

Jerry Wurf: Labor's Last Angry Man

Joseph Goulden



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Dust jacket notes: "In an era of complacent labor bureaucreats, Jerry Wurf never forgot that the main function of a union was to organize workers. In the decades before his death, he built a major trade union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFSCME, by social and political activism. Jerry Wurf was an American iconoclast in the Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas mold, labor's last angry man. Because of Wurf's foresight, AFSCME grew by quantum leaps to a strength of one million members in the 1970s, while other unions shrank. He fought unflinchingly to defend the workers' rights, to jolt the American labor establishment out of its complacency, to increase politicians' accountability to labor, and to overcome American indifference to public employees. He did not always win, he was not always popular, but he forged a tradition of leadership and concern that will long endure. This is the story of the man and his union, told in large part in his own impassioned voice, taken down in the months before his death. Wurf recounts the story of his battles, both professional - in New York, Memphis, Atlanta and elsewhere - and personal - against the crippling handicap that he would not permit to stop him. He talks about his early days in and out of the union; his disputes with public officials and with other union leaders, including George Meany; his role in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war struggles and in the 1976 and 1980 Presidential elections; his hopes for the years to come. Like the man himself, it is a bold book - at once a fitting legacy and a guidepost to the future."

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