividing the