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Roosevelt and the Protest of the 1930s*

Seymour Martin Lipset**

INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression sparked mass discontent and political crisis throughout the Western world. The economic breakdown was most severe in the United States and Germany, yet the political outcome differed markedly in the two countries. In Germany the government collapsed, ushering the Nazis into power. In the United States, on the other hand, no sustained upheaval occurred and political change resulting from the economic crisis was apparently limited to the Democrats replacing the Republicans as the dominant party.¹ Why was the United States government able to survive intact the worst depression in modern times?

Much of the answer lies in the social forces that have historically inhibited class conscious politics in the United States. Factors such as the unique character of the American class structure (the result of the absence of feudal hierarchical social relations in its past), the great wealth of the country, the

* This Article is part of a larger work dealing with the reasons why the United States is the only industrialized democratic country without a significant socialist or labor party. For earlier publications by the author on the subject, see Laslett & Lipset, *Social Scientists View the Problem*, in *FAILURE OF A DREAM? ESSAYS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOCIALISM* 25 (J. Laslett & S. Lipset eds. 1974); Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, in *CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM* 34 (M. Novak ed. 1979); Lipset, *Radicalism or Reformism: The Sources of Working-Class Politics*, 77 *AM. POL. SCI. REV.* 1 (1983); Lipset, *Socialism in America*, in *SIDNEY HOOK, PHILOSOPHER OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMANISM* 47 (P. Kurtz ed. 1983); Lipset, *Why is There No Socialism in the United States?*, in *RADICALISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY AGE* 31 (S. Bialer & S. Sluzar eds. 1977). I am indebted to Kim Voss for assistance on this Article.

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1. The different political experiences of Germany and the United States in the 1930s are attributable, in part, to the different degrees of legitimacy enjoyed by the governments of each country. The great majority of the American population considered the American political system legitimate. In contrast, large and powerful segments of the German population considered the German Republic illegitimate. For a discussion of political stability and legitimacy, see S.M. LIPSET, *POLITICAL MAN: THE SOCIAL BASES OF POLITICS* 64-86 (expanded ed. 1981).

existence of adult male suffrage prior to industrialization, and the effects of a two-party electoral system centered on the direct election of the President have made it extremely difficult for any group to channel social discontent into an independent third party that appeals to class interests.²

The Great Depression of the 1930s undermined the impact of the social and economic factors that traditionally have defused leftist radicalism in the United States, and a high level of protest resulted. Nonetheless, the political variables that press the discontented to work within the two-party system continued to operate. The effect of these variables was enhanced by the masterful political craftsmanship of President Franklin Roosevelt. He reduced the impact of the widespread discontent resulting from the Great Depression by co-opting the leaders and programs of insurgent political movements. Although the logic of the United States' political system has repeatedly led the major parties to absorb popular opposition movements, Roosevelt proved more adept at effecting such absorption than any other party leader in American history.

The social protest generated by the Great Depression has passed into history, leaving many unaware of its extent. Analysis of Franklin Roosevelt's role in incorporating this protest movement into the mainstream of political life requires a familiarity with the political environment in which he acted.

I. SOCIAL DISCONTENT AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE 1930s

President Roosevelt faced protest and anti-capitalist sentiment that threatened to undermine the existing political system and create new political parties. The findings of diverse opinion polls, as well as the electoral support given to radical, progressive, and pro-labor candidates, indicate that a large minority of Americans were ready to back social-democratic or socialist proposals. Such feelings were harnessed to build powerful leftist third-party movements in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York.³ In other states, radicals successfully advanced alternative political movements by pursuing a strategy of running in major-party primaries. In California, Upton Sin-

2. See generally sources cited *supra* note *.

3. The Farmer-Labor party arose in Minnesota, the Progressive party in Wisconsin, and the American Labor Party in New York. See *infra* notes 53-55 and accompanying text. For a good overview of economic protest movements, see Karsh & Garman, *The Impact of the Political Left*, in *LABOR AND THE NEW DEAL* 77 (M. Derber & E. Young eds. 1957).

