

# Introduction to the new edition

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This book is a product of the political and ideological debate that engaged my New Left generation when, in the early 1970s, so many campus-based radicals inaugurated a remarkable probe into the character, meaning, and history of the working class and its institutions. Two events in particular seemed to crystallize my decision to write a history of unionism and the state during the 1940s. The first came on the evening of September 14, 1970, when a few dozen Berkeley students drove down to Fremont's sprawling General Motors assembly complex to support rank and file workers when the United Automobile Workers struck the company at midnight. Hundreds jumped the gun and rushed out of the factory a couple of hours early. The youthful, boisterous crowd happily waved our hand-painted signs – “GM – Mark of Exploitation,” took over the union hall, and cheered militant speeches, both anti-company and anti-union. It was the beginning of the first coordinated, nationwide stoppage at GM since the winter of 1945–46. We didn't know it at the time, but the 1970 GM strike, which would continue for ten weeks, came right in the midst of the last great wave of twentieth-century industrial conflict in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

While all this was going on, the Berkeley branch of the International Socialists, a Trotskyist formation of New Left sensibility and “third camp” (i.e. anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist) politics, was in the midst of furious debate. Along with others radicalized on the campuses and in the anti-Vietnam War movement, a “turn toward the working class” had begun to propel thousands of student radicals into the nation's factories, warehouses, hospitals, and offices. From Berkeley, friends and comrades took off for Detroit auto plants, Chicago steel mills, Cleveland trucking companies, and all sorts of industrial jobs throughout the Bay Area.<sup>2</sup>

But what were they to do when they got there? If these “industrializers” began to work their way up through the trade union apparatus, they would be helping to build an institution that seemed positively

anathema to many of us. The AFL-CIO remained a firm backer of the war in Vietnam; moreover, even the more progressive unions, like the UAW and the Packinghouse Workers, appeared so strapped by bureaucracy, law, contracts, and political allegiances that they hardly seemed an appropriate vehicle to advance the class struggle. C. Wright Mills, Stanley Aronowitz, Harvey Swados, C. L. R. James, and other radicals had taught us that the growth of the union bureaucracy and the government's intrusive labor relations apparatus had robbed labor of its radical heritage. By incorporating the trade unions into the structures of the American state, or at least the two-party system, these institutions were thought to resemble those of Stalinist or fascist regimes, where statist unions and labor fronts had been foisted upon the working class.<sup>3</sup>

Thus in the debates that animated my generation of Berkeley students, older activists, like Hal Draper and Stan Weir, made much of labor's experience during the World War II mobilization era. Then the unions had offered the state and enforced upon their members a "no-strike pledge," even as "wildcat" strikes (i.e., those unauthorized by higher officials), union factionalism, and labor party agitation energized many of the rank-and-filers who had built the industrial unions during the great strikes that electrified the nation between 1934 and 1941. A new generation of working-class radicals must therefore keep a wary eye on the union leadership and build their own independent caucuses within the labor movement.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, I was beginning my research as a wave of spirited strikes, many of them wildcat, shattered the industrial relations routine in Detroit auto factories, Midwest trucking barns, big city post offices, and throughout California agriculture. Between 1967 and 1973 the size and number of strikes reached levels not seen since the immediate post-World War II years.

This was the perspective put forth in my 1974 University of California dissertation, published in 1982 as *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II*.<sup>5</sup> The book was skeptical about the staying power of New Deal liberalism; saw the warfare state as a repressive institution; criticized Congress of Industrial Organization leaders, both "conservative" (i.e. social democratic) and Communist; and celebrated the World War II wildcat strike movement in the auto, rubber, and shipbuilding industries. It saw that the emergence of a stolid, bureaucratically insular postwar labor movement was a product not of some inherent, "job-conscious" parochialism within the union rank and file, nor of McCar-

thyite repression after the war, but of the bargain struck between the government and cooperative, patriotic union leaders during World War II itself. This kind of argument was anathema to the then dominant set of industrial relations scholars, many themselves trained while serving with the War Labor Board and other labor relations agencies of the wartime era. These influential scholars, some of whom, like John Dunlop, Clark Kerr, Archibald Cox, George Schultz, and James MacGregor Burns, had achieved high visibility posts in government and the academy, saw labor's World War II experience as a gloriously successful one: the unions had matured by demonstrating their patriotism, doubling their membership, and stabilizing their relationship with employers and the state.

To their way of thinking, labor history really had come to an end round about 1941, if not before; what followed was "industrial relations," a policy-oriented research enterprise that sought to fine-tune a depoliticized system of labor-management accommodation and conflict.<sup>6</sup> Their enormous influence blocked efforts to reconfigure a twentieth-century history of class relations. Indeed, the most influential labor historians of the 1970s, Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, and E. P. Thompson, were all students of society and ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. David Brody had written a pioneering social history of the 1919 steel strike, but in the 1970s there were still few conceptual tools at hand by which to examine a history of the working class or its institutions during the mid-twentieth-century decades. The "state" had not yet been "brought back in," to use a phrase coined by Theda Skocpol and her associates; nor had historians begun to deconstruct the twentieth-century working class into those categories, including race, gender, skill, and *mentalité*, that have subsequently proven so illuminating. During the early 1970s the left, even the academic left, still imagined an undifferentiated rank and file, which was itself the ideological product of a biopolar discourse that dichotomized a powerful set of labor leaders and a bureaucratically repressed or misled mass union membership. Thus, there were more studies written on the Knights of Labor in that decade than on the Congress of Industrial Organizations. For labor historians it seemed a lot easier to find a useable past in the conflicts that divided a late nineteenth-century mill town than among those contractual disputes and internal union fights that structured the production regime in a Detroit factory circa 1945.

