Clarion Review

Biography

A Savage Factory
Robert J. Dewar
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Three Stars (out of Five)

If you were born in the 1960s or earlier you probably remember the exploding deathtrap known as the Ford Pinto. Robert Dewar worked for Ford as an auto plant foreman during the Pinto's production. According to Dewar this vehicle's horrible legacy typified Ford's corporate agenda of gross disregard for human lives in favor of profit. The author's position as foreman gave him unique access to the full panoply of deplorable working conditions prevalent at that time. In his first book Dewar provides an unflinching personal account of his nightmarish years at a transmission factory.

On the one hand Ford paid its employees extremely well. On the other hand they endured the constant threat of disciplinary action for minor infractions blatant racism sexual harassment and depersonalization. Life at Ford was hellish for management and hourly workers alike and enmity between the sides was built into the company's framework. His introduction to his job included revelations such as: "I need a foreman that has an invisible sign on his back that says fuck with me and you will pay a price. I need a foreman that can take the lowest scum from Cincinnati and make the torque converters I need to keep this plant humming…"

Dewar organizes his book in themed chapters. In one sickening revelation after another he reports on the horrors of his plant's inner workings. Disgusted workers sabotage parts: one employee revealed "I have been fucking their brains out since they hired me twenty-eight years ago. I run bad parts. I fuck up machines. I never ever run my full quota." Management uses rejected parts that they know will fail in order to keep up with demand. When women are hired someone goes unpunished after posting a life-size photo of a spread-eagle naked woman at his work station. The list of abominable happenings is long.

The author paints a vivid picture of a sick workplace with detailed obscenity-laden dialogue. Although Dewar is diligent in his reporting skills he does not specify the year in which his story begins and the reader is forced to glean this information from contextual clues. A

glaring oversight in proofreading is the persistent misuse of the word “starring” in place of “staring.” Other annoying editing errors include improper use of the words “to” and “too” and “shuttered” in place of “shuddered.” Although the dialogue is insightful regarding the depth of management’s incompetence it begins to sound stilted after a while with the absence of any contractions.

The author concludes “There could be no greater indictment of the incompetent even criminal management in the U.S. auto industry than closed Ford GM and Chrysler plants and thriving profitable nonunion Japanese auto plants.” Dewar’s shocking tales will make readers wish this book were fiction. His firsthand chronicle of Ford’s archaic managerial style and the toll it extracted on employees and consumers is a good lesson in failed management practices and is a timely message given auto makers’ current downward spiral.

Luise Bolleber