

A New Deal for All?**Race and Class Struggles in Depression-Era Baltimore**

Andor Skotnes

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Drawing extensively on oral history sources, Andor Skotnes's *A New Deal for All?* offers a detailed look at the origins of the "long civil rights movement" in Baltimore. As a "border city" in a "border state," Baltimore's "'in-betweenness' catalyzed a rich variety of struggles around both race and class, allowing close investigation of the character, interconnections, and potentials of such struggles" during the Great Depression (5). Focusing on the experience of a single city during the Depression allows Skotnes to chronicle in detail the breathtaking amount of organizing that took place in Baltimore. The sheer number of things happening in the book usefully blurs the distinction often made between labor and civil rights activism and breaks down the conceptual barriers between the general ferment of the 1930s and the black freedom struggle.

The chapters alternate between civil rights and labor history and are broken into four sections. The first, entitled "The Context," comprises a single chapter establishing the early twentieth-century background against which the struggles of the 1930s play out. The second section, "Emergences, 1930–1934," introduces most of the story's main characters, including Baltimore's Communist Party (CP), the unions representing the city's garment and waterfront workers, the Socialist-led People's Unemployment League, and the City-wide Young People's Forum. These latter two organizations nurtured future civil rights luminaries Thurgood Marshall, Clarence Mitchell, and Juanita Jackson Mitchell. As they came of age as organizers, their work began to build bridges between the labor and civil rights movements in Depression-era Baltimore. In the third section, "Transitions, 1933–1936," these organizations confront lynch violence throughout Maryland and respond to the opportunities created by the first wave of New Deal legislation. It is during these years that the race and class struggles in Baltimore came closest to establishing the sorts of "civil rights unionism" that the long civil rights movement thesis calls for. This long-movement thesis asserts that the history of the civil rights movement should not be confined to the period beginning with the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision. Rather, it has its roots in earlier coalitions between labor and civil rights activists beginning with the New Deal and broadens civil rights to include the fight for economic as well as political equality. Furthermore, it asserts that the purging of communist organizers during the 1950s red scare separated this economic agenda from the civil rights struggle. However, by the final section, entitled "Risings, 1936–1941," Skotnes reveals how tenuous the links between the civil rights and labor movements really were. As the local workers' and black freedom movements in Baltimore began to grow rapidly in response to the opportunities created by the second wave of New Deal legislation and the onset of World War Two, both local movements became integrated into "broader, more nationally connected, and sometimes nationally directed . . . organizational forms" (216). With less collaboration between the two movements, the local ties between them began to erode. Among the historiographical interventions Skotnes makes, this is perhaps the most significant, suggesting that the failure of civil rights unionism to cohere may have had as much to do with the growing divide between two expanding movements as it did with McCarthyism.

Skotnes's book is chock full of inspiring stories. Among these include a month-long boycott of Baltimore's white-owned stores by a black community whose members refused to shop where they were not allowed to work. This "Buy Where You Can Work" campaign began at the opening of 1933's Christmas shopping season and maintained dawn-to-dusk picket lines in the face of harassment and periodic violence. Though a court injunction shut down the pickets just before Christmas, the movement did succeed in winning jobs for some black store clerks (147–52). Another example is Skotnes's account of how the CP-led Marine Workers International Union (MWIU) wrested control over the disbursement of relief away from the corrupt, antilabor, waterfront YMCA. Using their control over relief payments, the MWIU launched more than fifty small strikes against every major shipping line in the Port of Baltimore. In the end, it managed to establish control over hiring and the disbursement of relief to unemployed sailors, and, for a period of six months, it asserted a "remarkable degree of worker control over the nation's third largest port." This "Baltimore Soviet" even managed to make some limited inroads into genuine interracial organizing alongside the all-black Local 858 of the International Longshoremen's Association (165–71).

Skotnes's alternating structure bounces the book between labor and civil rights in such a way that the two narratives do not really ever become one. Although there were some points of contact between the two struggles, there are not enough sustained connections to reveal the civil rights unionism that is central to the "long civil rights movement" thesis. At his most careful, Skotnes makes clear how short-lived these moments really were. For example, the members of Local 858, though segregated, were wary of abandoning Local 858—a significant institution in the black community—to join the interracial "Baltimore Soviet." In retrospect, this was a wise choice. The MWIU eventually lost control of federal relief; without that key piece of leverage, they also lost control of hiring. Finally, by February 1935, the CP disbanded the MWIU altogether as it abandoned the dual unionism of Third Period communism to embrace the Popular Front strategy of the later 1930s (161–73). Even after the Wagner act opened the possibility for a broader campaign to organize the entire waterfront, the National Maritime Union, which had inherited the organizers of the MWIU, was still unable to convince Local 858 to join them in a hundred-day strike (228–32). Though opportunities did exist for interracial solidarity, they nonetheless remained limited in the 1930s.

Though Skotnes breaks some important new ground, *A New Deal for All?* would have been more useful had it been put into more explicit conversation with the rest of the literature on race, labor, and urban politics in the 1930s, especially Cheryl Greenberg's *Or Does It Explode?* and Martha Biondi's more recent *To Stand and Fight*. For example, Skotnes's discussion of the "Buy Where You Can Work" campaign bears a striking resemblance to similar campaigns in Harlem described by Greenberg. Both very clearly draw inspiration from black nationalist traditions. However, where Greenberg details the tensions that arose between black supporters of the boycott movement and members of the white working class as they competed for retail jobs, Skotnes left me wondering how much this boycott may have complicated the efforts to build interracial solidarity in the city.

