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## Jennifer Delton, *The Industrialists: How the National Association of Manufacturers Shaped American Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020)

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[See table of contents](#)

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waged and socially reproductive labour, and current strategies for organizing must be “refracted through analysis of gender and sex transition.” (62)

*Transgender Marxism* fails purposefully to engage with normalizing questions like: “why [do] some people become transgender.” (70) Transgender Marxists voice confidence and rebelliousness, which may read as disruptive to those expecting the “confiding and confessing tone” (2) that trans people often use to gain mainstream approval. Such a tone challenges leftist paternalism, often rooted in whiteness and androcentricity – trans people require solidarity, not saviours. Additionally, amplifying trans voices as active agents for change eschews the necropolitical drive of even the most well-meaning of Marxists, whose magnification of trans alienation, dispossession, and lumpen-status debilitates their capacity to work with others to create other possible worlds.

This collection advances trans studies by emphasizing the primacy of capital as a social relation mediating trans oppression. Unfortunately, trans scholars interrogating whiteness or focusing on trans people of colour will not encounter intensive or sustained engagement with racial capitalism and its intersections with sex, gender, and sexuality.

Contributors to *Transgender Marxism* refuse “trans exceptionalism.” (43) Since sex is a governing category within capitalism, trans people, especially those reduced to survival-based existences, should “not [be] distinguished by [their] victimhood” (43) but seen as vital to class struggle. Transgender Marxism addresses the specificities of trans subjectivities whilst demonstrating that gender is not a private phenomenon; instead, all gender is a structure “formed under violence.” (43)

*Transgender Marxism* facilitates grounds for solidarity across differences. This collection urges Marxists, leftists,

and union organizers to learn from surplus populations rendered disposable by capitalists in an act of class warfare. Trans people’s insistence on transitioning in aspiration of better lives and the work of dispossessed and alienated trans communities to foster alternative economies to share with, and care for, each other lends a beckon of hope during these times of crisis.

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**Jennifer Delton, *The Industrialists: How the National Association of Manufacturers Shaped American Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020)**

JENNIFER DELTON’s *The Industrialists* details how capitalists in manufacturing sought to influence economic policy and labour relations, often being forced to scramble to keep up as capitalism shifted beneath them. Her study centres on the trade association, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), from the late 1890s until the early 21st century. In Delton’s account, the association shifts back and forth between making waves in the world and trying to stay afloat in situations beyond its control. Through the prism of NAM, Delton conveys a great deal of business history, the history of US economic policy, and a fair amount of labour history.

The book’s first part examines the organization in its early days, from its founding in 1895 through 1940. NAM was founded by a group of 600 manufacturers as a response to the economic crisis. Their most general goal was to make capitalism work better for themselves and to better weather the times when capitalism seemed to work against them. They initially placed a strong emphasis on increasing their ability to sell goods to

markets abroad, promoting standardization in basic economic building blocks like weights and measures, and coordinating (despite anti-trust laws) to share information and reduce competition. In addition, NAM also opposed unions while attempting to foster relatively disruption-free labour relations (through early forays into the fields that would become industrial relations and human resources).

The book's middle part focuses on NAM at its mid-20th century peak in both influence and membership, when over twenty thousand companies belonged to the association. At its height, NAM influenced US labour law by helping bring about the *Taft-Hartley Act of 1947*, which shaped the International Labour Organization and international trade agreements and had an impact on both the content of and businesses' compliance with emerging civil rights laws in the workplace. The book's final section details the rise of neoliberalism and fairly decisive victories for capitalist globalizers, developments that I would have assumed NAM would have celebrated but which actually sped up de-industrialization and the relative loss of prominence of organized manufacturers as a force influential upon the US government.

As it swam in capitalism's troubled waters, NAM was beset by internal conflicts clustered around three related tensions that were present to some extent from the organization's founding. One was that between manufacturers with a more nationalist vision of capitalism, favouring protectionist policies, and those with a more internationalist vision, favouring policies promoting access to markets. The economic nationalists were never fully at home in NAM, as one of the founding goals of the organization was to promote international trade, and over time, they were increasingly out of step with US economic and policy developments. Notably, in Delton's telling, the

Democratic Party seems to have done at least as much as the Republican Party to foster neoliberal globalization in the US and, via the US government, globally. This is not to say NAM's nationalist wing got what they wanted from Republicans, however. For instance, the Reagan administration generally favoured the finance and service sectors and did less for manufacturing than manufacturers wished.