Things are different today. Thirty years of union decline and labor-liberal defeat have transformed the questions historians choose to ask about the trajectory of organized labor during the New Deal and World War II years. Contemporary labor and social historians write more about the CIO than the Knights, or even the radical Industrial Workers of the World. In the early twentieth-first century, when the proportion of all union workers hovers just above 13 percent, organized labor's incorporation into a claustrophobic state apparatus seems far less of an issue than survival of those same unions, not to mention the revival of a socially conscious, New Deal impulse within the body politic. The postwar fate of New Deal liberalism has become a highly contentious issue, so an increasingly rich historiography on the "New Deal order" now stands embedded within a reconsideration of the postwar transformation of U.S. capitalism itself. We are becoming as interested in the ideas and institutions of those who fought against labor and the New Deal – the corporations, the various layers of the middle class, the anti-New Deal politicians of the South and West, the traditionalist conservatives within the working class itself – as we are determined to dissect the contradictions inherent in mid-twentieth-century labor liberalism and the Rooseveltian state.<sup>7</sup>

In this re-evaluation, the line that once divided the Depression decade from that of the war and the era of postwar politics now appears increasingly fractured. In part this stems from our understanding that the working class of the 1930s was hardly as radical as once conceived, or rather, that its presumptive militancy cannot be divorced from the state structures and institutions that are dialectically complicit in that advanced level of working-class mobilization. The nature of "militancy" and "conservatism" within the working class has become hugely problematic, as questions of ethnicity, racism, sexism, homophobia, and regionalism have moved to the fore.<sup>8</sup> Thus the warfare state did not instantly make irrelevant the politics, the social ideologies, or the ethnocultural matrix that had structured class relations during the heyday of the New Deal itself. Continuity, not abrupt change, characterizes the political culture of the late 1930s and early 1940s. As I often tell my classes, December 7, 1941 is the most overrated day in U.S. history.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, historians now see that the political economy of World War II is part of a larger New Deal order that stretched from the early 1930s to the 1970s. This was an era characterized by Democratic party domi-

nance, Keynesian statecraft, and a trade union movement whose power and presence was too often taken for granted, not the least by historians of “state development.” Industry-wide unions sustained both the dominance of the Democratic party and a quasi-corporatist system of labor-management relations whose impact, far transcending the realm of firm-centered collective bargaining, framed much of the polity’s consensus on taxes, social provision, and industry regulation. And finally, the system of production, distribution, and social expectations that characterized both union strength and business enterprise was uniquely stable, resting on both a well-protected continental market and a technologically and ideologically dominant mass-production model.

In this context the economic power wielded by American trade unions was by its very nature political, for the New Deal had thoroughly politicized all relations among the union movement, the business community, and the state. The New Deal provided a set of semi-permanent political structures in which key issues of vital concern to the trade union movement might be accommodated. The National Labor Relations Board established the legal basis of union power and a mechanism for its state sanction; New Deal regulatory bodies stabilized competition in key industries like trucking, coal, air transport, banking, and utilities; and the National War Labor Board provided a tripartite institution that set national wage policy and contributed to the rapid wartime growth of the new trade unions. Corporatism of this sort called for government agencies, composed of capital, labor, and public representatives, to substitute bureaucratic initiative and national economic planning for the chaos and inequities of the market.<sup>10</sup> The successive reappearance of such tripartite governing arrangements during the mid-twentieth-century seemed to signal that in the future as in the past, the fortunes of organized labor would be determined as much by a process of politicized bargaining in Washington as by the give and take of contractual collective bargaining.

This was neither “free collective bargaining” nor the kind of syndicalism that, during the era of the Great War, had informed phrases like “social reconstruction,” “industrial democracy,” and “workers’ control.”<sup>11</sup> To insure industrial peace during the Second World War, the state sustained a coercive labor relations apparatus that policed not only recalcitrant corporations, but also radical shop stewards, uncooperative unions, and striking workers. A generation ago the repressive character of this regime came in for much attention. Thus Martin Glaberman

celebrated the unstructured spontaneity by which new industrial migrants threw off the contract shackles and Wagner Act procedures forged by the New Deal state. George Lipsitz searched for the link that would unite in song and struggle many of those same working-class rebels, and especially those white Appalachians and African Americans marginal to the New Deal universe. And I condemned as a disastrous bargain the “no-strike pledge” that virtually all union leaders offered the nation. They won “union security” and a rising membership, but advanced the union movement’s internal bureaucratic deformities as well as its marriage to the Democratic party and the warfare state.<sup>12</sup>

But in the early years of the twenty-first century, the potential payoff from the corporatist bargain of the World War II era looks much better than it once did. Resistance to union organizing declined dramatically during the war as the union movement nearly doubled in size. In the South the work of the War Labor Board (WLB), not to mention the Fair Employment Practice Commission, generated something close to a social revolution. As Michelle Brattain, Daniel Clark, Michael Honey, and Robert Korstad have demonstrated, the WLB orders that mandated union recognition and collective bargaining opened up the organizational and ideological space that enabled workers, both black and white, to liberate themselves from three generations of paternalism and repression. In his study of Winston-Salem tobacco workers, Korstad rightly calls this the “Daybreak of Freedom.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, in the North the WLB socialized much of the labor movement’s prewar agenda, thus making union security, grievance arbitration, seniority, vacation pay, sick leave, and night-shift supplements standard entitlements mandated for an increasingly large section of the working class. The Little Steel wage formula, although bitterly resisted by the more highly paid and well organized sections of the working class, had enough loopholes and special dispensations to enable low-paid workers in labor-short industries to bring their wages closer to the national average.<sup>14</sup> Thus black wages rose twice as fast as white, and weekly earnings in cotton textiles and in retail trade increased about 50 percent faster than in high-wage industries like steel and auto. By the onset of postwar reconversion, WLB wage policy was explicitly egalitarian. “It is not desirable to increase hourly earnings in each industry in accordance with the rise of productivity in that industry,” declared a July 1945 memorandum. “The proper goal of policy is to increase hourly earnings generally in proportion to the average increase of productivity in the economy as *a whole*.”<sup>15</sup>