Finally, a good number of the claims that Skotnes makes about the origins and growth of mass movements during the Depression would have been more convincing if grounded in a more extensive look at the history of black Baltimore during what he terms the "premodern" era of the freedom movement (40). Structuring the book so heavily around the long civil rights movement thesis makes that long movement overshadow earlier influences. The most significant of these omissions is the history of black women's activism

in the 1910s and 1920s, especially given the prevalence of black women in the leadership of Baltimore's later civil rights organizations. A significant proportion of the City-wide Young People's Forum's leaders were women (84). The history of women's activism is even more noteworthy given the role of the Baltimore Housewives' League in both expanding the "Buy Where You Can Work" boycott and staffing its pickets (147). The Housewives' League later became the foundation for a network of protective associations founded to fight the establishment of taverns in black neighborhoods following the repeal of Prohibition (287–89). Lillie Jackson, one of the key leaders of these protective associations, even served as president of the local NAACP from 1935 until 1969. Though he discusses at length women's participation in the race and class struggles in 1930s Baltimore, Skotnes overlooks its connection to an earlier organizing tradition.

Despite these limitations, *A New Deal for All?* offers a fascinating look into the history of Baltimore during the Depression and provides a solid foundation for future researchers.

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Working Hard for the American Dream: Workers and Their Unions, World War I to the Present

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Randi Storch's compelling argument in *Working Hard for the American Dream: Workers and Their Unions, World War I to the Present* is both timely and thought-provoking. Her study explores the political and economic terrain of the last century to "explain how workers and the labor movement got from there to here, and why this story is so important today" (7–8). The narrative traces the rise and fall of the twentieth-century labor movement, spanning the era when industrial unions came of age—when union leaders attained newfound power and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the CIO developed into formidable entities—then tracking the rise of public-sector unionism followed by the decline of organized labor. Comparing the low density of union representation today to that of the 1920s, when few workers had union representation, she notes that unions are again "on the decline. . . and the people they represent are on the defensive and under siege" (6).

But the story Storch tells also addresses the relationship between unions and the demise of the middle class. As memberships in unions have fallen, the gap between the rich and poor in the United States has increased, suggesting, she argues, a link between a unionized work force and the twentieth-century rise and fall of the middle class: "The share of profits that corporate employers pay to their workers has fallen to its lowest level since 1929" (234). In 1965, the heads of the largest corporations earned twenty times what they paid their average workers. In 2005, corporate chief executive officers earned 262 times the pay of their average workers. If the American dream is to regain traction, workers must reclaim their lost legacy, for without unions what power do workers have when negotiating for their fair share?

To reclaim that legacy, Storch has composed a synthesis of the most recent scholarship in the field of working-class history to convey the robust and dynamic experience of workers in all their racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. It is a conscious and successful attempt to move beyond "the traditional story of the labor union" (8), shifting the focus away from institutions and union bureaucracies. She highlights the larger political, economic, and social context that shaped workers' lives, sometimes by raising barriers to opportunity and at other times by increasing workers' power, and what they did to challenge labor and social relations at work and within the community.

The century-long exploration begins with the Great Depression and the question, "Why would working people demand union rights in the middle of the worst economic crisis of their lives" (11)? The answer, Storch suggests, lies with the hopes, expectations, and challenges that occurred during World War I and into the 1920s. The battle for new industrial unions during the 1930s did not drop out of the sky but grew out of the changing political and economic conditions between 1914 and 1930. In 1917, as President Woodrow Wilson took the nation to war to "make the world safe for democracy," he instituted a new relationship between the state and labor to keep labor unrest at a minimum, particularly in industries producing for the war. The new relationship included an eight-hour day, equal pay for women for equal work, and the right to join a union. These new worker rights were part of "industrial democracy," introduced during the war to promote the idea that "war-production workers were patriots serving a vital national function" (14). Under the protection of the state, 1 million new workers joined unions during the war. Although pro-union labor agreements and the public's willingness to support them stopped abruptly when the war ended, the workers' desire for collective bargaining rights did not die. Welfare capitalism during the twenties did not defeat the union idea so much as teach workers that there was little that was democratic in the employers' approach, leading Storch to note that "many times management's ineptitude proved to be the union organizer's best weapon" (31). The 1920s also saw the rise of interest in unions among African Americans who had migrated north, seeking the promise of America only to find the "reality of postwar racial violence" (39). Under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph's drive to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the "new crowd" within the black community tied union rights to the completion of the "unfinished task of emancipation" (39).

With that as a foundation, state power was used to make unions legitimate under President Roosevelt's New Deal. The new union movement of the 1930s pushed the president and Congress to extend the New Deal for workers beyond the shop floor to include social security, unemployment, and health care. Although the New Deal "unleashed labor activism" (67), it took another world war to consolidate the gains of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Throughout, Storch's narrative does not follow a smooth or straight path. The text is organized chronologically, but political themes within each of the four chapters shape the terrain activists operated from as they pushed labor organizations to expand economic as well as social citizenship.

Chapter 2 explores how World War II and the Cold War strengthened the role of the state in workers' lives, breathing new life into unions and the labor movement even as it created new problems. On the one hand, wartime federal power legitimized unions, greatly increased union membership, and increased pay for war workers. Jobs opened up for women and people of color that had previously been reserved for white men only, unleashing a second, and much larger, phase of the Great Migration and lifting thousands out of