

Settle in with a Good Labor/Political Movie or Book



As the winter season sets in, it's a fine time to grab something hot to drink, crank up the fire and settle in to watch some movies or read a good book. If you are interested in something labor or politically inspired, here is a list that will keep you entertained. The list was compiled by World Wide Work, and is published by the American Labor Education Center, an independent nonprofit founded in 1979. (Go to the www.theworksite.org for more information).

Movies

✓ *A Crack in the Pavement* and *The New Neighbors* are two related half-hour documentaries. The first shows how many of America's first inner suburbs are falling apart as government policy supports further sprawl rather than maintenance of existing infrastructure. The second focuses on a diverse group of residents of Pennsauken, New Jersey, that is working to promote and maintain integration in their community.

✓ *The Yes Men Fix the World* shows the key stunts that two activist performance artists have pulled off by impersonating corporate or government officials in television interviews or conference speeches and making the announcements those officials ought to make if they put the public interest first.

The film's release is quite timely, given that in October the *Yes Men* pulled off a similar action by announcing at the National Press Club that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had decided to endorse strong action on climate change. The announcement was carried by Reuters and the *New York Times* web site, until the Chamber came forward awkwardly to deny that it supports climate change solutions.

✓ *The Exiles* is a restoration of a tragic but beautifully made 72-minute film first released in 1961. It portrays one night in the lives of Native Americans who were uprooted from their land by official U.S. government policies and exiled with no future to Los Angeles (as well as other urban centers).

✓ *Outsourced* (www.outsourcedthemovie.com). This romantic comedy follows a young "fulfillment executive" in Seattle who is sent to India to train workers who will be taking over the work the team he supervised used to do. In the process, he falls in love, learns something about Indian culture as well as his own, and finds out that Indians too are subject to the whims of global capital.

✓ *Freeheld* (www.freeheld.com). The 38-minute Oscar winner for short documentary is a powerful tool for provoking discussion about the rights of partners of the same sex.

✓ *August Evening* (www.augustevening.com). This gorgeous independent feature about cross-generational relationships in a Mexican family in Texas has authentic emotion and subtlety. Key roles are played powerfully by people from the area who never acted before.

✓ *War Made Easy* (www.warmadeeasythemovie.org). This 73-minute documentary collects in one place virtually all of the key video clips from U.S. presidents

ranging from Lyndon Johnson through Bush the Second that show Republicans and Democrats alike lying to the public to justify the launching and prolonging of wars. By juxtaposing nearly identical clips from media coverage of war after war, the film exposes a pattern of government-media collaboration to mislead, cheerlead, attack or ignore critics, and then insist that withdrawal would cause more damage than continuing the war indefinitely.

✓ *Secrecy* (www.secrecyfilm.com). An 87-minute, dispassionate documentary interviews intelligence and military insiders as well as outside watchdogs on the question of how to balance the public's need for information to make democratic decisions and agencies' desire to maintain secrecy.

Books

✓ *Unafraid* by Jeff Golden (www.Unafraidthebook.com). At a time when a new national figure is leading for his party's presidential nomination by tapping into many Americans' yearning for a break from conventional politics, this novel evokes the author's vision of what is possible. His starting point, what if the bullet fired at John F. Kennedy in Dallas in 1963 only wounded him, and in the process gave him a new willingness to take risks for progressive policies and an intense sense of urgency? How might the years since then have been different?

✓ *Swim Against the Current* by Jim Hightower with Susan DeMarco (Wiley). The populist with a sense of humor chronicles grassroots activists across the U.S. who have made a difference in their communities.

✓ *Stand Up Straight* by Robert Creamer (Seven Locks Press). A long-time political organizer provides nearly 600 pages of thoughtful advice for campaigners of all kinds about how to communicate and organize effectively for progressive issues and candidates.

✓ *The Big Squeeze* by Steven Greenhouse (Knopf). One of the few labor reporters left at an American newspaper, the *New York Times* reporter draws on years of interviews to paint a human picture of declining living standards and workers' rights. He contrasts the Wal-Marting of the economy with the high road he says employers such as Costco have followed.

✓ *Waiting on a Train* by James McCommons (Chelsea Green). The author spent months riding rail routes throughout America. His account, filled with entertaining anecdotes, combines history, travelogue, and discussion of public policy. With air and auto travel increasingly unsustainable, McCommons argues that the nation's passenger rail system must be revitalized.

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