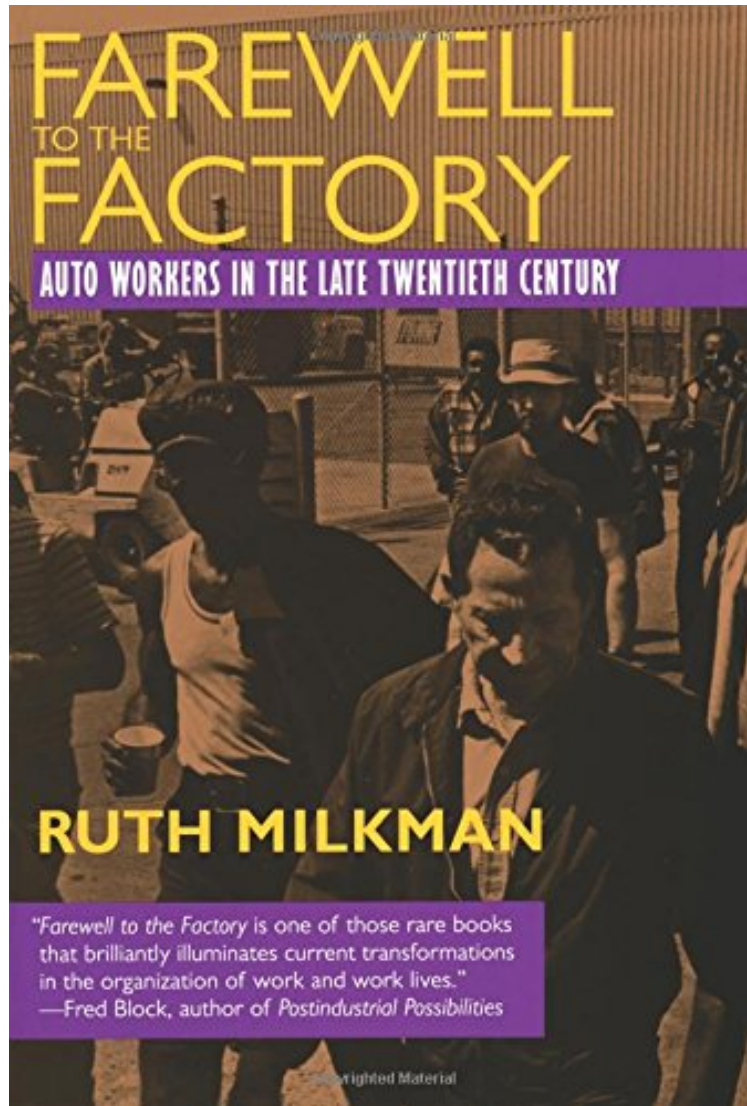


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Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century

Ruth Milkman

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Ruth Milkman : Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century:

This study exposes the human side of the decline of the U.S. auto industry, tracing the experiences of two key groups of General Motors workers: those who took a cash buyout and left the factory, and those who remained and felt the effects of new technology and other workplace changes. Milkman's extensive interviews and surveys of workers from the Linden, New Jersey, GM plant reveal their profound hatred for the factory regime a longstanding discontent made worse by the decline of the auto workers' union in the 1980s. One of the leading social historians of the auto industry, Ruth Milkman moves between changes in the wider industry and those in the Linden plant, bringing both a workers' perspective and a historical perspective to the study. Milkman finds that, contrary to the assumption in much of the literature on deindustrialization, the Linden buyout-takers express no nostalgia for the high-paying manufacturing jobs they left behind. Given the chance to make a new start in the late 1980s, they were eager to leave the plant with its authoritarian, prison-like conditions, and few have any regrets about their decision five years later. Despite the fact that the factory was retooled for robotics and that the management hoped to introduce a new participatory system of industrial relations, workers who remained express much less satisfaction with their lives and jobs. Milkman is adamant about allowing the workers to speak for themselves, and their hopes, frustrations, and insights add fresh and powerful perspectives to a debate that is often carried out over the heads of those whose lives are most affected by changes in the industry.

From Booklist Milkman is a sociology professor at UCLA and the author of *Gender at Work* (1987) and *Women, Work, and Protest* (1985). Here she extrapolates an understanding of the changes technology and new management techniques have wrought on U.S. industry by focusing on General Motors' Linden, New Jersey, manufacturing plant during the 1980s. Milkman and a fellow researcher undertook a 10-year study of the employees at Linden that was funded in part by both the United Auto Workers and GM. Following up the original research with personal surveys and interviews, Milkman now contrasts two groups of workers--those who accepted GM's offer to "buy them out" in the mid-1980s and those who remained to see new quality processes implemented at the plant. She reports her discovery that those who left GM were happier in their new lives even though many sacrificed higher incomes and that those who remained were disappointed with the failed promise of a better workplace even though improvements were made. David Rouse From the Inside Flap "A profound exploration into the decline of factory labor in the U.S. . . . Hers is one of those rare books that brilliantly illuminates current transformations in the organization of work and work lives." Fred Block, author of *Postindustrial Possibilities* "Part ethnography and part contemporary labor history, Milkman's wonderful book will be required reading for anyone concerned with the transformation American industry has undergone in the past twenty years and what this transformation has meant for American workers." David Brody, author of *Workers in Industrial America* "Behind all of the statistics on downsizing, the shrinking of our industrial base, and the folly of short-sighted management is the human drama of working women and men and their unions, struggling for dignity, fairness, and security. In *Farewell to the Factory*, Ruth Milkman tells us the stories of workers in a New Jersey auto plant. Milkman's scholarship makes a valuable contribution to the national conversation on restoring the American Dream for working families." John J. Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO "A fascinating case study of deindustrialization and restructuring by one of the leading social historians of the auto industry. The book is a great read and should be widely adopted in the classroom." Michael Burawoy, University of California, Berkeley "Milkman's impressive study probes the contemporary meaning of work, freedom and dignity in a fashion both sociologically rigorous and culturally evocative. Avoiding liberal nostalgia over the demise of industrial America, Milkman deploys a magnificently textured set of interviews to demonstrate that auto workers hated the chronic stress and humiliation of factory work even as they clung to its high pay and good benefits." Nelson Lichtenstein, author of *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor*