Class Politics and the State during World War Two

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Abstract

The historiography of US labor during the Second World War has shifted away from New Left concerns with the fate of working-class militancy, becoming more attuned instead to the structure and development of the New Deal order. A quarter century ago, historians debated the extent to which the warfare state had emasculated working-class radicalism and constructed in its place a bureaucratized, corporate-liberal labor movement. Few scholars doubted that trade unions were a fixed and permanent feature of the postwar political economy. But in the decades following the presidency of Ronald Reagan, when the legal, ideological, and economic structures sustaining the institutional union movement are so weak, the agenda of most historians and social scientists has shifted to one that problematizes the rise, consolidation, and postwar devolution of the mid-century New Deal settlement. For US labor and other popular social movements, World War Two had a dichotomous character. In both politics and policy, war-era corporatist structures failed to win lasting institutional expressions, either during the war or in the decades following 1945. There was no "labor-management accord," although labor's strength did generate a kind of armed truce in key oligopolistic sectors of the economy. Anti-New-Deal conservatives in Congress and the corporate hierarchy sought, above all, to divorce industrial relations issues from the larger political universe. This was the meaning of "free" collective bargaining in the years after 1947. But during the war and reconversion years right afterward, elite power at the top of the mobilization apparatus was repeatedly challenged by insurgencies from below that sought to take advantage of the unprecedented demand for labor while at the same time actualizing the pluralist, social-patriotic ethos that was the quasi-official ideology of the World War Two home front. These social movements were a dialectical product of the mobilizing bureaucracies—the War Labor Board, the Fair Employment Practice Commission, and the Office of Price Administration—that were among the most remarkable features of the wartime New Deal. Indeed, this increasingly contentious juxtaposition between a state apparatus drifting rightward and a well-organized 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.

My introduction to the history of the American working class during World War Two came during the fall of 1970. At that time, the Berkeley branch of the International Socialists, a "third camp" formation of New Left sensibility and Shactmanite politics, was in the midst of furious debate. Many New Leftists had just begun a "turn toward the working class" that sent thousands of student radicals into factories, warehouses, hospitals, and offices.[1]

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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 American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) remained a firm backer of the war in Vietnam. Moreover, even the more progressive unions, like the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and the Packinghouse Workers, were 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 argued that the growth of the union bureaucracy and a powerful, 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, working-class institutions in the United States resembled those of Stalinist or fascist regimes, where statist unions and labor fronts had been foisted upon the working class.[2]

Thus, in our debates, older comrades made much of labor's experience during the World War Two mobilization era. Then the unions had offered the state and enforced upon their members a "no-strike pledge," even as wildcat strikes, union factionalism, and labor party talk energized many of the rank and filers who had built the industrial unions during the great strikes at Flint, Akron, and Minneapolis. A new generation of working-class radicals must therefore keep a wary eye on the union bureaucracy and build their own independent caucuses within the labor movement.

This was the kernel of the argument I put forth in my 1974 dissertation, later published as *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York, 1982). It was skeptical of Rooseveltian war aims, saw the warfare state as a repressive institution, criticized leaders of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) (both the "conservatives," who were really social democrats, as well as the communists), and celebrated the 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, Perlmanite "job consciousness" within the rank and file, nor of McCarthyite repression after the war, but of the bargain struck between the government and cooperative, patriotic union leaders during World War Two itself. This kind of argument was anathema to the then reigning set of industrial relations scholars, many of whom were themselves trained while serving with the War Labor Board and other wartime labor relations agencies. They saw labor's World War Two 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.[3]

The Corporatist Agenda

More than twenty-five years of union decline and labor-liberal defeat have altered the tenor of that debate. In thinking about the fate of the labor movement