clair organized the End Poverty in California (EPIC) movement which won a majority in the 1934 Democratic gubernatorial primaries. By 1938 former EPIC leaders had captured the California governorship and a United States Senate seat.⁴ In Washington and Oregon, the Commonwealth Federations, patterning themselves after the social-democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of Canada, won a number of state and congressional posts and controlled the state Democratic parties for several years.⁵ In North Dakota, the revived radical Non-Partisan League, operating within the Republican party, won the governorship, a United States Senate seat, and both congressional seats in 1932, and continued to win other elections throughout the decade.⁶

The Socialist and Communist parties grew substantially as well. In 1932 the Socialist party had 15,000 members. Its electoral support, however, was much broader as indicated by the 1932 presidential election in which Norman Thomas received close to 900,000 votes, up from 267,000 in 1928.⁷ The Socialist party's membership increased to 25,000 by 1935. As a result of leftist enthusiasm for President Roosevelt, however, its presidential vote declined to approximately 188,000 in 1936, fewer votes than the party had attained in any presidential contest since 1900.⁸ The Communist party, on the other hand, backed President Roosevelt from 1936 on⁹ and its membership grew steadily, numbering between 80,000 and 90,000 at its high point in 1939.¹⁰ According to former party leader Peggy Dennis, Communists played major roles in "left center" electoral coalitions

4. See R. BURKE, *OLSON'S NEW DEAL FOR CALIFORNIA* 32-33 (1953); W. LEUCHTENBURG, *FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL* 114-15 (1963).

5. See A. Acena, *The Washington Commonwealth Federation: Reform Politics and the Popular Front* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Washington, 1975); J. Herzig, *The Oregon Commonwealth Federation: The Rise and Decline of a Reform Organization* (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Oregon, 1963).

6. See E. BLACKORBY, *PRAIRIE REBEL: THE PUBLIC LIFE OF WILLIAM LEMKE* 190 (1963); R. MORLAN, *POLITICAL PRAIRIE FIRE* 360 (1955).

7. See B. JOHN POLL, *PACIFIST'S PROGRESS: NORMAN THOMAS AND THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN SOCIALISM* 57, 96 (1970); S. PETERSEN, *A STATISTICAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS* 89, 91 (1981). See also L. GOODWYN, *DEMOCRATIC PROMISE: THE POPULIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICA* (1976).

8. By 1940 the Socialist vote had fallen to 116,514. See S. PETERSEN, *supra* note 7, at 97.

9. See *infra* notes 67-69, 76-88, and accompanying text.

10. Both Michael Harrington, Socialist party leader, and Earl Browder, chairperson of the Communist party during the 1930s, suggest that the Communist party grew to be the larger party because it was willing to work within the two-party system. In comparing the strategy of the Communist party with that of the anti-New Deal Socialists, Browder argued:

in four states and had significant influence in thirty-one others, mainly within the Democratic party.¹¹ Although the latter estimate is probably exaggerated, considerable evidence attests to the Communist party's strength in California, Minnesota, New York, and Washington.¹²

Labor groups gained unprecedented support as they pioneered new tactics and built organizations that were militant in ways previously unknown in American society. A wave of sit-down strikes successfully unionized mass production industries, such as automobile and steel.¹³ Organizations of the unemployed, often with Communist party leadership, developed radical strategies to influence the government to ease the plight

The Communist party, on the other hand, rapidly moved out of its extreme leftist sectarianism of 1930 It relegated its revolutionary socialist goals to the ritual of chapel and Sundays on the pattern long followed by the Christian Church. On weekdays it became the most single-minded practical reformist party that America ever produced. Thus the Socialist party, despite its initial advantages over the Communists, lost ground steadily to them. . . .