The capacity of the state to reshape labor relations at the point of production has also been the subject of much debate and reevaluation. *Labor's War at Home* reflected the perspective of those union militants and dissidents who in the 1960s and 1970s saw the codification of routine industrial relations as a disaster for democracy and militancy inside the factory, mine, and mill. The Taft-Hartley era labor law, much of which had been first deployed by the War Labor Board, became an increasingly restrictive straightjacket that constrained and suffocated the union movement's bolder and more progressive spirits. The routinization of industrial relations, the marginalization of shop-floor activism symbolized and embodied in the wartime no-strike pledge, and the rise of a social patriotic ideology all devalued worker militancy and opened the door to the restoration of managerial authority. In the 1980s this perspective generated much support, especially from a new generation of legal scholars animated by the emancipatory spirit of the New Left. Christopher Tomlins thought that the increasingly intrusive character of the New Deal labor law generated little more than a "counterfeit liberty." James Atleson argued that wartime policies, designed to stabilize labor relations and "control rank-and-file militancy" would be "transferred to the peacetime era without any serious questioning of the wisdom of the application of policies originally designed for a quite different time." And in her classic *Yale Law Journal* essay of 1981, Katherine Van Wezel Stone argued that the ideology of "industrial pluralism," which projected a false equality between the power of labor and management, "serves as a vehicle for the manipulation of employee discontent and for the legitimization of existing inequalities of power in the workplace." The elaborate system of grievance handling and arbitration put in place by WLB experts and the postwar courts that followed their lead functioned largely as a therapeutic apparatus of control, not a mechanism designed to achieve industrial justice.<sup>16</sup>

But not all historians have agreed with this doleful perspective. Indeed, if the industrial relations system put in place during the 1940s was so hostile to working-class interests, then why have almost all employers resisted it? Why did company executives see union contracts, seniority systems, and grievance procedures as such a threat to their managerial prerogatives, to the flexibility of their enterprise, to their "right to manage?" And this managerial anti-unionism has been even more the case in the years since 1980, when one has had to search far and wide for any pocket of militant shop-floor unionism.

What seems so clear now, in an era of union defeat and retreat, is that almost any system of “industrial jurisprudence,” which was the phrase used by labor economist Sumner Slichter at the time, or “workplace contractualism,” a term later coined by historian David Brody, represents a terrain of struggle that is advantageous to most workers in most places. As Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin argued shortly after the appearance of *Labor’s War at Home*, and in opposition to the perspective put forward in that book, “The contractual system of collective bargaining which emerged from the Second World War placed substantial constraints on management’s freedom to deploy labor and to impose arbitrary discipline.”<sup>17</sup> This was a judgment that was certainly sustained by those studying the struggle of unions to secure a foothold in the textile industry of the American South, or in industries where women or people of color represented a substantial proportion of the workforce. In his story of two North Carolina textile plants unionized during the war, Daniel Clark hails the grievance procedures and arbitration system as “liberating forces” in the lives of these mill workers.<sup>18</sup> African Americans became staunch unionists, and firm proponents of the grievance procedure, even in unions and workplaces where the seniority system was structured to defend the interests of the white majority. This is because they understood that for those at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, to those long subject to the capricious exercise of power by petty elites or to an ethnically coded set of discriminations, the very bureaucratization of labor relations had an impact that was liberating in the world of work. Unionism forced the company to pay “the job not the man,” asserted a black Birmingham steel worker. “CIO came along and said, well, if you get on a job, from the day you’re hired, your seniority starts,” remembered a wartime packinghouse worker. “And whoever comes behind you, gets behind you. Color has nothing to do with it.”<sup>19</sup>

Some working-class militants may have found this war-era corporatism a poor bargain, but business executives, Southern bourbons, and most of the GOP hated New Dealism of the 1940s even more. In their more recent books, Alan Brinkley and Steven Fraser have sustained my view that the New Deal was very much on the defensive after 1938. The New Deal order did remain intact, but at the policy level, labor-liberals fought a defensive, rearguard battle. In his biography of Sidney Hillman, Fraser entitles his chapter on Hillman’s sojourn as a high-level government official, “The Fall to Power.” New Deal liberals and Keynesian planners who sought to use the defense-era mobilization crisis to ad-



vance a social-democratic perspective found that de facto control of the corporate economy's commanding heights was almost entirely beyond their influence.<sup>20</sup> "The military services were insulated from popular pressures and were not part of the New Deal coalition," writes political scientist Brian Waddell. "They had no agenda for displacing corporate prerogatives through their management of mobilization, as did the New Dealers." FDR's Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, reflected the military-corporate-Wall Street mind-set in a 1941 entry in his diary: "If you are going to try to go to war, or prepare for war, in a capitalist country, you have got to let business make money out of the process or business won't work."<sup>21</sup>

Despite much wishful historiography, no "corporate liberal" bloc ever emerged in the United States, even at the height of union strength and New Deal political hegemony. Twenty years ago Howell Harris demonstrated that even the most "realistic" U.S. firms, like General Motors, U.S. Rubber, and General Electric, were determined to contain, constrain, and marginalize trade unionism. Sanford Jacoby sustains Harris's doleful perspective in the more recent *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* by rediscovering a cohort of powerful, "progressive" firms that successfully stymied the union impulse, even when this required outright violation of NLRB and WLB directives. Historians of Southern labor and industrialization have never detected much managerial interest there in a postwar accord with the unions. Moreover, Jefferson Cowie's superb *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*, demonstrates that even when companies avoided an outright confrontation with labor, corporate liberal firms like RCA systematically relocated production to North American sites thought inhospitable to effective unionism.<sup>22</sup>

Andrew Workman's detailed study of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) further sustains the view that most American corporations found war-era corporatism intolerable. The participation of NAM leaders in FDR's 1941 labor-management conference setting up the WLB soon generated a backlash that put a new, aggressive set of anti-union, anti-New Deal leaders in charge of the business group. This hardening of management outlook was best exemplified by the famous 1944 photograph of two fully armed soldiers carrying Montgomery Ward's reactionary chairman, Sewell Avery, out of the corporation's Chicago headquarters. Because Avery had defied a WLB order to treat with his unionized employees, Roosevelt took over Montgomery Ward.