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as well as the political and social character of the working class, our agenda has shifted since 1970. Incorporation into a claustrophobic state apparatus seems far less of an issue than survival of those same unions and revival of a laborite, social-democratic impulse. The postwar fate of New Deal liberalism has become a more contentious issue, so an increasingly rich historiography on the "New Deal order" now stands embedded within a reconsideration of the postwar transformation of US capitalism itself.[4] Meanwhile, the nature of "militancy" and "conservatism" within the working class has become hugely problematized, as questions of skill, ethnicity, racism, sexism, homophobia, and regionalism have moved to the fore.[5]

In this reevaluation, the line that once divided the Depression decade from that of World War Two 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 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. Continuity, not abrupt change, characterizes the political culture of the late 1930s and early 1940s. December 7, 1941, is the most overrated day in US history.[6]

The political economy of World War Two is embedded within a larger New Deal order that stretched from the early 1930s to the late 1970s. This was an era characterized by Democratic party dominance, 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." Industrywide unions sustained both the dominance of the Democratic party and a quasicorporatist 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. 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 between the union movement, the business community, and the state. The New Deal provided a set of semipermanent political structures in which key issues of vital concern to the trade union movement might be accommodated. Although the industry codes negotiated under the National Recovery Administration were declared unconstitutional in 1935, the Fair Labor Standards Act set new wage and hour standards three years later. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) established the legal basis of union power and a mechanism for its state sanction, while the National War Labor Board (WLB) provided a tripartite institution that set both national wage policy and contributed to the rapid

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wartime growth of the new trade unions. The successive appearances of these agencies seemed to signal the fact 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 contract collective bargaining.

As a result of this New Deal legacy, most unionists hoped that wartime mobilization would open the door to the kind of social-democratic corporatism that was just beginning to reach fruition in northern Europe and Scandinavia. 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.[7]

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."[8] To ensure 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 "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 cultural 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.[9]

In the year 2000, the potential payoff from the corporatist bargain of the World War Two era looks much better than it did just thirty years ago. Resistance to union organizing declined dramatically during the war as the union movement nearly doubled in size. Meanwhile, the War Labor Board 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.[10] Thus black wages rose twice as fast as white, and weekly earnings in cotton textiles and in retail trade increased about fifty percent faster than in high-wage industries like steel and auto. By the onset of postwar reconversion, War Labor Board 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."[11]

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Class Politics from Above

Some working-class militants may have found this war-era corporatism a poor bargain, but corporate executives, Southern bourbons, and most of the Republican party hated the New Dealism of the 1940s even more. As Alan Brinkley and Steve Fraser have demonstrated, 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 advance a social-democratic perspective found that de facto control of the corporate economy's commanding heights was almost entirely beyond their influence.[12]

Taking issue with this perspective, some social science historians have argued that that business interests made a necessary accommodation to the New Deal during the war, given the power and authority generated by the new warfare state. Thus, David Plotke writes that corporate participation in the mobilization apparatus "weakened the unqualified opposition that business elites so often expressed toward the new Democratic state in the late 1930s. A subtle process of business incorporation took place within the framework of the Democratic war effort." Likewise, Gregory Hooks argues that during the war an "autonomous," militarized state rose in influence at the "expense of corporate interests."[13]

But this "state development" perspective substitutes a deterministic process of elite bureaucratization for the continuation of a politicized class struggle that was waged within the very bosom of the wartime state. Thus, in a set of recent essays, Brian Waddell rejects this statist perspective and endorses that of Fraser and Brinkley (and Lichtenstein). The fierce mobilization-era conflicts of 1940 and 1941 were but another round in the post-1938 offensive launched by business and agribusiness against the New Deal and the labor movement. "The military services were insulated from popular pressures and were not part of the New Deal coalition," writes Waddell. "They had no agenda for displacing corporate prerogatives through their management of mobilization, as did the New Dealers." Franklin Delano Roosevelt's new 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."[14]

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. Nearly twenty years ago, Howell Harris demonstrated that even the most "realistic" US firms, like General Motors, US Rubber, and General Electric were determined to contain, constrain, and marginalize trade unionism. In *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton, 1997), Sanford Jacoby sustains Harris's doleful perspective by rediscovering a

