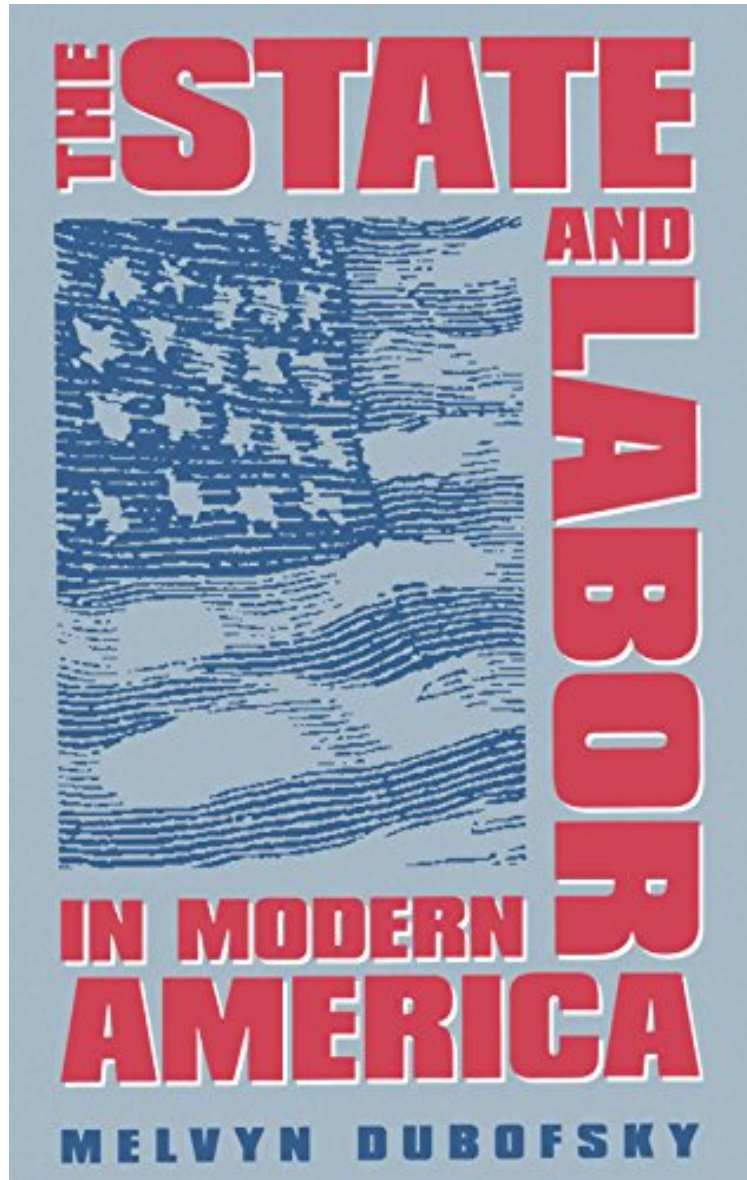


The State and Labor in Modern America

Melvyn Dubofsky

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Melvyn Dubofsky : The State and Labor in Modern America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The State and Labor in Modern America:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. okayBy CustomerI wanted some more personally. In relation to state labor.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Instructive overview of state regulation of labor unionsBy Chris GThis book gives an overview of the involvement of the U.S. government in labor relations from roughly 1877 through the Reagan years. The amount of primary sources in the book is impressive. I could think of a few labor

