



# **Reform or Repression: Organizing America's Anti-Union Movement (American Business, Politics, and Society)**

*Chad Pearson*

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Historians have characterized the open-shop movement of the early twentieth century as a cynical attempt by business to undercut the labor movement by twisting the American ideals of independence and self-sufficiency to their own ends. The precursors to today's right-to-work movement, advocates of the open shop in the Progressive Era argued that honest workers should have the right to choose whether or not to join a union free from all pressure. At the same time, business owners systematically prevented unionization in their workplaces.

While most scholars portray union opponents as knee-jerk conservatives, Chad Pearson demonstrates that many open-shop proponents identified themselves as progressive reformers and benevolent guardians of America's economic and political institutions. By exploring the ways in which employers and their allies in journalism, law, politics, and religion drew attention to the reformist, rather than repressive, character of the open-shop movement, Pearson's book forces us to consider the origins, character, and limitations of this movement in new ways. Throughout his study, Pearson describes class tensions, noting that open-shop campaigns primarily benefited management and the nation's most economically privileged members at the expense of ordinary people.

Pearson's analysis of archives, trade journals, newspapers, speeches, and other primary sources elucidates the mentalities of his subjects and their times, rediscovering forgotten leaders and offering fresh perspectives on well-known figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, Booker T. Washington and George Creel. Reform or Repression sheds light on businessmen who viewed strong urban-based employers' and citizens' associations, weak unions, and managerial benevolence as the key to their own, as well as the nation's, progress and prosperity.

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