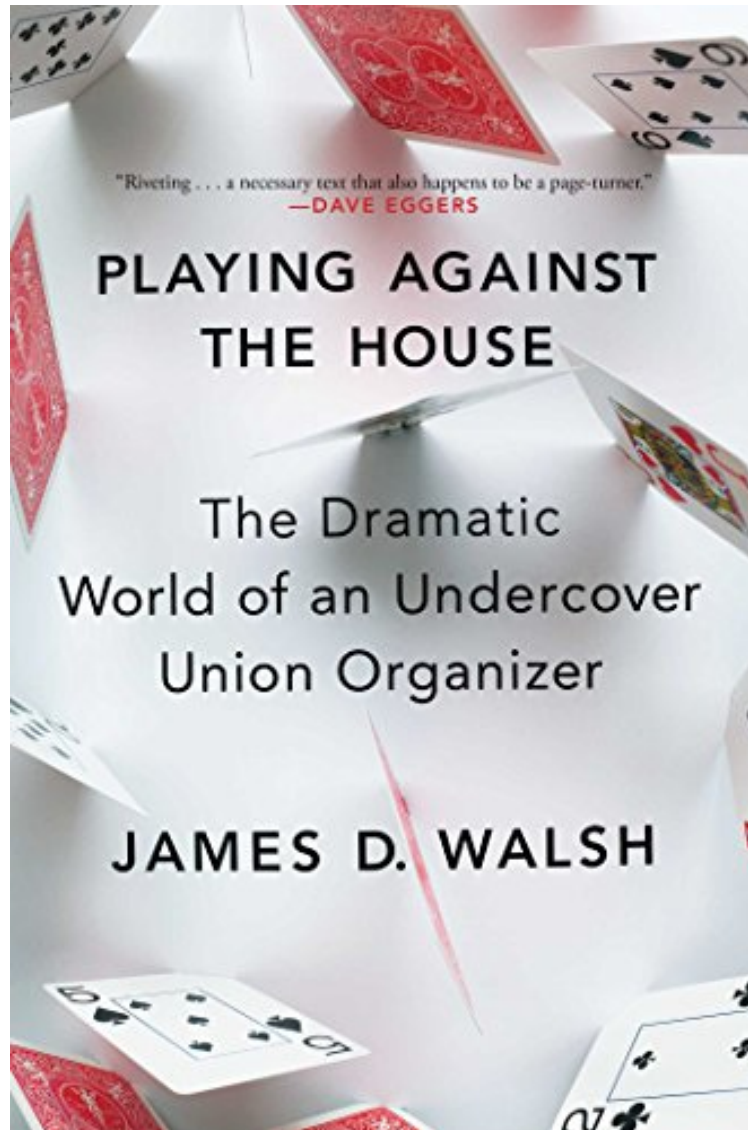


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## Playing Against the House: The Dramatic World of an Undercover Union Organizer

*James D. Walsh*

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**James D. Walsh : Playing Against the House: The Dramatic World of an Undercover Union Organizer** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Playing Against the House: The Dramatic World of an Undercover Union Organizer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. terrific insight, and witBy Emily SpitzerWhat a captivating book! I was unfamiliar with unions and their important work. Walsh captures the challenges faced by low-wage workers and attempts to unionize, and he writes with compassion, terrific insight, and wit. His chronicle allowed me to feel the

alternating fear, anger, and resignation of the people with whom he worked. I loved the book and admire the commitment of the author. I heartily recommend it!

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By PawGood Read Great Service  
6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating  
By DarrenIngram\_dot\_com  
Trade unions have historically done good, essential work for workers. Opinions can vary between many about their need or effectiveness in today's society. This is before you look at different attitudes towards trade union membership and activity in different countries around the world. No matter your view on the matter, this book was an interesting look at attempts to get trade union recognition and membership within U.S. companies operating in sectors that were often quite anti-union, showing how trade unions seek to establish a presence. It feels strange, with a western European mindset, that in the 21st century unions are needing to sneak about in the shadows to try and get members and be recognised in the workplace. This reviewer could hardly be described as a union activist and can be quite critical towards the activities of many unions, yet the fundamental right to organise representation for workers should be a given. In many European countries trade union activities is protected by law and companies have to subsidise the union activities in terms of facilities, access to workers, giving paid time to union officials who are employed by the company and so forth. Reading how things can be in the United States - hardly a backward, uncivilised country - can be quite shocking in contrast. The book is written in a narrative, matter-of-fact style, explaining about how the author sought employment within a casino that was overtly non-union in nature, to do the job they were hired for whilst "salting", seeking to unionise co-workers from within without drawing attention to management who may be very quick to terminate your employment. Credit must be given for the author having the right balance in his writing, so it is not campaigning or pointing out the unfairness of the situation directly. It lets the situation speak for itself and the reader forms their own impressions. It was a fascinating, eye-opening read. Of course, when you think about it, it is clear that unions will try and get members and gain acceptance in places where they are not necessarily welcome in. However, the way in which many are forced to go about it was entirely new to this reviewer so engaging it is no cliché; to say that this book was hard to put down.

Fascinating and groundbreaking: a talented young journalist goes undercover to work as a casino labor-union organizer in Florida in this rare, smart look at the ongoing struggle between the haves and the have-nots. Salting is a simple concept—get hired at a non-union company, do the job you were hired to do, and, with the help of organizers on the outside, unionize your coworkers from the inside. James Walsh spent almost three years as a "salty" in two casinos in South Florida, working as a buffet server and a bartender. Neither his employers at the casinos nor the union knew about Walsh's intentions to write about his experience. Now he reveals little-known truths about how unions fight to organize workers in the service industries, the vigorous corporate opposition against them, and how workers are caught in the battle. During his time as an undercover worker, Walsh witnessed the oddities of casino culture, the cultish nature of labor organizing, and surprising details of service industry employment. His revelations show the ferocious conflict between large service corporations and their hourly wage employees, who are hanging onto economic survival by their fingernails. The hotel and service union Walsh worked with employs young, college-educated activists and learning how salts use their skills to great success or failure is riveting. Walsh transports us directly to the hot, humid backroom of the Miami casino and shows how it feels to be grilled by a union organizer as to whether you have enough grit for the job. A clear-eyed and fascinating portrait of labor-organizing, *Playing Against the House* explores the trials of day-to-day life for the working poor to its effects on the middle class and the face of twenty-first century union busting in unprecedented detail.

"The degree of commitment shown by this young author is stunning. James Walsh used his two years in low wage jobs to help bring a union fight to casino owners and, now, an original, first-hand account to readers. It's an up-close, empathetic portrait of the working poor, in particular the bravest among them, and what happens when idealism meets the sausage-making of union organizing." —Ted Conover, author of *Rolling Nowhere* and *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*

"James Walsh's *Playing Against the House* is a brilliantly conceived and executed undercover expose about union rights at casinos. Set in South Florida, the narrative is full of compassion for the hard-working poor. Every page sizzles. This is New Journalism at its finest!" —Douglas Brinkley, author of *Cronkite*

"James Walsh has done a remarkable thing here. He has told a story of 21st-century union organizing, not through statistics and received wisdom, but through riveting, accessible first-person reporting. He humanizes the issue, deftly rendering everyone involved—from workers to management—and in the process, has created a necessary text that also happens to be a page-turner." —Dave Eggers, cofounder of *Voice of Witness* and author of *The Circle* and *A Hologram for The King*

About the Author: James Walsh's work has appeared on the websites of *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and *GlobalPost*. He is on the editorial staff at *New York* magazine. *Playing Against the House* is his first book.