But Avery thereby became a hero to the anti-New Deal right. Thus, by 1945 when the Truman administration tried to orchestrate a postwar compact between labor and capital, the NAM skillfully and determinedly sabotaged the high-profile labor-management conference finally held in November of that year. Above all, NAM wanted to eliminate the role of the state in establishing an industry-wide incomes policy, and it sought to discipline union strength at the shop-floor level. This aggressive stance made unavoidable a massive postwar strike wave and thus helped precipitate the anti-labor backlash that saturated American political culture in the years immediately following.<sup>23</sup>

This drift to the right in corporate policy and wartime administrative governance was framed by the consolidation, in Congress and in the national political discourse, of a generation-spanning alliance between Republicans and Southern Democrats. After a careful assessment, Ira Katznelson and his associates have determined that the key element cementing this conservative coalition was the hostility of both factions to the rise of a powerful trade union movement. Until the late 1930s, Southern Democrats supported most New Deal social legislation, albeit with the proviso that such initiatives protect the Southern racial order and the regional advantages of New South agriculture and manufacturing. But this Southern allegiance to the New Deal collapsed after 1938 when organized labor became a more assertive component within the Democratic party. Southern pro-labor voting stopped, and in the war-era Congresses an anti-labor conservative coalition became dominant. The war cemented the Dixiecrat alliance with the Republicans because a labor-backed reform of the South now poised a real threat to the racial oligarchy of the region. Wartime labor shortages and military conscription facilitated union organizing and civil rights agitation. Writes Katznelson: "In this more uncertain moment of rapid economic and central state expansion, the South redrew the line between those aspects of the New Deal it would tolerate and those it could not."<sup>24</sup>

But conservative elites did not get everything they wanted in World War II. Even as they increased their influence within the state's labor-relations apparatus, their social and economic power was challenged by a counter-mobilization from below that sought to take advantage of the unprecedented demand for labor while at the same time actualizing the social patriotic ethos that was the quasi-official ideology of the World War II home front. Indeed, this increasingly contentious juxtaposition,

between a rightward drifting state apparatus and an increasingly organized and self-mobilized working class, represents the great paradox of the war, a dichotomy that would be resolved in the postwar years by a rapid, politically brutal divorce between popular aspirations and the state policies needed to fulfill them.

In a shrewd critique of *Labor's War at Home*, Gary Gerstle has argued that the working class of World War II "did not just go to work. It went to war." By this he means that war workers took their patriotism seriously, and their war-era cultural standing and social value to the nation perhaps even more so. In 1940 a majority of industrial workers in the North and West were still immigrants or the sons and daughters of immigrants. The coercive Americanization crusades of the First World War had been directed at these Poles, Hungarians, Jews, Slavs, and Italians, but the ideological thrust of World War II was far more pluralist. In what FDR called the Arsenal of Democracy, the workers became the soldiers of production, and it was now patriotic, not socially demeaning, to take a factory job. Every foxhole movie and war bond campaign celebrated the ethnic heterogeneity of plebian America. Likewise, the new industrial unions were vehicles not only for gaining economic power but also for overcoming cultural discrimination. CIO electoral propaganda in 1944 proclaimed, "All of us in America are foreigners or the children of foreigners. . . . They built the railroads, they built the highways, they built the factories. . . . They all have equal rights to share in America."<sup>25</sup> Working-class agency during the war therefore represented a culmination of the pluralist impulse inaugurated by the New Deal itself. To Gerstle, rising wages and full employment "in conjunction with the war-time celebration of the nation's multicultural character allowed European ethnics to believe that the American dream had finally been placed within their grasp."<sup>26</sup>

All true, yet in the first edition of *Labor's War at Home*, I devalued the social patriotism of the wartime working class, in part because it was hard to do otherwise in an era when "hard hat" hyper-patriotism was so crassly manipulated by the Nixon White House.<sup>27</sup> But during World War II social integration – a belief in the American dream – did not spell social quiescence. Indeed, the very sense of Americanism that Gerstle evokes so well laid the basis for the claims upon their employers and the state that working-class Americans made with such frequency during World War II. Although the character of their aspirations would differ

according to their gender, race, age, and occupation, the social-patriotic ethos generated by anti-fascist propaganda and war-era mobilization politicized new aspects of working-class life.

Take the wage issue, for example. While wartime pay was higher than ever, wages represented more than money to most workers. The level of reimbursement symbolized a worker's social worth, and in years past the pay packet had often been an explicit social marker ranking the status of men and women, black and white, Slav and German. Thus, in a war in which patriotic egalitarianism was a pervasive home-front rationale, and in which workers' pay was a product of governmental fiat, inequalities of all sorts – in pay, promotions, seniority, and general respect – proved to be among the most vexing and persistent causes of shop-floor discontent.<sup>28</sup> In his study of the “politics of sacrifice” during the war, Mark Leff finds that the War Advertising Council and other business interests feared such a political construction. They therefore worked strenuously to manipulate and constrain an ideology of equal sacrifice, “to curb its subversive potential.”<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, a patriotic subversion of the old order took many forms. Ethnic hierarchies lost much of their potency during World War II, although we also understand that one overripe fruit of the war era's social patriotism, even of its more liberal brand of cultural pluralism, was the transformation of ethnicity into a sense of entitled whiteness. The white working class became more unified, more militant, and more determined to police its own boundaries, both at work, where seniority rights and skill definitions were highly racialized, and even more so in the working-class neighborhoods where the defense of racial exclusivity consistently trumped laborite liberalism. As Tom Sugrue, Kenneth Durr, John T. McGreevy, and Bruce Nelson have shown in such graphic detail, this white defensive militancy became the submerged rock upon which post-war liberalism would splinter, first at the municipal level, and later on a larger political stage. The degree to which New Deal pluralism and wartime social patriotism had reconstructed white ethnic America remained somewhat veiled for nearly two decades, until the rise of an anti-state, Wallacite discourse in the 1960s gave to this insular racism a political legitimacy it had never before enjoyed, at least outside the South.<sup>30</sup>

