*"Who's in Charge?": Workers and Managers in the United States.* National Museum of American History.

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Smithsonian curators Harry Rubenstein and Peter Liebhold have braved the chilly ideological winds blowing across the Mall to mount this timely and provocative traveling exhibition in the National Museum of American History. The space devoted to the exhibition is relatively small, but the subject is huge: nothing less than a class analysis of the labor process from the nineteenth century industrial era to the contemporary world of computer consoles and just-in-time production techniques. <p> Rubenstein and Liebhold have assembled some striking artifacts: an ominous set of nineteenth-century iron gates from the Bobson Textile Mills of Philadelphia, which guards the exhibit entrance; a set of the wooden tobacco molds that did so much to deskill turn-of-the-century cigar workers; an early set of time and motion sheets, with stopwatch, used by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth; and a contemporary keyboard from a McDonald's cash register, upon which the dollars and cents numbers have been replaced by "words" like FUDG SUND. <p> This traveling exhibit, on display at the NMAH through April 7, is well grounded in the spirit of Harry Braverman, perhaps far too much so. Indeed, its first third is an unrelenting exposition of the ideology and praxis of nineteenth-century industrial management, whose quest for industrial hegemony through workplace regimentation and de-skilling is starkly explicated. Given the calculated ignorance of the rest of the museum world on this subject, the creators of "Who's In Charge? " deserve our considerable gratitude, but there is a heavy-handed didacticism here that is most off-putting. No panel invokes the resources upon which the working class itself mobilized a turn-of-the-century resistance: there's no hint of the communal, republican world first celebrated by Herbert Gutman, or even of the craftsman's fierce pride and autonomy so well evoked by David Montgomery and the generation of labor historians who followed his lead. No artifacts from either the Knights of Labor or the Industrial Workers of the World are shown. <p> Historians of technology will find this early section of the exhibit flat-footed as well: a quotation from Karl Marx–who is identified only as an "economist"–encapsulates both the admirable political boldness and the reductionism of the exhibit: "It would be possible to write a history of inventions ... made for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class." Driving home the point is an epigram from Frederick Taylor: "In the past workers have been first. In the future the system must be first." <p> A short section on the New Deal and the classic era of mid-century collective bargaining stands at the exhibit's midpoint. Here the focus shifts rather abruptly to discussions of trade unionism, strikes, and the new labor legislation. All this is important, of course, but the resolute focus on the relationship between workers and their immediate bosses, which was the signal virtue of the exhibit's first section, is missing. A union contract book, a shop steward's badge, or an actual seniority list posted on a factory bulletin board might well have exemplified the shift in shop-floor power relations so notable in the New Deal era. <p> The exhibit's dramatic final section is dominated by an Andon Board taken right out of the jointly operated Toyota-General Motors assembly plant in Fremont, California. With its blinking red, yellow, and green lights revealing the status of each work station, the Andon Board is the physical embodiment of Japanese just-in-time production techniques. Workers have the formal right to stop the line by pulling a cord–in which case their green light turns first to yellow and then, after a pause, to red–but management has quickly learned to process this worker-generated information on labor intensity to "stress" the line in order to achieve relentlessly higher levels of individual productivity. <p> This exhibition room also displays a series of wonderful posters and advertisements, touting ev-

erything from foreman training and employer-employee unity to the virtues of cheap labor in Haiti and the rest of the Caribbean. Although the advocates of the new "team production" schemes are given their due, this final exhibit space is undoubtedly one of the most forthright critiques of contemporary capitalism to appear at taxpayer expense. The glowing set of tributes to the exhibition that appear in the comment notebooks at the exit demonstrate that, whatever the project's limitations, Liebhold and Rubenstein have tapped an exposed nerve in the way Americans feel about the contemporary world of work. <p>

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