[The Socialists] learned nothing . . . from the spectacular capture of the Democratic party primary in California by Upton Sinclair's EPIC [End Poverty in California] movement They repeated all their failures but none of their successes. It was left to the Communists to learn from their successes; e.g., they copied Sinclair's EPIC movement and largely absorbed its remains

Browder, *The American Communist Party in the Thirties*, in *AS WE SAW THE THIRTIES* 237-38 (R. Simon ed. 1967).

Similarly, Michael Harrington noted that the Socialists, by insisting "on the traditional model of the Socialist party as an electoral alternative . . . missed participating in the most important political development in the history of the American working class." M. HARRINGTON, *SOCIALISM* 262 (1972). Harrington further stated that had the party followed Norman Thomas's advice in 1938 to cease running candidates, "it might have been able to maintain some kind of serious base in the unions. But it did not, and Socialists like Walter Reuther, when confronted with the choice between the party's political tactic and that of the labor movement itself, unhesitatingly chose the latter. The tragedy was that the two were counterposed." *Id.* at 262-63. For membership figures, as estimated by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, see I. HOWE & L. COSER, *THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY: A CRITICAL HISTORY* 386 (1957). The Communist party claimed 100,000 members by early 1939, although Philip Jaffe explains that "the total membership . . . never went beyond 70,000 (plus about 30,000 Young Communist League members)." P. JAFFE, *THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM* 11 (1975).

11. See P. DENNIS, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN AMERICAN COMMUNIST: A PERSONAL VIEW OF A POLITICAL LIFE, 1925-1975*, at 122 (1977).

12. See H. KLEHR, *THE HEYDAY OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM: THE DEPRESSION DECADE* ch. 14 (1984).

13. For a recent overview of labor organization during the 1930s, see Davis, *The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party*, 124 *NEW LEFT REV.* 43 (1980). See also I. BERNSTEIN, *THE TURBULENT YEARS* (1970); D. BRODY, *WORKERS IN INDUSTRIAL AMERICA: ESSAYS ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY STRUGGLE* ch. 4 (1980); J. GREEN, *THE WORLD OF THE WORKER: LABOR IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA* (1980).

of the jobless; risking arrest, they resisted evictions, sat in at relief bureaus, and organized mass hunger marches.¹⁴

In addition, the decade witnessed the emergence of large-scale social movements led by Senator Huey Long of Louisiana and Father Charles Coughlin of Michigan. Although each man's orientation has been described as fascist, abundant evidence indicates that Long's appeal was primarily as a leftist critic of the system and, prior to 1936, many perceived Coughlin as a leftist opponent of the banking system and of capitalism, although he eventually turned to overt anti-Semitism and open admiration of European fascist dictators.¹⁵

Huey Long's highly publicized "Share-Our-Wealth" plan, for example, had many radical elements. The plan involved 100% taxation of all family wealth in excess of \$5,000,000 and all income in excess of \$1,000,000 a year. Furthermore, the government was to guarantee each American family a "homestead" of \$5,000 and an "annual income of \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year." Senator Long's plan also called for a reduction of the work week to thirty hours and the work year to eleven months.¹⁶

Although the Share-Our-Wealth plan found adherents in every state, its greatest appeal outside of Long's home region was in Midwest, Mountain, and Pacific Coast states—primarily in those sectors of the population predisposed to the political left. A state-by-state comparison of the percentage of people who in 1935 said they would vote for Huey Long for President with the vote actually received by Eugene Debs in 1912, Robert LaFollette Sr. in 1924, and Norman Thomas in 1932 indicates that Long's support correlated significantly with support for these earlier Socialist and Progressive presidential candidates.¹⁷ His appeal, moreover, was clearly class-linked. Although the 1935 survey did not inquire into the occupational or socioeconomic status of the respondents, questionnaires were divided between those completed by voters receiving govern-

14. For an interesting account of such tactics and the growth of black protest, see Naison, *Harlem Communists and the Politics of Black Protest*, MARXIST PERSPECTIVES, Fall 1978, at 20.