By contrast, the legitimacy and visibility of the African-American freedom struggle, and that of the Mexican-American civil rights movement in the West, took a quantum leap forward during World War II itself. There is not much on this in *Labor's War at Home*, but there should have

been because, with some notable exceptions, most labor historians have postulated that mass industrial unionism has more often than not put the citizenship rights of its members and their families high on the socio-political agenda. And this was certainly true during World War II, even taking into account the violent racism of so many in the white rank and file and the hate strikes that periodically exploded in Detroit, Mobile, Los Angeles, and other industrial cities.<sup>31</sup>

There were two reasons for the giant leap forward in civil rights consciousness. First, the war inaugurated a quarter century of African-American migration from farm to city and from the South to the North and West. Compared to the Great Migration of World War I, the African-American proletarianization experience during the era from 1941 to 1946 (and extended in a continuous fashion until the deep recession of 1957–58) was broader, longer, and more massive. Second, this process of class recomposition was accompanied by an ideological transformation which pushed the issue of African-American political and economic rights to near the top of American liberalism's immediate postwar agenda. Just as the New Deal had offered a new kind of pluralist citizenship to immigrant America, so too did World War II engender a vibrant rights-conscious sense of entitlement among African Americans. This was not because the Army or the mobilization agencies or even the newly established Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) were staunch friends of civil rights liberalism. They were not, but the patriotic egalitarianism of the war effort, combined with the creation of a set of state institutions open to grievance and redress, laid the basis for a dialectically powerful relationship – not unlike that of the early 1960s – between social mobilization at the bottom and state building from above. Thus, at the start of the war a reporter for the NAACP's *The Crisis* labeled the CIO a “lamp of democracy” throughout the old Confederate states. The NAACP recruited tens of thousands of unionized workers, increasing its membership nine-fold during World War II, even as it became a foundational pillar of the emergent labor-liberal coalition.<sup>32</sup>

The flagship agency was the FEPC, established by the Roosevelt liberals to fend off A. Philip Randolph's 1941 March on Washington. The FEPC had little institutional power, but its symbolic import was hardly less than that of the Freedman's Bureau in the early Reconstruction era. “It legitimized black demands and emboldened protest,” writes historian Eileen Boris. FEPC hearings, investigations, and grievance procedures gave African Americans a point of leverage with the federal

government that proved corrosive to the old racial order. Despite its embattled status within the state apparatus – a Southern filibuster would finally kill it early in 1946 – the FEPC’s energetic, union-connected, interracial staff served as one of the late New Deal’s great mobilizing bureaucracies. As the *Atlanta Journal* sourly put it in 1944, “So adroit are its maneuvers that it is usually out of the picture when any trouble it has started is full-blown. It calls on other government agencies to enforce its decrees and whip dissenters into line.”<sup>33</sup>

This kind of mobilization from below, legitimated by government policy from above, also generated a powerful dialectic in the gendered world of consumption politics.<sup>34</sup> Here we find another front in the crucial battle over the relationship between wages and prices that had been so thoroughly politicized during World War II. Indeed, UAW president Walter Reuther would inaugurate the great postwar strike wave with the slogan “Purchasing Power for Prosperity.” The key agency in this battle was the Office of Price Administration (OPA). Like the National Labor Relations Board and the FEPC, the OPA’s effectiveness depended upon the organized activism of huge numbers of once voiceless individuals. In 1945 OPA employed nearly 75,000 and enlisted the voluntary participation of another 300,000, mainly urban housewives and union activists, who checked the prices and quality of the consumer goods regulated by the government. OPA chief Chester Bowles, a spirited New Deal liberal, called the volunteer price checkers “as American as baseball.” Many merchants denounced them as a “kitchen gestapo,” but the polls found that more than 80 percent of all citizens backed OPA price-control regulations. In response, the National Association of Manufacturers poured as much money into anti-OPA propaganda as it would later spend on agitation for the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. NAM called OPA an agency leading to “regimented chaos,” an oxymoronic phrase which nevertheless captured business fear of a powerful state whose regulatory purposes were implemented by an activist, organized citizenry.<sup>35</sup>

In recent years many historians, policy-makers, and labor partisans have argued for both the existence of and virtue of a “labor–management accord” that governed industrial relations in a generation-long era following World War II. Writing in the early 1980s, economists Samuel Bowles, David Gordon, and Thomas Weisskopf were among the first scholars to identify a “tacit agreement between corporate capitalists and the organized labor movement.” Fifteen years later AFL-CIO President John Sweeney himself called for the restoration of the “unwritten social

compact” between capital and labor; while Robert Reich, President Clinton’s first Secretary of Labor, jawboned corporations to restore their side of the accord.<sup>36</sup>

Although *Labor’s War at Home* emphasized the routinization of conflict in postwar labor–management relations, the book saw this postwar settlement as something quite fragile and hardly a victory for ordinary workers. Indeed, phrases like “social compact” and “social contract” were first deployed in the early 1980s by liberals and laborites anxious to condemn wage cuts, denounce corporate union-busting, and define what they seemed to be losing in Reagan’s America. But such language was altogether absent in the first decades after the end of World War II. Most unionists would have thought the very idea of a consensual accord between themselves and their corporate adversaries a clever piece of management propaganda. Unionists were well aware that no sector of American capital had agreed, even under wartime conditions, to an “accord” with labor or the New Deal state. There was no corporatist settlement, either of the hard variety embodied in tripartite mechanisms of economic regulation, nor in the soft bargaining patterns whereby the unions sought to regulate wages and working conditions – and even company pricing policies – in a single industry. A kind of meso-corporatism did structure a few otherwise highly competitive industries, such as trucking, airlines, railroads, and municipal transport. There, the extraordinarily high level of unionization reached during the war – above 90 percent – did persist for three decades afterwards. But such corporatist arrangements came flying apart where management in highly competitive industries went on the postwar offensive: first in textiles, where War Labor Board orders were routinely violated in 1944 and 1945, and then in retail trade, electrical products, and all along unionism’s white collar frontier.<sup>37</sup>

