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The experience of total war involved the unprecedented economic interventions of the federal government apparatus in the United States, following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 until Japan's surrender in August 1945. In so doing it revitalised President Franklin Roosevelt's stalled New Deal, and formed the basis of a new settlement that took account of the corporatisation of the economy and the challenges that this posed to both product market competition and industrial relations. The rapid dawning of the Cold War and the foundation of the modern national security state served to reinforce the continuation of a sense of collective effort and compromise in the service of a higher national goal. It took several decades before the conditions that made this set of arrangements possible crumbled and thereby rendered anachronistic what had been regarded by the 1950s as thoroughly modern (77).

In *The Labor Board Crew*, Ronald Schatz tells the story of the rise and fall of an approximation of corporatism that was even less than the "corporate bias" or tendency to tripartism identified by Keith Middlemas in his pioneering 1979 study of mid-twentieth century Britain, *Politics in an Industrial Society*. Instead, the vision of industrial relations that the Second World War institutionalised into being was kept alive by the veterans of the National War Labor Board (NWLB), established in January 1942 by Roosevelt, whose executive order made it a matter of national interest that "there shall be no interruption of any work which contributes to the effective prosecution of the war ... and that all labor disputes shall be settled by peaceful means" by the NWLB (8). Through the biographical profiles of several key personalities, Schatz charts the early post-war successes and gradual decline of a style of politics and dispute resolution whose material base eventually shrivelled, culminating in the Reagan era's championing of management prerogative and financial liberalization, accompanied by an accelerating deindustrialization.

Back in 1941, industrial relations "were the toughest challenge of all on the home front" (6), given the intense hostility of business interests and the means at their disposal to enforce settlements very much in their favour. Increasing labour militancy during the 1930s led to bitter and notorious strikes, lock-outs and pitched battles between workers and police and/or hired thugs in a spiral that continued into the new decade, until the attack on Pearl Harbor "allowed the administration to adopt a more sophisticated strategy" (7). This involved appointing a

relatively young group of men who were “for all intents and purposes institutional economists, in the tradition of John R. Commons” (17) of Wisconsin, whose concept of “industrial goodwill” was explicitly cited by George W. Taylor (36), whom Schatz credits as the chief author of the industrial relations system effectively inaugurated with the founding of the NWLB (31). Taylor’s younger colleague, John T. Dunlop, who eventually succeeded him as “the top labor-management arbitrator in America” (18), was mentored at Harvard University by Sumner Slichter, who had earlier studied with Commons (73).

Backed with presidential authority, the NWLB set about conciliating and arbitrating disputes that effectively shifted the balance of power towards the labor interest, but in such a way as to carry wider legitimacy, neutralising a growing bipartisan Congressional anti-union consensus (39). The skills honed and applied during the war were then applied to a variety of dispute situations, with apparent success initially, but encountering more intractable challenges and resistance as the decades passed.

Following the dissolution of the NWLB in December 1945, many of its officials found work in academia, during what were the “glory days” of industrial relations as a study discipline (52). They were also appointed as official arbitrators overseeing negotiations and agreements between specific companies and the unions representing their employees. It was during this period that the notion of a “capital-labor accord” gained currency. Given the hostilities of the pre-war period, the relative calm presided over by the NWLB during the war, and its continuation thereafter, it was perhaps not surprising that the contrast encouraged such claims, which became orthodoxy among labor historians until the Reagan administration’s firmly pro-capital policies triggered a rethink. Schatz himself appears somewhat equivocal, first declaring that neither argument for and against the existence of such an accord “is convincing overall”, before concluding that “there was no ‘grand accord’ at the summit of labor and capital ... Rather, compromises were hammered out firm by firm after 1945” (52). The implication is that a major factor in the relative industrial peace of the 30 years leading up to the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter in 1977 was the personalities and skills of the individuals profiled in this book.

While the material and structural aspects are not overlooked by Schatz, they were undoubtedly more significant than is often portrayed here. Nevertheless, the influence and authority of the Labor Board veterans were real to the extent that they were “fixers” whom presidents, corporate executives and union leaders relied on to broker agreements that allowed capital and labour both to claim a kind of victory. They were the embodiments of Arthur Schlesinger’s *Vital Center*, who saw themselves as somehow above politics and even “shunned the term

*institutional*, which had an old-fashioned Progressive connotation” (80) and perhaps also a more contemporary risk of association with Henry Wallace’s presidential campaigns in 1948 and 1952. However, their normative “end of ideology” politics and belief in interest group capitalism (95) were not always conducive to long-term economic competitiveness. Schatz highlights the 1959 steel strike, “the biggest strike ever in U.S. history and one of the most consequential” (99), whose settlement ultimately ignored the lack of investment that was as endemic and consequential to contemporaneous British industry.

Quibbles aside, this book provides a valuable perspective on a unique moment in US industrial relations and economic history.

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