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cohort of powerful, "progressive" firms that successfully stymied the union impulse, even when this required outright violation of National Labor Relations Board and War Labor Board 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 recent, superb *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, 1999) 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.[15]

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 Roosevelt's 1941 labor-management conference setting up the WLB soon generated a backlash that put a new, aggressive set of antiunion, anti-New-Deal leaders in charge of the business group. By 1945 when Harry Truman's administration tried to orchestrate a postwar compact, 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 industrywide 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 antilabor backlash that saturated American political culture in the years immediately following.[16]

The 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 prolabor voting stopped and in the war-era Congresses an antilabor conservative coalition became dominant. The war cemented the Dixiecrat alliance with the Republicans because a labor-backed reform of the South now posed 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."[17]

We can see this process of polarization at work in the quintessential heartland of the Southern political economy, the Mississippi Delta. There, planter power had been enhanced by New Deal agricultural policy during the 1930s: The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and successor agencies represented a

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vast federal subsidy to the planter elite. In the 1940s this landed class increased its power still further: They controlled the draft boards, the employment service, and the government panels that set agricultural wages. But this formal, governmental power was being undermined by a relentless upward pressure on day-labor wages during an era when shipyard jobs in Mississippi and factory work in Memphis and Chicago sucked labor out of the Delta. Indeed, wages increased five-fold in the Delta between 1940 and 1948, even as the federal government and the new unions sought to deregionalize the low-wage Southern labor market. As early as 1942, therefore, Mississippi planters were searching for an alternative to the national Democrats. As one planter put it, "We are going in the future to get quite close to the time when the darkey [sic] will be protected by federal law in his vote in the South, and we all know what that will mean in Mississippi."[18]

A Mobilization Dialectic

The dilemma faced by Delta planters encapsulated that encountered by other conservative elites during World War Two. Even as they increased their influence within the state's labor-relations apparatus, their social and economic power was challenged by a countermobilization 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 Two 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 Two "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 Two was far more pluralist. In the wartime 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 plebeian 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. . . . [T]hey built the railroads, they built the highways, they built the factories. . . . They all have equal rights to share in America."[19] Working-class agency during the war therefore represented a culmination of the pluralist impulse inaugurated by the New Deal

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itself. To Gerstle, rising wages and full employment "in conjunction with the wartime celebration of the nation's multicultural character allowed European ethnics to believe that the American dream had finally been placed within their grasp."[20]

All true, but 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 Two. Although the character of their aspirations would differ according to their gender, race, age, and occupation, the social-patriotic ethos generated by antifascist 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.[21] 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."[22]

Indeed, a patriotic subversion of the old order took many forms. Ethnic hierarchies lost much of their potency during World War Two, 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 new 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 postwar 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 George Wallace's antistate discourse in 1960s gave to this insular racism a political legitimacy it had never before enjoyed, at least outside the South.[23]

By contrast, the legitimacy and visibility of the African-American freedom struggle took a quantum leap forward during World War Two itself. There were two reasons for this. First, the war inaugurated a quarter century of African-

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American migration from farm to city and from the South to the North and West. Compared to the Great Migration of World War One, the African-American proletarianization experience during the era of 1941 to 1946 (and extended in a continuous fashion until the deep recession of 1957 to 1958) was broader, longer, and more massive. Second, this process of class recomposition was accompanied by an ideological transformation that 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 Two 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 Practice Commission (FEPC) were staunch friends of civil rights liberalism. They were not, but the patriotic egalitarianism of the war effort, combined with 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 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) increased its membership ninefold during World War Two, even as it became a foundational pillar of the emergent labor-liberal coalition.[24]

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 legitimatized 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 in line."[25]

This kind of mobilization from below, legitimated by government policy from above, also generated a powerful dialectic in the gendered world of consumption politics.[26] Here the key agency was the Office of Price Administration (OPA). Like the National Labor Relations Board and the FEPC, the effectiveness of the OPA depended upon the organized activism of huge numbers of once voiceless individuals. In 1945, the 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

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eighty 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 that nevertheless captured business fear of a powerful state whose regulatory purposes were implemented by an activist, organized citizenry.[27]

A Postwar Settlement?