Though the destruction of trade unionism in the core mid-century industries – auto, steel, rubber, and construction – was not on the corporate agenda, the depoliticization of collective bargaining was an almost universal goal of these industries’ corporate managers. All across the business spectrum, from brass-hat conservatives on the right to corporate liberal statesmen on the left, postwar executives sought to privatize and ghettoize bargaining relationships and economic conflict. The abolition or devaluation of the war era’s mobilizing bureaucracies – the War Labor Board, NLRB, OPA, and FEPC – stood near the top of the postwar Republican–business agenda. Conflict over the degree to which

the unions could still enlist the state in recalibrating the relationship between capital and labor constituted the heart of so many of the celebrated struggles of the postwar era: the 1946 strike wave, the subsequent fight over OPA, enactment of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, and the battle over company-paid health insurance and pensions during the 1949–50 collective bargaining round.<sup>38</sup> By the 1950s the divorce between the system of collective bargaining and American politics was far more complete than in any other industrial democracy. Although mid-century strike levels remained comparatively high, the industrial relations system of that era was so “free” that liberal Democratic political victories in 1948, 1958, and 1964 had virtually no impact upon this increasingly insular collective bargaining regime.

So were there any alternative structures that might have emerged from the labor politics of World War II? In *Labor's War at Home*, I saw the wildcat strikers and the militant shop stewards as heroic figures, a vibrant, combative opposition not only to the warfare state, but to management and union bureaucracy alike. But their allure has faded over the years. Labor historians of mid-century America have fragmented point-of-production militancy into a set of competing impulses, not all admirable from a contemporary standpoint. Meanwhile, almost all historians have become more attuned either to formal political and policy initiatives or to the cultural, racial, and gender substructures that have framed the working-class experience. And in recent years trade union leadership, conservative as well as radical, has won a certain appreciation, if only because of its embattled role in American political life.<sup>39</sup>

But the demise of these warfare state rebels remains crucial to understanding the fate of unionism and working-class power in the postwar era. Although the wildcat strikers of World War II never developed the kind of political program, or the kind of leadership, that could make their perspective fully legitimate, their unpredictable militancy did embody a syndicalist current that kept the old “labor question” a focus of unresolved contention. By standing outside the corporatist structures of the wartime state, these industrial radicals brought into question a whole set of policy and political arrangements: WLB wage ceilings, labor's alliance with the Democratic party, even the meaning of patriotism in an era of endemic international tensions. They politicized the emergent system of industrial relations by adding a contingent, ideological dimension to issues that state managers, corporate executives, and not a few union officials sought to routinize and consolidate. Their exit from the



postwar stage therefore made the union movement a more insular, depoliticized entity, and therefore one of far less potency and promise.

## Notes

- 1 New Left skepticism toward both the UAW and GM during the 1970 strike is well captured in William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The "Civilized" Relationship of the General Motors Corporation and the United Automobile Workers* (New York: Knopf, 1973).
- 2 The International Socialists, which now exists as Solidarity, traced its ideological roots to the 1940 division within the Trotskyist movement. Max Schachtman, Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, Hal Draper, and others then argued that the Soviet Union was not, as Trotsky held, a "degenerated workers state" worthy of critical support, but a "bureaucratic collectivist" regime, as repressive in its own way as any state in the capitalist world. See Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994). Solidarity is now largely responsible for publication of the widely respected *Labor Notes*.
- 3 Important influences were C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1963); C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948, 2001); and Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973); Harvey Swados, "The UAW – Over the Top or Over the Hill?" *Dissent*, Fall 1963, 321–43. The 2001 edition of *The New Men of Power* contains my appreciative introduction.
- 4 Nelson Lichtenstein, "Industrial Unionism Under the No-Strike Pledge: A Study of the CIO During the Second World War" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1974). Richard Abrams was the chair of my dissertation committee, but Michael Rogin (1937–2001) exerted what little real interpretative guidance I accepted from any on the faculty.
- 5 Hal Draper (1914–1990), a founder of the third camp Worker's Party in 1940, had been a contributor and editor of *Labor Action* and a shipbuilder in Long Beach during World War II. A scholar of Marx and Marxism, his most widely read and influential work was the pamphlet *The Two Souls of Socialism*, first published in 1960. Stan Weir (1921–2001) was a seaman in World War II and a well-known internal union opponent of Harry Bridges in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union of the early 1960s. He later published Singlejack Books, which distributed shirt-pocket guides for rank and file militants.
- 6 See, for example, Joel Seidman, *American Labor: From Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Richard Lester, *As Unions Mature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); and Clark Kerr, Frederick Harbison, John Dunlop, and Charles Myers, *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). As a dissertation, my book manuscript was rejected for publication by both Greenwood Press and University of Kentucky Press. The outside readers were from the world of industrial relations. Cambridge University Press decided to publish it because of a fortuitous political-generational shift. Steven Fraser had become

