

Urban frontiersman

Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal. By David L. Stebenne, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, 539 pp. \$45.

Arthur Goldberg has often been referred to as the Davy Crockett of the New Frontier—a reference to the administration of President John F. Kennedy. While a pathfinder in the political and economic arenas of American life, Goldberg had little else in common with the American hero who, according to legend, hunted wild bears as a boy. In fact, Goldberg's closest encounter with any bruinesque figure would have been while working as a vendor during a Chicago Cubs professional baseball game.

Like many products of an urban village, Goldberg, a first-generation American of Russian/Jewish stock, fell under the political mystique of President Franklin Roosevelt. Although not reared in a traditional trade-union family, the future Secretary of Labor witnessed the heavy burdens borne by working-class families in Chicago prior to and during the Great Depression. President Roosevelt appeared to have solutions to these problems and Goldberg spent a lifetime defending the gospel of the New Deal. This particular social contract with America was proposed for a Keynesian economy in which tripartite sharing of political and economic power by labor, management, and the government could provide most Americans with prosperity and promise for a better future.

To Goldberg's dismay, this corporatism never fully materialized. Although he fought indefatigably to maintain the New Deal order for the American political economy as Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and Steelworkers union legal advisor, as Secretary of Labor, as Supreme Court Justice, and as United Nations Ambassador, the process eroded concurrently with his career.

David L. Stebenne has written a very

good account of the life and times of Arthur Goldberg. It is a valuable resource, but will not serve as the definitive study of the scholar-politician and the social order of his period. A good portion of the book focuses on Goldberg's career as a labor attorney. As Stebenne notes, this was not Goldberg's original career plan, but certain personal influences led the young man down this path. The most important of these was teacher Lilian Herstein (an executive board member of the Chicago AFL) and Chicago area labor leaders Van Bittner of the Steelworkers and Alex Rose of the Hatmakers. Goldberg's structured approach to problem-solving and his moderate temperament provided for more public visibility as chief legal advisor to both the Steelworkers union and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The labor movement then called on his organizational talents to arrange for the AFL-CIO merger in 1955.

Ironically, the merger closed the window on his trade union career and opened another in public service. The book's author provides a very good account of this transition. He clearly illustrates how Goldberg's negotiating in the dramatic 1959 steel strike and his internal legal posturing in the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act that same year brought him into contact with John and Robert Kennedy. With his role in the new AFL-CIO diminished, Goldberg accepted the nomination as Kennedy's Secretary of Labor. Stebenne accurately demonstrates how Goldberg's personal agenda for the New Frontier has real significance presently. This is especially poignant in labor relations, now that global and technologically advanced economies are standards of the new industrial relations.

Goldberg's short tenure as Secretary was eclipsed by fulfillment of a lifelong dream: appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Stebenne's legal background is very helpful in analyzing some of the key labor cases that came before the Court during this period. As with Goldberg's economic policies,

some of the cases before the Court, *Erie Resistor v. NLRB* for example, have had great impact on current issues such as striker replacement and right-to-work controversies.

The book also highlights the penultimate sacrifice made by this public servant in accepting the U.S. Ambassadorship to the United Nations. Goldberg forfeited a lifetime portfolio on the Supreme Court, hoping to reverse the "hawkish" Vietnam policies of the Johnson administration. He gambled that, following the retirement of friend and colleague Chief Justice Earl Warren, Johnson would reappoint him to the Court. However, the President refused to make a recess appointment, and the die was permanently cast when conservative Richard Nixon won the 1968 presidential election, thus ending any chances for a return.

Thankfully, this book covers little of Goldberg's disastrous and probably capricious New York gubernatorial campaign of 1970. Instead, it gracefully concludes with a brief epilogue on the man's post-public service.

Readers will be attracted by Goldberg's prescience, particularly his recognition of the future workplace as one of technological displacement, global competition, and erosion of hard-won worker rights. The author has made a strong effort to correlate the events of Goldberg's time to those of the 1990s. Despite the absence of any personal memoirs or notes, Stebenne has exhaustively researched his subject. In fact, more than 25 percent of this 540-page book consists of footnotes. It will be of great value to other researchers as a result.

This strength of accountability, however, contributes to some weaknesses. This book is a refinement of the author's Ph.D dissertation. Unfortunately, it often reads as one, in a rather pedantic and pedestrian style. There is little insight into the personal character of the subject—what were Goldberg's reactions to the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, of Martin Luther King? What did

he think of the clash at the 1968 Chicago convention? Wife Dorothy Gold-berg, not to mention children Robert and Barbara, shared most aspects of Gold-berg's life, yet this theme never fully develops. Without personal papers or diaries, however, it is difficult to extrapolate on his personal life. Even the Department of Labor, in the brief statement attached to the Secretary's official portrait, erroneously cites his home State as New York instead of Illinois. The depths of Gold-berg's personal feelings and passions await future publications.

Nonetheless, this book should be read by anyone involved in the industrial relations process. The erosion of the "New Deal" model has been fodder for countless conferences, papers, seminars, and other forums. Here is an account of one of the "insiders" in the construction and defense of the postwar order. It details and interweaves the complex transactions of human nature and differences of opinions between allies such as Walter Reuther of the CIO and UAW, George Meany of the AFL, Philip Murray and David McDonald of the Steelworkers, and adversaries such as Roger

Blough and R. Conrad Cooper of U.S. Steel. It also touches on the role of middle-of-the-road participants like Henry Kaiser of Kaiser Steel and Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell.

One of the most interesting segments of this work is the construction of the New Deal model and its meaning for working Americans. Stebbene methodically illustrates how worker benefits (that is, pension plans, supplemental unemployment benefits, cost-of-living allowances, training, and retraining due to technology change) became part of the collective bargaining equation. Although not exclusive to the historic period studied here, the problems of current employee-employer industrial participation programs can be traced to many of the events that atrophied the corporatist system sought by Goldberg and his peers. For example, Goldberg tried to solidify corporatist policy-making through a tripartite Labor Advisory Council, but it suffered from many of the same problems experienced by both President Truman's Labor-Management Conference in the late 1940s and the 1994 Commission on Labor-Management Relations chaired by

former Secretary of Labor John Dunlop. Too many influences on both sides of the labor-management table preferred the adversarial system to one of cooperation.

There are some other minor criticisms of this book. The author often knowledgeably analyzes an issue but does not fully identify the event. For example, Goldberg's role in making pensions a legitimate issue of collective bargaining is explained fairly well, but the exact Inland Steel case of 1949 is not identified until well after the basic analysis. This problem, however, is a minor one.

Today, many believe that the New Deal social order is in chaos. Labor relations appear also to be in an equally poor state of affairs, and we seem presently unable to hurdle the barriers posed by a transition from the industrial to the information age. Perhaps we need another urban frontiersman to work out the details.

—Henry P. Guzda

Industrial Relations Specialist
U.S. Department of Labor