In recent years, many historians, policymakers, and labor partisans have argued for the existence and virtue of a "labor-management accord" that governed industrial relations for a generation following World War Two. 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 Bill Clinton's first Secretary of Labor, jawboned corporations to restore their side of the accord.[28]

However, the very idea of such a postwar accord is a suspect construct. 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 Ronald Reagan's America. But such language was altogether absent in the first decades after the end of World War Two. Most laborites 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, neither the "hard" variety embodied in tripartite mechanisms of economic regulation, nor a set of "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 mesocorporatism 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 ninety 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. This occurred 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.[29]

Although the destruction of trade unionism in the core midcentury industries—in auto, steel, rubber, and construction—was not on the corporate agenda, the depoliticization of collective bargaining was an almost universal goal of

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those same 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, the NLRB, the OPA, and the 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 1949–1950 collective bargaining round.[30] By the 1950s, the divorce of the collective bargaining system from American politics was far greater than in any other industrial democracy. Although midcentury 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 Two? 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 studying midcentury 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 diminished role in American political culture.[31]

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 Two 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 problematized 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 an unpredictable, social 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 made the union movement a more insular, depoliticized quantity and therefore one of far less potency and promise.

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NOTES

1. The International Socialists, which now exists as Solidarity, traced its ideological roots to the 1940 division within the Trotskyist movement. Max Schactman, Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, Hal Draper, and others then argued that the Soviet Union was not, as Trotsky argued, 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, 1994). Solidarity is now largely responsible for publication of the widely respected *Labor Notes*.

2. Two important influences were C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Detroit, 1963), and C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power* (New York, 1948).

3. See, for example, Joel Seidman, *American Labor: From Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago, 1952); Richard Lester, *As Unions Mature* (Princeton, 1958); and Clark Kerr, Frederick Harbison, John Dunlop, and Charles Myers, *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Cambridge, MA, 1960). As a dissertation, my book was rejected by both Greenwood Press and University of Kentucky Press; Cambridge University Press took it only because of a political/generational shift. Steve 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, 1975).

4. See, in particular, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, 1989); Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920–1935* (New York, 1994); David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York, 1996); and Michael Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca, 1999).

5. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York, 1991); Steve Babson, *Building the Union: Skilled Workers and Anglo-Gaelic Immigrants in the Rise of the UAW* (New Brunswick, 1991); Eric Arnesen, "Up from Exclusion: Back and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998):146–74; Gerald Zahavi, "Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at Schenectady General Electric, 1932–1954," *Journal of American History* 82 (1996):514–48; and Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, 2000).

6. On this topic, see the outstanding work of Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: Industrial Unionism in a Textile Town* (New York, 1991); and Joshua B. Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933–1966* (New York, 1989). In a different vein, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1996).

7. Much of the perspective is summarized in Nelson Lichtenstein, "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, 122–52.

8. 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, 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, 1987), 330–410 passim.

9. Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No-Strike Pledge* (Detroit, 1980); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, 1981; revised 1994), 69–99, 120–156, 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, 1995).

10. 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, 1995), 163–90; and Gilbert Gall, *Pursuing Justice: Lee Pressman, the New Deal, and the CIO* (Albany, 1999), 113–91 passim.

11. 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, 1975), 13.

12. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1995), 175–226 passim; and Steve Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise*

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of American Labor (New York, 1991),407–94 passim; and John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: A Life of Henry A. Wallace* (New York, 2000), 266–325 passim.

13. Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order*, 199; Gregory Hooks, *Forging the Military-Industrial Complex* (Urbana, 1991), 23.