- the history editor at Cambridge; one of the readers to whom he sent the manuscript was Peter Friedlander, who had just published the pioneering social history *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–1939: A Study in Class and Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975).
- 7 See, in particular, Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920–1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Michael Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
  - 8 See Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Steve Babson, *Building the Union: Skilled Workers and Anglo-Gaelic Immigrants in the Rise of the UAW* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Eric Arnesen, “Up from Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History,” *Reviews in American History*, 26 (March 1998), 146–74; Gerald Zahavi, “Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at Schenectady General Electric, 1932–1954,” *Journal of American History*, 82 (September 1996), 514–48.
  - 9 On this topic see the outstanding work of Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: Industrial Unionism in a Textile Town* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933–1966* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; rpt. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); and in a different vein, Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).
  - 10 Much of the perspective is summarized in Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era,” in Fraser and Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, 122–52. And see more generally Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 98–140.
  - 11 See especially Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912–1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 94–119; and of course David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 330–410 passim.
  - 12 Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No-Strike Pledge* (Detroit: Bewick, 1980); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981, revised 1994), 69–99, 120–56, 253–334; Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 44–81 passim. The introduction and several essays touch on these issues in Sally Miller and Daniel Cornford, *American Labor in the Era of World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).
  - 13 Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of

- North Carolina Press, 2003); and see also Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Daniel Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
- 14 Recent works that take a relatively favorable view of the union dividend from such war-era labor relations agencies include Robert Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 163–90; and Gilbert Gall, *Pursuing Justice: Lee Pressman, the New Deal, and the CIO* (Albany: SUNY, 1999), 113–91 *passim*.
  - 15 Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining,” 125; WLB quoted in Craufurd Goodwin, *Exhortation and Controls: The Search for a Wage Price Policy, 1945–1971* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1975), 13 (*italics in original*).
  - 16 Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 328; James B. Atleson, *Labor and the Wartime State: Labor Relations and Law During World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1–2; Katherine Van Wezel Stone, “The Post-war Paradigm in American Labor Law,” *Yale Law Journal*, 90 (June 1981), 1517. I kick myself for not consulting the Stone essay before my book appeared, but in the 1970s when I did most of the research for *Labor’s War at Home*, labor law scholarship, especially that involving the history of industrial relations, had become increasingly arid. Today no labor historian can afford to ignore the rich and plentiful work of the current generation of labor law scholars.
  - 17 Nelson Lichtenstein, “Great Expectations: The Promise of Industrial Jurisprudence and Its Demise, 1930–1960,” and David Brody, “Workplace Contractualism in Comparative Perspective,” both in Nelson Lichtenstein and Howell John Harris, eds., *Industrial Democracy in America: The Ambiguous Promise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113–41, 176–205; and Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin, “Shop-Floor Bargaining, Contract Unionism and Job Control: An Anglo-American Comparison,” in Tolliday and Zeitlin, eds., *The Automobile Industry and Its Workers* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1986), quoted on page 112.
  - 18 Clark, *Like Night and Day*, 4.
  - 19 Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 43; Roger Horowitz, “Negro and White: Unite and Fight!”: *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930–1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 96. And see also Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*; Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness*; and Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*.
  - 20 Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 175–226 *passim*; Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 407–94 *passim*.
  - 21 Brian Waddell, “Economic Mobilization for World War II and the Transformation of the U.S. State,” *Politics & Society*, 22 (June 1994), 165–94; Waddell quoted on page 170, Secretary of War Stimson quoted on page 173. The pioneering work of Paul A. C. Koistinen sustains Waddell’s view. See Koistinen’s “Mobilizing the World War II Economy: Labor and the Industrial-

- Military Alliance," *Pacific Historical Review*, 42 (November 1973), 443–78. And see the recent biography of Henry Wallace by John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* (New York: Norton, 2000), 266–303.
- 22 Howell Harris, *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 105–27, 177–204; Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 143–92 (on Thompson Product's diabolically successful resistance to the UAW during and just after World War II); Timothy Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For? The TWUA in the South, 1945–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936–1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 96–121; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1–40.
  - 23 Andrew Workman, "Manufacturing Power: The Organizational Revival of the National Association of Manufacturers, 1941–1945," *Business History Review*, 78 (Summer 1998), 279–317.
  - 24 Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933–1950," *Political Science Quarterly*, 108 (Summer 1993), 283–306.
  - 25 As quoted in Joseph Gaer, *The First Round: The Story of the CIO Political Action Committee* (New York: CIO-PAC, 1944), 22. See also Lawrence Samuel, *Pledging Allegiance: American Identity and the Bond Drive of World War II* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).
  - 26 Gary Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War," *Mid-America*, 75 (October 1993), 315. See also the essays by Lary May, Elaine Tyler May, Perry Duis, Reed Ueda, and Gary Gerstle in Lewis Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
  - 27 See, for example, Joshua Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History*, 26 (Summer 1993), 725–37.
  - 28 I discuss this at greater length in Lichtenstein, "The Making of the Postwar Working Class: Cultural Pluralism and Social Structure in World War II," *The Historian*, 51 (November 1988), 42–63.
  - 29 Mark Leff, "The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II," *Journal of American History*, 77 (March 1991), 1318.
  - 30 Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33–88 passim; John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55–110 passim; Kenneth Durr, "When Southern Politics Came North: The Roots of White Working-Class Conservatism in Baltimore, 1940–1964," *Labor History*, 37 (Summer 1996), 309–31; and Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, 89–141, 185–218.
  - 31 For the skeptics, see Bruce Nelson, "Class, Race, and Democracy in the CIO: The 'New' Labor History Meets the 'Wages of Whiteness,'" *International Review of Social History*, 41 (Fall 1996), 351–74; Robert Norell, "Cast in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American*

