



# Work Inc.: A Philosophical Inquiry

*Edmund Byrne*

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## **Work Inc.: A Philosophical Inquiry** Edmund Byrne

Many workers today feel that the longstanding social contract between government, business, and labor has been broken. This book examines legal and philosophical problems that must be addressed if there is to be a new social contract that is fair to workers. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, from the popular press to technical philosophy, Edmund F. Byrne brings into focus ethical issues involved in corporate decisions to reorganize, relocate, or automate. In assessing the human costs of these decisions, he shows why, to a worker, "corporations are not reducible to their assets and liabilities any more than a government is merely its annual budget. That they are organizations, that these organizations do things, and that they are socially responsible for what they do."

In support of this assignment of responsibility, Byrne seeks to demythologize corporate hegemony by confronting a variety of intellectual "dragons" that guard the gates of the status quo. These include legal assumptions about corporate personhood and commodification, private property and eminent domain; management ideas about the autonomous employee and profit without payrolls; technocratic dreams of a dehumanized workplace; ideological belief in progress and competition; and philosophical arguments for libertarian freedom, liberal welfare, and global justice.

Because of these and other mainstream perspectives, workers today are widely perceived, in law and in common parlance, to be isolated atoms. But, Byrne emphasizes, work, including work done for a transnational corporation, is done in a community. Since corporate leaders make decisions that have an impact on people's lives and on communities, involvement in such decisions must be not only corporate or governmental but community-based as well.

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