related historical events that the author does not mention in this book but overall the detail and analyses are impressive and useful. He begins by describing federal government labor policy in the late 19th century. The U.S. was rapidly industrializing and economic competition was intense. The economy was in a continual state of booming and then falling into serious depression. Labor costs were the main target for businesses to slash in order to strengthen competitive position. When workers objected to wage cuts and bad conditions and organized to resist such measures, businesses usually had the backing of state and local authorities in crushing unionization and strikes. The courts were especially helpful to employers, granting injunctions against strikes on the ground that they interfered with interstate commerce. The courts made particular use of the Sherman Act of 1890 which was originally assumed to target corporate monopolies but judges used it against unions. Also, when federal troops were called out, they were placed under the control of state governments and used to crush unionization. One example Dubofsky gives is the use of federal troops by Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg in 1899 to arrest all union coal miners and release them only after they pledged not to return to the union. The federal troops also assisted state authorities in purging union sympathizers from local government posts. Dubofsky examines the evolving federal response to labor crises which constitutional traditions of the period usually placed in the hands of local and state authorities. After episodes of industrial unrest, Congress appointed investigatory commissions that condemned both management and workers and then did nothing more. Dubofsky places the 1894 Pullman strike as a time when one began to hear the beginnings of federal government endorsement of "responsible unionism." But it was not until Theodore Roosevelt when a president gave a substantial amount of rhetorical support to responsible unionism. In this case the responsible unions were the relatively well paid and work secure craft unionists of the American Federation of Labor. In contrast, his hostility to the IWW was quite extreme, similar to that held by other leading politicians in the period. He refused pleas of the Western Federation of Miners, from which the IWW sprung, to protect them in Colorado from the extensive violations in 1903-05 of their civil liberties. In the face of a reactionary judiciary, business and congress, he did little to push for the legislative demands of the A.F. of L. He did instruct federal troops sent to Nevada to keep order during an IWW coal strike not to aid in suppressing the strike, which ended up crushed by the companies and local authorities anyway. Dubofsky describes how closely the A.F. of L. linked up with the administration of Woodrow Wilson. The president's Commission on Industrial Relations, headed by the interesting figure of Frank P. Walsh, harshly condemned the excesses of free market capitalism. The Clayton Act of 1914 declared workers had the right to organize and supposedly exempted unions from the Sherman Act. But according to Dubofsky, most congressmen and Senators backed language protecting peaceful union organizing from court injunctions that was as vague as possible, leaving it to the courts to define the parameters of the Act. Of course the courts would eventually significantly water down the Clayton Act. Dubofsky describes the efforts of some officials in the Wilson administration to promote non-radical unionization but this of course ran into conflict with the World War one and post war Red Scare. Employers used the Red Scare as a cover to repress any sort of unionism, radical or otherwise. Dubofsky describes how the federal government's "neutrality" in the 1920's redounded to the benefit of employers. He describes the efforts of the Franklin Roosevelt administration to give unions a decent measure of viability in industrial relations. He writes that unions had the support of the administration against management when the unions presented a powerful and potentially disruptive force. When unions were weak in comparison to management--as during the textile strike of 1934--or when unions were on the defensive against a hostile public opinion and congress Roosevelt was cool or hostile. Dubofsky describes in impressive detail the Roosevelt administration's labor policy during World War II. Unions wished to have a voice in the conduct of war industries but business more or less exclusively directed the government boards overseeing war industries. In the interests of an efficient war effort, the administration refused to deny war contracts to anti-union businesses. The administration tried to contain wage growth in order to control inflation but this led to an explosion of strikes, in particular in the mining industry. On the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, Dubofsky argues that despite the hysterical denunciations of the CIO, the actual effects of the law were not terribly significant. In particular he argues that Taft-Hartley was not much of a divergence from the Roosevelt administration policy that had been developed in the National Labor Relations Board since the purge of radicals from that body began in 1939. He notes that while Truman vetoed the Act and publicly predicted it would give impetus for communists in the labor movement, according to a credible source, he privately expressed the opinion that it wasn't that bad. I think that Dubofsky may under-estimate the role the Act played in the subsequent dampening of rank and file militancy. Dubofsky notes unions assumed their institutional place in the post-war economy and wages and benefits steadily increased, trickling down to non-union members as well. But union leaders agreed to multi-year contracts where lengthy rules and grievance procedures effectively diluted rank and file militancy. By the 1970's, with America losing its supreme economic position, business leaders increasingly saw unions as a hindrance to its ability to compete.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A Revisionist look at the Tripartite Relationship
By Taparaho
In a revisionist look at labor history in the 20th century, Melvyn Dubofsky counters the typical claim that government has played a repressive role in government-union-capital relationships. His argument, not accepted by many labor scholars, is that labor benefitted in the long-run through the states intervention -- attempting to diffuse the potential revolutionary zeal of the masses by appeasing them with small gains. Dubofsky's methodology launches a