15. See S.M. LIPSET & E. RAAB, *THE POLITICS OF UNREASON: RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN AMERICA, 1790-1977*, at 167-99 (2d ed. 1978); R. McElvaine, *Thunder Without Lightning; Working Class Discontent in the United States, 1929-1937*, at 217-31, 237-48 (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1974).

16. See T. WILLIAMS, *HUEY LONG* 693 (1969). See also A. BRINKLEY, *VOICES OF PROTEST: HUEY LONG, FATHER COUGHLIN, AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION* 71-74 (1982).

17. Earl Raab and I correlated these percentages from the results of a large-scale opinion poll. See S.M. LIPSET & E. RAAB, *supra* note 15, at 192.

ment assistance and others. In the thirty states for which such differentiated data were collected, Long received the support of 16% of the less privileged voters compared to 8% of the more affluent voters. As might be expected, a large majority of respondents backing Huey Long for President had voted for Franklin Roosevelt in 1932.¹⁸

The Reverend Charles Coughlin hosted a weekly national radio program in which he preached that bankers were the source of all evil, including international tensions, and that silver was "the key to world prosperity."¹⁹ The extent of Coughlin's support is indicated by his estimated weekly audience of thirty to forty-five million listeners by 1932. By 1934 Coughlin was receiving the largest volume of mail of any person in the United States, including the President.²⁰ His base of support, although always predominantly Catholic, varied over time. Analysis of the earliest available opinion polls indicates that, religious identification apart, in 1938 Coughlin drew support primarily from the less privileged and others who "were . . . discontented with their lot, with the economic state of the country, and with prospects for the future."²¹

Evidence from national surveys suggests that the leftward shift in public opinion during the 1930s was much more extensive than third-party voting or membership in radical organizations indicated. Although large leftist third parties existed only in Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin, three Gallup polls taken between December 1936 and January 1938 found that between 14 and 16% of those polled said they "would join," not merely vote for, a Farmer-Labor party if one were organized. Of those interviewees expressing an opinion in 1937, 21% voiced a readiness to join a new party.²² In a Roper poll taken in 1942 for *Fortune* magazine, 25% of the respondents agreed that "some form of Socialism would be a good thing . . . for the country as a whole," compared with 40% who said it would be a bad thing.²³ No other survey conducted during this time period explicitly inquired about socialism, but a 1936 Roper/*Fortune* poll found that a majority of respondents favored public owner-

18. See *id.* at 191-94.

19. See A. BRINKLEY, *supra* note 16, at 120.

20. See W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 100.

21. See S.M. LIPSET & E. RAAB, *supra* note 15, at 177. See also *id.* at 179, 185.

22. Percentages were calculated from polls reported in PUBLIC OPINION, 1935-1946, at 576-77 (H. Cantril ed. 1951).

23. See *id.* at 802.

ship of various utilities: 56% of those polled supported public ownership of electric lights, 55% called for such ownership of gas, 50% for telephones, and 49% for trolleys and buses.²⁴ A Gallup survey taken in 1937 indicated that 41% of the respondents supported government ownership of banks.²⁵

Other public opinion surveys revealed that the economic malaise of the 1930s produced sharp antagonism toward great wealth and corporate power.²⁶ Moreover, a clearly identifiable class-based division in attitudes emerged: the less affluent strata, measured by both socioeconomic status and occupation, perceived redistributionist policies, government ownership, and welfare policies more favorably than did the well-to-do.²⁷

The Great Depression produced a substantial change in the attitudes of many Americans toward the traditional economic system. Yet, although millions of Americans may have been ready for a new radical party, the 1930s produced neither a party nor a movement committed to socialism or social democracy in the United States.

II. THIRD PARTIES AND THE AMERICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The American electoral system itself played an important role in preventing the emergence of a third party. The United States differs from parliamentary countries in that its executive branch cannot be divided in a multi-party coalition. Instead, the United States' political system overwhelmingly focuses on

24. See *id.* at 694.

25. See S.M. LIPSET & W. SCHNEIDER, *THE CONFIDENCE GAP: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND GOVERNMENT IN THE PUBLIC MIND* 283 (1983).

