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Sticking To The Union: An Oral History Of The Life And Times Of Julia Ruuttila (Palgrave Studies In Oral History)



Synopsis

Sticking to the Union relates the vibrant life of Julia Ruuttila (1907-1991), a political radical and labor journalist in the Pacific Northwest. Ruuttila's life of activism provides a much-needed woman's voice in the history of labor and social activism in the twentieth century. Ruuttila worked for civil liberties, civil rights, and peace organizations throughout her life, supporting striking workers, taking part in lunch-counter protests against businesses that discriminated against African Americans, and demonstrating against the Vietnam War. Polishuk provides insightful historical context for Ruuttila's own lively words. A unique and important perspective on American struggles of the twentieth century emerges in this engaging story of an irrepressible, hard-nosed woman.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Julia Ruuttila pursued economic justice through labor organizing much of her adult life in the Pacific Northwest. The span of her involvement and her reflections on that engagement contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of the major transformations in the United States from the early 1900s through the 1980s. Her account through the medium of oral history delivers all the enthusiasm, passion, frustration, and occasional despair that accompanies a life on the front line. Ruuttila enjoyed a long history of union activism. Her father was a Wobbly, a member of the radical one-big-union Industrial Workers of the World, and her mother defied the law to distribute birth control information to other working class women. Household guests when she was a child included

some of the biggest names in the radical union movement. Steeped in leftist organizing and radical commitments, Ruuttila made a name for herself as an organizer and journalist. She helped establish a womanâ€™s auxiliary to support lumber mill strikes during the 1930s and to demand justice for imprisoned workers. She opposed the US entering WWII and later supported peace candidates. She protested the Vietnam War and fought race discrimination. Sandy Polishuk encouraged Ruuttila to present her own story and then urged her to pursue sensitive areas in her life, to be more forthcoming and present a fuller historical record. She met a great deal of resistance from her subject about disclosing personal events, but that too illuminated how much Ruuttila believed the only thing that really mattered was political activity. Polishuk knows oral history, and she applies a deft touch interpreting her subjectâ€™s recollections as any account is sure to include both inaccuracies and intentional re-shaping of events.

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