

War Labor Boards in the Field. By Allan R. Richards. Volume 35, *James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953, pp. vii, 281. Index. \$1.25.)

With a national board located in Washington and twelve regional boards distributed throughout the country, charged with responsibility for wage stabilization and the task of preventing work stoppages in essential industries, the War Labor Board was one of the most important of the numerous wartime governmental agencies. From January 12, 1942, to August 18, 1945, the National War Labor Board and its field agencies decided 17,650 dispute cases that other agencies had failed to settle and terminated 436,894 voluntary wage adjustment cases. That the national board handled less than .005 per cent of the latter cases is adequate indication of the importance of the regional boards.

The present volume does not profess to be a history of the Regional War Labor Boards. It is, rather, a study of their administrative policies and problems, and is designed to fill a reported gap in the literature of governmental administration. The "literature on top-level administration outnumbers the literature on field administration by at least twenty to one," and this book, begun as a doctoral dissertation, is an attempt partially to alleviate that discrepancy.

The author finds much to criticize about the organization and procedure of the War Labor Board. Most serious, perhaps, is the charge that the nature of the national board's orders and directives put the regional boards "in a position of responsibility without authority." Throughout the volume evidence is plentiful that the national board was extremely reluctant to spell out its policies in definite and clear-cut terms. Although refusing to accept the idea that each case should be judged on its own merits, the national board maintained that no formula adequate for all cases could be devised. Regional boards frequently were criticized for taking unauthorized action, but their requests for more definite instructions seldom were heeded. The result was a considerable amount of grumbling, groping, and bungling.

The mountainous records of the War Labor Board, most of which are housed in the National Archives, would discourage any but the most determined of researchers, but

the more than 1100 footnotes contained in this 271-page monograph indicate that the author has worked them carefully. In several respects, however, the result of this prodigious amount of work is disappointing. Because the text is broken up into 230 sections, ranging in length from three lines to eight pages, the reader seldom gets the feel of a topic before it is abruptly broken off and another one is begun. The volume abounds in statements that might variously be described as obvious, contradictory, and redundant. For example, the following sentences seem to assert the obvious: "Effective policy effectively administered yields good administration." "The ability of a field office to act within the scope of the agency program depends upon its ability to understand that program." Some examples of contradictory statements are: "Every regional board used part-time members to represent all three groups—labor, industry, public. The sole exception was RWLB VI in Chicago." "When an analyst opened a case folder, his first concern was that the application was properly filled out." And in the same paragraph: "By the time a case reached an analyst, [it] had been previously checked for accuracy and completeness." Finally, too many short, choppy sentences and a lack of variety in sentence structure greatly reduce the readability of the book.

Despite the defects which have been noted, *War Labor Boards in the Field* may properly be described as a useful contribution to the literature on governmental administration. The development of the War Labor Board from inception to termination is minutely traced. The many problems, both procedural and substantive, which it faced and the changes made to meet those problems are discussed in detail. Some of these problems were: (1) what standards would best maintain central control and allow regional discretion at the same time? (2) To what extent should the regional boards be allowed to operate independently? (3) Did the tripartite structure of boards adequately protect the interests of the public? (4) What was the best way to secure sufficient wage data upon which to base wage stabilization decisions? (5) How could contradictory authority and overlapping jurisdiction be eliminated? (6) How specific and unyielding should be the instructions of the national board to regional boards? Few of these problems ever were completely solved.

The bringing to light of these problems together with the

various procedures devised to cope with them, although of somewhat limited value to the historian, should be of particular interest to the administrator who may be confronted with similar problems.

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