liberal attack on Marxist thinkers and activists by challenging the view that government is a tool of capital to hold workers in check. His work points out that unions gained when the people organized and threatened militancy. Government sought to appease labor through putting pressure on capital. However, when labor crossed the line actually becoming militant and acting out against the states authority, government sided with capital -- an action more in line with providing the economic stability everyone needs. Labor history in a raw sense is both shocking and appalling. His account of labor history is packed with detail, and historical accounts which sometimes get in the way of his thesis.

In this important new book, Melyyn Dubofsky traces the relationship between the American labor movement and the federal government from the 1870s until the present. His is the only book to focus specifically on the 'labor question' as a lens through which to view more clearly the basic political, economic, and social forces that have divided citizens throughout the industrial era. Many scholars contend that the state has acted to suppress trade union autonomy and democracy, as well as rank-and-file militancy, in the interest of social stability and conclude that the law has rendered unions the servants of capital and the state. In contrast, Dubofsky argues that the relationship between the state and labor is far more complex and that workers and their unions have gained from positive state intervention at particular junctures in American history. He focuses on six such periods when, in varying combinations, popular politics, administrative policy formation, and union influence on the legislative and executive branches operated to promote stability by furthering the interests of workers and their organizations.

From Library Journal In this work, Dubofsky (history and sociology, SUNY at Binghamton) is trying to avoid many of the current paths of labor scholarship. Instead of investigating labor internally, he looks at the ways labor and capital have interacted with the various branches of government since Reconstruction. In studying the tangible labor policies of the state, he analyzes the influence of the different regions on one another, considering, for instance, the effect of congressional representatives from the South on New England's manufacturing workers. He also reveals that the use of troops against unions was often not court ordered but frequently decreed by the executive branch and supported by Congress. Dubofsky's footnotes and bibliography are, as usual, magnificent; when he ignores an event or aspect of a subject, the reader feels sure that he is aware of his actions. Recommended for all academic libraries. Clay Williams, Bluefield State Coll. Lib., W. Va. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. Dubofsky's analysis is bracing and should generate much debate. "Journal of American History" This expert historical essay should be read by all political scientists. "Political Science Quarterly" An excellent book with many powerful and well-substantiated points. "Industrial and Labor Relations "An expert guide to the half-century of political and legal turmoil that preceded Taft-Hartley." American Historical " "First-rate history, the best synthesis yet published of the public policy of labor relations in industrial America." s in American History " "First-rate history, the best synthesis yet published of the public policy of labor relations in industrial America." s in American History" This expert historical essay should be read by all political scientists.--Political Science Quarterly [Dubofsky] likes the historical imaginations of social scientists, and his method is to blend their insights within a traditional framework focused on the Presidency in order to 'bring the state back in' to labor history.--New York Times Book A masterful history of the federal law of industrial disputes and collective bargaining in the century after 1873. . . . The State and Labor in Modern America is also first-rate history, the best synthesis yet published of the public policy of labor relations in industrial America.-- s in American History Dubofsky's analysis is bracing and should generate much debate.--Journal of American History An outstanding example of historical scholarship. . . . It both surveys the broad scope of over 100 years of labor-state relations and establishes a standard by which subsequent work in the field will be measured. The book is written with great clarity and exemplary fair-mindedness while at the same time advancing forthright and convincing perspectives on a wide range of complex and controversial issues.--Robert H. Zieger, University of Florida An expert guide to the half-century of political and legal turmoil that preceded Taft-Hartley and a persuasive reaffirmation of the significance of organized labor in twentieth-century history.--American Historical The State and Labor in Modern America is an excellent book with many powerful and well-substantiated points.--Industrial and Labor Relations [This] deeply informed and wise book . . . restores the cogency of the liberal argument and sets the scholarly standard against which all future work on state-labor relations in modern America will be tested.--David Brody, University of California, Davis