

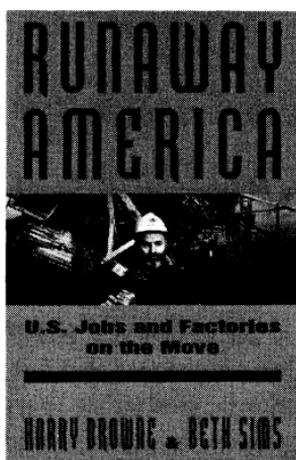
RUNAWAY AMERICA

U.S. Jobs and Factories on the Move

by Harry Browne and Beth Sims, 149 pp., 1993. [Resource Center Press, Box 4506, Albuquerque, NM, 87196], \$11.95.

WARN ACT AND STATE PLANT-CLOSING HANDBOOK

edited by James Fitzpatrick, 458 pp, 1993. [Bureau of National Affairs, BNA Books, P.O. Box 6036, Rockville, MD, 20850], \$45.



But for the NAFTA debate, you'd hardly know that almost two million Americans are *still* being permanently laid-off every year. Two new books focus on job loss and the few legal protections U.S. workers have against the effects of shutdowns.

Runaway America is a timely and comprehensive look at job flight from the U.S., especially to Mexico. It includes an appendix listing 258 U.S.-to-Mexico runaway shops with over 96,000 jobs, the largest such list ever compiled previewing NAFTA's impact on the U.S.

Authors Browne and Sims provide a solid overview of the issue of U.S. capital mobility and the most common responses to it. Drawing especially on the experiences of many groups in the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal (FIRR), the authors highlight such tactics as early warning networks, employee buyouts, corporate campaigns, and public subsidy abuse lawsuits.

Runaway America also includes a discussion of proposals for socially accountable trade agreements as developed by various labor-community exchanges, plus a directory of groups working on trade reform and industrial retention. Overall, the book is a concise primer on how and why jobs are more mobile today than ever before; it is a valuable resource for unionists and community activists.

James Fitzpatrick, Senior Legal Editor at the Bureau of National Affairs, has produced the *WARN Act and State Plant-Closing Handbook*, the definitive legal guide and first comprehensive listing of WARN Act cases and state plant closing laws and disputes. While the book is mostly a dry compilation of laws, regulations, and case summaries, it contains a few lively nuggets.

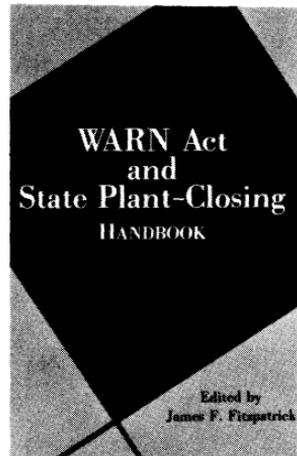
Of greatest use is the testimony of Julie Hurwitz, director of the National Lawyers Guild Sugar Law Center, before the Senate Labor Subcommittee. Hurwitz not only points out the major flaws in the WARN Act (such as the “mass layoff” loophole), she also suggests remedies for improving WARN.

Though it is useful to have such a thorough guide to the law, the WARN Act seems increasingly irrelevant. As the February, 1993 GAO report (also included in the handbook) concluded, only 1 out of 6 workers whom Congress intended to receive notice is actually getting notice. And a recent analysis by two University of South Carolina economists found that slightly more workers are getting *no notice at all* and slightly fewer are getting two months’ notice or more, since the law took effect in 1989.

Indeed, one of the major reforms of WARN advocated by FIRR and others is to require the Department of Labor to enforce the Act, just as the DOL enforces other fair labor standards, so that workers wouldn’t have to wait two years behind drug case-clogged federal courts to seek justice for WARN violations. The mass layoff loophole, making it possible for companies to gradually lay off hundreds of workers but never give notice, also needs tightening, as do many other aspects of WARN.

Congress William Ford has already introduced HR 2300, a bill that would revamp WARN, but the bill’s status in this Congress is murky. The bottom line is, however, WARN hasn’t saved any jobs, and never will until it becomes part of a real U.S. industrial policy. And *that* won’t evolve without the kind of broad based organizing chronicled in *Runaway America*.

—Greg LeRoy



Greg LeRoy is policy consultant for the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal and former Research Director of the Midwest Center for Labor Research. He also authored articles on fighting plant closings and improving EDWAA/WARN which appeared in *Labor Research Review 19: Saving Manufacturing*.