A second tension was between NAM members with a strong ideological commitment to political conservatism and those who made a more pragmatic effort to get the best deal in the present via the political centre-right, which eventually came to be represented by the Democratic Party in the 1990s. The third tension was between firms of different sizes. Generally, small manufacturing enterprises made up a large proportion of the association's members and officers, but big and often multinational corporations tended to make up a large share of the organization's dues income and exert a great deal of informal influence. These various tensions made it hard for NAM to straightforwardly represent the interests of US manufacturers in their entirety. Instead, NAM served as a mechanism for the constitution of conflict-laden coalitions of industrial capitalists by providing a space in which manufacturers engaged in politicking among themselves, aimed at both shaping society and shaping NAM's members.

Internal tensions were exacerbated by and shaped how NAM responded to broader social conflicts – and the resulting changes in laws – around labour, race, gender, and disability. Overall, *The Industrialists* shows NAM repeatedly divided over how to best pursue what it took to be a better capitalism in a world that kept on changing in unforeseen ways. Delton's emphasis on divisions among capitalists is especially illuminating in

the book's final section. I had always thought of the Reagan years as a time of unambiguous triumph for US capitalists, but the reality is that some capitalists won while others lost, including the once-powerful bloc represented by NAM. While they certainly have it far better than the working-class, capitalists too live with the reality that, to paraphrase Marx, people make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

Readers of *Labour/Le Travail* may balk at some elements of Delton's account. For instance, she claims that the *Taft-Hartley Act of 1947*, widely loathed by the labour movement and labour scholars, provided a framework in which both management and unions benefitted. This view seems hard to sustain given work on the law's contribution to the US labour movement's decline by scholars like Christopher Tomlins and Charley Romney. Despite this disagreement, the book merits a careful reading – or really, because of this disagreement. While I was unconvinced by this one facet of her argument, revisiting apparent certainties is edifying.

While her relatively empathetic treatment of NAM officials will not be entirely comfortable reading for some more class-partisan readers of *Labour/Le Travail*, understanding employers, their organizations, and their attempts to shape policy in their favour is important for anyone who cares about the future of the labour movement and the working class. Delton helps readers know NAM from the inside, as a result of a detailed investigation into what NAM's members and officers thought they were doing in response to changing social circumstances. One element that comes through loudly is that NAM, despite all of its conservatism, never sought to keep the world exactly as it was but rather continued to pursue making economic policy and labour relations more in step with what

the organization thought contemporary capitalism needed. Conservatives can be a source of dynamism, albeit in an anti-worker direction. In addition to telling us a great deal about some of the labour movement's opponents, NAM's story provides a window onto a great deal of the history of capitalism in the US over more than a hundred years. Anyone concerned with the course of US economic policy and global capitalism over the 20th century will learn a great deal from Delton's high-quality book.

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**Mike Richardson, *Tremors of Discontent: My Life in Print 1970-1988* (Bristol: Bristol Radical History Group, 2021)**

IT IS A SURPRISE, in a way, that the succession of "angry young men" British novels, some with notable film adaptations, did not open the way for a richer, sustained literature of personal recollection. Or perhaps it is simply the case that writing from the working class itself remains rare, or when written, turns out to be about despair and personal collapse, with socialist ideals (if any) invisible.

At any rate, *Tremors of Discontent* is a tremendous book. Mike Richardson has a fabulous memory of his personal life and a lot to say about the class struggle. None of it is preachy or away from his own experience, and what he learns in the media of the time. Born in 1947, he can relay most of 40 years with precision and in fine, straightforward prose. No grandiosity.

It is useful, for me and perhaps other readers, to take a small byroad here and reflect on another new book, *Acceptable Men: Life in the Largest Steel Mill in the World*, by Noel Ignatiev. This author is a hard-bitten faction fighter in the US left, and the book is closer to other accounts