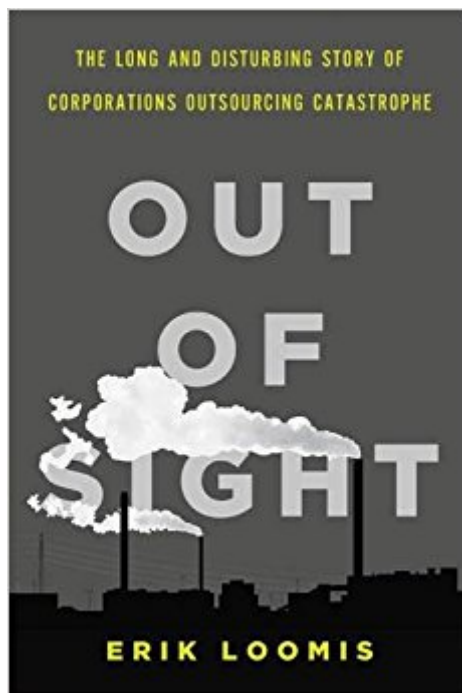




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Out Of Sight: The Long And Disturbing Story Of Corporations Outsourcing Catastrophe



Synopsis

When jobs can move anywhere in the world, bosses have no incentive to protect either their workers or the environment. Work moves seamlessly across national boundaries, yet the laws that protect us from rapacious behavior remain tied to national governments. This situation creates an all-too-familiar "race to the bottom," where profit is generated on the backs of workers and at the cost of toxic pollution. In *Out of Sight*, Erik Loomis, a historian of both the labor and environmental movements, follows the thread that runs from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York in 1911 to the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building outside of Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2013. The truth is that our systems of industrial production today are just as dirty and abusive as they were during the depths of the industrial revolution and the Gilded Age, but the ugly side of manufacturing is now hidden in faraway places where workers are most vulnerable. Today, American capitalists threaten that any environmental regulations will drive up the cost of production and force them to relocate our jobs to a country where they don't face such laws and can re-create their toxic work conditions. It wasn't always like this. In his insightful book, Loomis shows that the great environmental victories of twentieth-century America, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the EPA, were actually union victories. This history is a call to action: when we fight for our planet, we fight for our own dignity as workers and citizens.

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Praise for Erik Loomis: "A detailed and devastating critique by a brilliant historian."—John Nichols, *The Progressive* "The arrival of *Out of Sight* could not have been better timed. Erik Loomis

prescribes how activists can take back our country—for workers and for those who care about the health of our planet."—Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) "The rise of unbridled corporate power has been a disaster in so many ways—including the ability of the 1 percent to intimidate the rest of us into remaining silent lest we displease our masters. The story told here is tragic and important."—Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy* "Erik Loomis has globalized [Upton Sinclair's] *The Jungle*. He shows that the most important reason for U.S. corporations to produce abroad is to avoid the regulations that books like *The Jungle* produced. Perhaps *Out of Sight* can prompt a similar movement on behalf of workers around the world, our planetary environment, and, yes, we who wear the clothes and eat the sausage that they produce."—James Loewen, author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me* "In this dazzling overview of industrial history, Erik Loomis shows how we can—no, we must—fight for both decent jobs and a clean environment. We can do so by not letting the corporations escape ‘out of sight. We need to think and act as globally as corporations do, and force them to respect rights wherever they go. This book is a must-read for people who care about jobs and the environment."—Aviva Chomsky, professor of history at Salem State University and author of *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* "Well-written and informative . . . shows the many strong connections between workplace catastrophes, poor working conditions, diseases, and environmental disasters. Highly recommended."—Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, Dhaka "A passionate condemnation of the power that corporations hold over our lives, Erik Loomis shows that capitalism's geography is a central element in class conflicts."—Andrew Herod, Distinguished Professor of Geography at the University of Georgia "Erik Loomis shows that our systems remain broken, and it is our planet and her people, particularly the most marginalized communities, who are paying the price. However, there is hope in collective action."—Jacqueline Patterson, director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program "One of the top voices chronicling the struggles of the twenty-first-century labor movement. Loomis's blunt, witty, take-no-prisoners style always promises an exciting read."—Sarah Jaffe