- History*, 73 (December 1986), 669–701; and Herbert Hill, “Black Workers, Organized Labor, and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act: Legislative Record and Litigation Record,” in Herbert Hill and James E. Jones, Jr., eds., *Race in America: The Struggle for Equality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 263–341.
- 32 For an elaboration of this perspective, see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History*, 75 (December 1988), 786–811; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Zaragoza Vargas, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Mexican American Workers, Unionism, and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1929–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 177–213; and Horowitz, “Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”, 145–74.
- 33 Eileen Boris, “‘You Wouldn’t Want One of ‘Em Dancing With Your Wife’: Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II,” *American Quarterly*, 50 (March 1998), 83; Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 88–132.
- 34 Of course, the gendered world of *production* politics is another story. Here, the dramatic, massive influx of women into new jobs and new industries during the war has been well studied. But the institutional and social legacy was proportionally tepid because this demographic upheaval was unaccompanied by the kind of ideological legitimization that made the upgrading of black labor such a pivotal development. See Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935–1975* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 50–51; Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 81–112. Gunnar Myrdal finished writing *An American Dilemma* by the end of 1942; it would take 21 more years for Betty Friedan, whose feminist politics were heavily influenced by her experiences in the 1940s labor left, to publish the equally influential *The Feminine Mystique*. See Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).
- 35 Meg Jacobs, “How About Some Meat? The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941–1946,” *Journal of American History*, 84 (December 1997), 910–41; National Association of Manufacturers, “Would You Like Some Butter or a Roast of Beef” (newspaper advertisement), reproduced in Jacobs, “How About Some Meat?” 935; see also Anne Stein, “Post-War Consumer Boycotts,” *Radical America*, 9 (July–August 1975), 156–61. In another context Marilyn John-

- son captures the war-era flavor of an empowered citizenship in her striking essay, "War as Watershed: The East Bay and World War II," *Pacific Historical Review*, 63 (August 1994), 315-31.
- 36 Bruce Nissen, "A Post-World War II Social Accord?" in Nissen, ed., *U.S. Labor Relations, 1945-1989: Accommodation and Conflict* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 174-79; John Sweeney, *America Needs a Raise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 17.
  - 37 Timothy Willard, "Labor and the National War Labor Board, 1942-1945: An experiment in Corporatist Wage Stabilization" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toledo, 1984); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); David A. Horowitz, *Beyond Left and Right: Insurgency and the Establishment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
  - 38 A particularly good discussion of the way in which Taft-Hartley's threat to union security generated a more privatized, interest-group labor movement is found in Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State*, 135-64.
  - 39 See most recently David Stebenne, *Arthur Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

# Preface

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When I began work on this book in the early 1970s, many of us who were active in the student movement concluded that radical social and political change could come only if it were based, at least in part, on a working-class mobilization equal to or greater than that of the 1930s. However, when we looked to those who actually labored in American factories and offices, we found more inertia than activism, and the trade unions seemed sclerotic and increasingly impotent. The old Roosevelt coalition was in its final stages of collapse. In New York City, construction workers on Wall Street only recently had beaten up antiwar demonstrators. George Meany's AFL-CIO seemed a bulwark of the status quo, unconcerned even about the declining proportion of the workforce enrolled in the trade unions. Labor still favored an expansion of the welfare state, but most unions nevertheless remained steadfastly in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the Vietnam War.

Of course, this was also the era in which farm workers and public employees made significant organizational gains, in which an insurgent movement revitalized the United Mine Workers, and in which the young workers at General Motors' Lordstown, Ohio, assembly plant captured the attention of even the mass media. Some ex-students began to "industrialize" in a conscious effort to build a socialist opposition movement within unions such as the Teamsters, the United Automobile Workers, and the United Steelworkers of America. Although I kept largely to academe, I shared their search for a program that could engender a new militancy among American workers and transform the unions once again into the premier progressive force in national life.

A study of the union movement in World War II seemed relevant. During the 1970s, I followed with fascination and a sense of hope the wildcat strikes that flared in the coalfields and auto plants, so my interest was naturally kindled regarding the almost forgotten but far larger wildcat movement of the wartime era. What had happened to that insurgency, and what could be learned from its demise? In the 1940s, an ear-

lier generation of non-Communist militants had unsuccessfully sought to politicize that rebellion, to rescind the no-strike pledge, to smash the wage controls, and to make a start on building the long-delayed labor party; latter-day radicals can learn something from the successes and failures of that experience.

The 1940s were also the years in which business and labor firmly established the industry-wide collective bargaining that would prove routine throughout most of the postwar era. Was this process necessarily counterposed to a more aggressive brand of working-class activism, as some contemporary New Leftists argued, or were there not more specific historical circumstances associated with the war and its legacy that spurred the growth of union bureaucracy and conservatism in the labor movement? Finally, in both the 1940s and 1970s, the state had moved toward a system of wage and price controls that politicized all elements of the collective bargaining regime and brought patriotic union officials onto the various government boards designed to formulate a wage standard. Had this process effectively incorporated the unions in the state apparatus and robbed them of their oppositional potential? If so, what role could the Left play within these institutions? Of course, no historical study can directly provide a political strategy for contemporary struggle, but I hope this work will help to create the larger context necessary for a resolution of these questions.

This text originated as a doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley. There I found the learning experience the most stimulating of my life, both within and without the walls of the academy. Richard Abrams proved a model thesis director, a probing critic of my endeavor, a forceful advocate of his own historical perspective, and a craftsmanlike editor of the emerging manuscript. Financial support came from two university fellowships and later from an American Council of Learned Societies grant-in-aid. Scores of librarians aided me in my research. Those at Berkeley's Institute of Industrial Relations, at Wayne State University's Walter Reuther Library, at the Catholic University of America, at the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, and at the National Archives proved the most patient.

Various colleagues, comrades, and friends offered advice, argument, and support as this manuscript moved through several stages of revision. I have learned much from Richard Arneson, Richard Boyden, George Cotkin, Joshua Freeman, Ernie Haberkern, Tom Harrison, Bruce Laurie, Mark Levitan, Chris Paige, Michael Rogin, Michael Shute, and Stan



Weir. To Joanne Landy I owe an especially profound debt, for she did more than any to shape my politics and frame this work in its formative stages. David Brody, Howell John Harris, Peter Friedlander, Melvyn Dubofsky, and Steve Fraser read the manuscript with great care, and all offered the sort of constructive criticism that one historian is delighted to take from another. Eileen Boris reworked several versions of this material with me, consistently providing incisive criticism, support, and encouragement. Her collaboration has given to my work both a higher standard and a great joy.

*Washington, D.C.*  
*June 1982*

Nelson Lichtenstein