14. Brian Waddell, "Economic Mobilization for World War II and the Transformation of the U.S. State, " *Politics and Society* 22 (1994):165–94; Waddell is quoted on page 170 and Stimson is quoted on page 173. The pioneering work of Paul A. C. Koistinen sustains Waddell's view; see his "Mobilizing the World War II Economy: Labor and the Industrial-Military Alliance," *Pacific Historical Review* 42 (1973):443–78. And see also Culver and Hyde, *American Dreamer*, 266–303.

15. Howell Harris, *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison, 1982), 105–27, 177–204; Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton, 1997), 143–92 (on Thompson Product's diabolically successful resistance to the UAW during and just after World War Two); Timothy Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For? The TWUA in the South, 1945–1955* (Chapel Hill, 1996); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936–1990* (Urbana, 1993), 96–121; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithica, 1999), 1–40.

16. Andrew Workman, "Manufacturing Power: The Organizational Revival of the National Association of Manufacturers, 1941–1945," *Business History Review* 78 (1998):279–317.

17. Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933–1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (1993):283–306.

18. Chester Morgan, "At the Crossroads: World War II, Delta Agriculture, and Modernization in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* 57 (1995):353–71; the quotation is on page 369. See also Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York, 1986); and Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, "Mississippi Delta Planters and Debates over Mechanization, Labor, and Civil Rights in the 1940s," *Journal of Southern History* 60 (1994):263–84.

19. Quoted in Joseph Gaer, *The First Round: The Story of the CIO Political Action Committee* (New York, 1944), 22. See also Lawrence Samuel, *Pledging Allegiance: American Identity and the Bond Drive of World War II* (Washington, DC, 1997).

20. Gary Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War," *Mid-America* 75 (1993):315. See also the essays by Larry May, Elaine Tyler May, Perry Duis, Reed Ueda, and Gary Gerstle in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*, ed. Lewis Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago, 1996).

21. I discuss this at greater length in Nelson Lichtenstein, "The Making of the Postwar Working Class: Cultural Pluralism and Social Structure in World War II," *The Historian* 51 (1988):42–63.

22. Mark Leff, "The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II," *Journal of American History* 77 (1991):1318.

23. Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996), 33–88 passim; John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago, 1996), 55–110 passim; Nelson, *Divided We Stand*; and Kenneth Durr, "When Southern Politics Came North: The Roots of White Working-Class Conservatism in Baltimore, 1940–1964," *Labor History* 37 (1996): 309–31.

24. The literature on the black working-class experience in World War Two is large. Among the best works are: Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, 1993), 177–213; Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!": A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930–1990* (Urbana, 1997), 145–74; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York, 1979); and see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (1988):786–811.

25. 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 (1998):83; Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II* (New York, 2000), 88–132.

26. 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

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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, 1987); Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, 1981); Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935–1975* (Ithica, 1990), 50–51; Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington, KY, 1990), 81–112. Gunnar Myrdal finished writing *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944) by the end of 1942; it would take twenty-one more years before Betty Friedan, whose feminist politics were heavily influenced by her experiences in the 1940s labor Left, to publish the equally influential *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963). See Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill, 1987); Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, MA, 1998).

27. 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 (1997):910–41; NAM, "Would You Like Some Butter of 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 (1975):156–61. In another context, Marilynn Johnson 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 (1994):315–31.

28. Bruce Nissen, "A Post-World War II Social Accord?" in *U.S. Labor Relations, 1945–1989: Accommodation and Conflict* (New York, 1990), ed. Bruce Nissen, 174–79; John Sweeney, *America Needs a Raise* (Boston, 1996), 17.

29. Timothy Willard, "Labor and the National War Labor Board, 1942–1945: An Experiment in Corporatist Wage Stabilization" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toledo, 1984); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (Urbana, 1994); David A. Horowitz, *Beyond Left and Right: Insurgency and the Establishment* (Urbana, 1997).

30. A particularly good discussion of the way in which the Taft-Hartley Act'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.

31. See, most recently, David Stebenne, *Arthur Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York, 1996); and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana, 1997).

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