

Specialists may find this story all too familiar, but other readers will discover a delightful rendering of at least some of what worried the American people at the dawn of the nation's second generation. Adequate notes and a bibliographic essay will guide interested readers further into the literature. Subscribers to the *Indiana Magazine of History* are quite likely to

find *1816: America Rising* worth their time and attention.

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American Vanguard

The United Auto Workers during the Reuther Years, 1935-1970

By John Barnard

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$49.95.)

Born out of a series of epic confrontations with some of the nation's largest corporations, and occupying a highly visible place as one of America's largest and most visionary unions, the United Auto Workers (UAW) fascinated observers during its glory days and has since received considerable attention from labor historians. Recent scholarship has tended to be critical of the UAW, questioning both the collective bargaining and social achievements of the union and its most prominent leader, Walter Reuther. In this sweeping history of the first four decades of the UAW, John Barnard flatly rejects this view and describes the UAW as an "American vanguard" at the forefront of efforts to humanize the workplace and fashion a social contract more favorable to working-class Americans.

Barnard vividly recounts and astutely analyzes the shop-floor, intra-union, and political dynamics surrounding the UAW's formation. Throughout the union's history, disputes over such crucial issues as the pace of work, supervisory treatment, job security, and adequate compensation inspired auto worker activism. Shop-floor militants—mostly socialists and communists—successfully united a diverse labor force and capitalized on a rare historical convergence of impaired credibility of top corporate leadership, state and public tolerance of militant labor action, and self-portrayal of union actions as upholding important American principles. Yet, as Barnard soberly notes, even after electrifying triumphs at General Motors in 1937 and Ford in 1941, the UAW leadership's broader ambitions were thwarted by GM's

insistence on the preservation of management rights and a conservative backlash that defeated UAW efforts to gain political power in Detroit.

After a bruising decade-long factional struggle for control of the union, Reuther became UAW president in 1946 and the most eloquent post-World War II advocate of a broader social role for labor. In contrast to scholars who have charged that Reuther too readily ceded managerial authority to the auto makers in return for wage and benefit improvements, Barnard insists that the union continued to sanction resistance to heavy-handed management on the shop floor. For Barnard, "the conservative postwar political climate effectively precluded any other course" (p. 288), and under the circumstances, Reuther and the UAW fashioned an impressive workplace compact that markedly improved the lives of auto workers and their families.

Barnard acknowledges that Reuther and the UAW were often frustrated in the political arena. Reuther repeatedly tried but failed to establish a tripartite business, government, and labor administration of economic affairs; and although the union reshaped Michigan politics along social democratic lines, its hopes for an ideological realignment of the national Democratic Party failed to materialize. Barnard notes that in spite of Reuther's impassioned rhetoric on behalf of African Americans, farm workers, the poor, and the economically displaced, his refusal to

offend Lyndon B. Johnson by openly opposing the president's Vietnam policy undermined his ability to lead a revitalized progressive movement. Nevertheless, Barnard does not fully account for Reuther's inability to activate broader labor support for his political agenda.

Exhaustively researched and crisply written, Barnard's book provides a thoughtful and often persuasive counterpoint to those scholars who have criticized the UAW but not fully appreciated the social and political constraints limiting its options. Yet at times, Barnard's critical judgment is dulled by his reliance on sources close to Reuther and the UAW leadership—a close circle of one-party rule embodying the form of democracy but not the spirit. Barnard's evidence suggests that while the UAW never quite fulfilled its hopes of becoming an "American vanguard," it did succeed in bringing dignity to thousands of workers and consistently sought to link labor's progress to the advancement of the public good. *American Vanguard* performs a valuable service in spotlighting these achievements and reclaiming the UAW's important social legacy.

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