



WHY GRIEVANCES ARE NOT ENOUGH

If only we could count on contract enforcement to keep our workplaces trouble-free.

But every time management gets a chance, it will encroach into territory the union has won, taking away things we thought the contract protected. The contract reflects the balance of power between management and workers at the moment it was signed—but not necessarily the balance today.

Simply filing a grievance doesn't build power. It's not usually a collective activity. While the grievance moves from step to step, the members have nothing to do but wait.

Besides, grievances can fix only a tiny fraction of the injustices that go on in any workplace. Think about the individual workers whose rights are violated. Most won't file a grievance. Some are still on probation, or already facing discrimination, or simply afraid they'll be marked as troublemakers. Some don't realize they have the right to grieve.

Even a good steward can't comb the shop getting all the shy or fearful workers to submit their grievances. In any case, the steward wouldn't have time to file them all; she has to pick her battles.

So of the many grievances that might have been filed, only a handful actually are. Months later, a few are finally won, but only the workers involved ever know about them. Even those with similar problems may not realize that a grievance happened. Most are left stewing over wrongs that go unaddressed.

That's why this book teaches you how to back up grievances with shop floor action or bypass the grievance system altogether. There still won't be time to address every issue—but the more people participate in solving a problem, the more they will develop the skills and confidence to take on other problems, and the union's power will grow.

You're developing a union culture in the workplace—not just at the union hall—where people expect to participate in defending the contract and defending each other.