Most of us have had at least some exposure to the history of the labor movement in the US. Things like the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire and the Pullman strike are pretty common parts of even high school history classes (or, used to be). So we have a rough idea of how bad things used to be and how we got to the relatively enlightened time we live in now. What Erik Loomis does in this book is flesh-out the missing parts of this story, bring it up to date, and then explode the horizon to include the rest of

the world and our place in it. Suddenly the present doesn't seem so enlightened. Suddenly the bad old days aren't old -- they're here, now, in the form of miserable poverty, dangerous working conditions, and recklessly irresponsible environmental practices. All of it being done in our names, for the goods in our stores. Many of these effects are hidden from the average cubicle-dwelling American worker. Our lives are pretty tame. But we come to realize that our desks and laptops and Starbucks coffee cups all rest on a precarious tower of human misery, most of it hidden away in foreign countries where the travel guides never go. Read it and weep. Then dry your tears and heed the words of advice that Loomis offers at the end -- a sort of tips'n'tricks for a better world.

During a twitter fight that involved me, a socialist, and a libertarian, I was recommended to buy two separate books - this book by Erik Loomis and William Easterly *The Tyranny of Experts*. Because of course the best time to buy books is based on recommendations in twitter fights. Overall, the information is good here. I am one of those Pro-Free Trade Marxists you hear about all the time because if I had a religion it would be based on the last lines of the Manifesto: Workers of the World, Unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains (depending on the translation, I know). So I have watched nativists with puzzlement because those manufacturing jobs are not coming back. So on one hand it's good that there are opportunities for employment in the developing world. On the other hand my they're exploitative and on another or the same hand, my they are dangerous. So what we need is some check to that labor cost arbitrage that international corporations are capable of. There needs to be supranational bodies with some real teeth and trade agreements need to be transparent and enforceable with real consequences to make sure that the labor that we offshore is not the kind that necessitates suicide nets on the factories. Unfortunately the agreements have left a lot of areas wanting and the UN agencies for labor are relatively invisible. What Loomis does well is catalogue the problems. The strength is showing the danger that we have pushed away from our shores and in how those dangers were once on our shores. Once corporations became larger and more powerful than nations, those labor laws disappeared and OSHA lost its grip. Where the book fails is finding solutions. The proposals compared to the scope of the problem seem like small steps. Not to diminish organizing and consciousness raising, but Loomis is stuck in the paradigm of making capitalism the best possible, not moving to the next economic system. You know, whatever that may be. Where it also goes wrong is that it feels at times just like a litany of bad things. A blurb compares the book to the Jungle, and it feels most like Zinn's *A People's History*, but there is no real compelling narrative or

characters to draw you through. Zinn used the characters in his book to tell the story he wanted. It worked well in sections on the villainy of Columbus and the heroism of Eugene Debs, both which I remember twenty years after picking it up. There are no heroes here, anti- or regular, and that makes the book a slog. Which is weird because it is less than 200 pages long.

This book will open your eyes to the world we live in, and will hopefully draw enough attention to create positive change.

Erik Loomis makes labor history engaging and accessible to activist and undergraduate readers.

Erik Loomis has written a fantastic, infuriating, depressing, and ultimately inspiring book on the extent to which corporations have damaged the working class, organized labor, the environment, and the American political system as a whole. Out of Sight is a short read packed with compelling narratives and facts that every American should be well aware of but aren't, thanks to our power-serving media owned, unsurprisingly, by massive corporations. Please, read this book, and then force everyone around you to read it too.

Erik Loomis has written a gripping and essential book. Too often, we are desensitized to the fact that corporations can hide the crimes that they perpetrate both on the bodies of their workers and on the environment simply by putting their factories far away from their consumers. Loomis argues that there need to be global protections for a global economy. He is not hopeless, and his is not a story without hope; there are real political fixes for this broken system. Within the framework of this argument, he provides his readers an invaluable and exciting recourse: a concise and edge-of-your-seat historical narrative of the U.S. labor movement. This whirlwind of resistance to power is inspiring, and it serves to underline his point that we, workers and citizens, can succeed in regulating corporate behavior -- in fact, we have done so with amazing success. Now, we just need to take it to the global level. This book is incredibly timely, as it publishes right into the debate about "fast track" and the TPP and TIPP. Loomis shows that these trade deals are simply cover for corporate power, and we need to work to make sure they protect us.

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