26. In 1937 Ferdinand Lundberg posited that "[t]he United States is owned and dominated by a hierarchy of its sixty richest families." F. LUNDBERG, *AMERICA'S 60 FAMILIES* 3 (1937). A Roper/*Fortune* poll taken in early 1938 sought to determine the extent to which the American public accepted Lundberg's widely discussed point of view. Of those persons polled, 29% believed that "60 families control most of the economic life of this country," 10% believed this statement was partly true, and an additional 13.5% indicated "maybe not 60, but a very small number." *The Fortune Quarterly Survey: XII*, *FORTUNE*, Apr. 1938, at 99, 102, 104.

27. For an indication of public opinion in the late 1930s regarding the redistribution of wealth, by socioeconomic status and wealth, see *The Fortune Survey: XXII*, *FORTUNE*, June 1939, at 68; *The Fortune Quarterly Survey: X*, *FORTUNE*, Oct. 1937, at 108, 154. For attitudes during this period with respect to government responsibility for employment, by socioeconomic status and race, see *The Fortune Survey: XXII*, *FORTUNE*, June 1939, at 68; *The Fortune Survey*, *FORTUNE*, July 1935, at 66, 67. For a measure of public opinion in 1939 dealing with government provision of welfare, by socioeconomic status and race, see *The Fortune Survey: XXII*, *FORTUNE*, June 1939, at 68.

one winner capturing the Presidency in a national contest. Such a focus greatly strengthens a two-party system.²⁸ Similarly, the system of primary elections and the absence of party discipline in Congress enables individuals with sharply diverse views to run for and hold office under the same party label. These factors have produced two parties that are broad coalitions of heterogeneous, often conflicting groupings. The two major parties have repeatedly responded to or co-opted movements and tendencies expressive of discontent. Invariably, such reactions have sufficiently convinced extra-partisan protestors either that one of the major parties substantially represents their position or that the two major parties respond so dissimilarly to the issues that it makes a significant difference which nominee or party wins the election. Consequently, support of a third-party strategy has not been viewed as a realistic means of electing third-party nominees. Instead, it is seen as diluting support for the major-party candidate whose views are most compatible with those of the potential supporters of the third party, thereby aiding the election of the candidate they most oppose.

Thus, the impact of the American electoral system has been to undercut third parties. Significant third-party movements emerge in the United States when groups, interests, or factions believe that they are being ignored by both major parties—that neither party is “the lesser of two evils” or a more positive good. But after the dissidents have demonstrated the intensity of their feeling, one or both of the major-party coalitions generally respond sympathetically by advocating appropriate policies, by symbolically endorsing the movement, or often by nominating candidates who speak the language of the protest. For instance, in the 1890s the Democrats absorbed the growing Populist party by nominating near-Populist William Jennings Bryan for President and by drawing up a platform that included Populist demands and rhetoric.²⁹

The different histories of third parties in the 1930s in the United States and Canada demonstrate the importance of the

28. E.E. Schattschneider, the most sophisticated analyst of the factors sustaining the two-party system, stressed that “[t]he American two-party system is the direct consequence of the American election system.” E. SCHATTSCHNEIDER, *PARTY GOVERNMENT* 69 (1942). See also S.M. LIPSET, *THE FIRST NEW NATION: THE UNITED STATES IN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE* 286-317 (rev. ed. 1979); N. THOMAS, *SOCIALISM ON THE DEFENSIVE* 281 (1938).

29. See J. HICKS, *THE POPULIST REVOLT: A HISTORY OF THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE AND THE PEOPLE'S PARTY* 354, 358 (1961).

American electoral system in undermining such groups. Although Canada's social structure, particularly in the English-speaking parts, is similar to that of the United States, socialists made more headway in the United States than in Canada in the early decades of this century. The proportionately weaker Canadian socialist and labor party movements lacked national organization and splintered, until the 1930s, among a variety of small regionally based sects. They were able nonetheless to forge an electorally significant socialist party out of the discontent of the 1930s—the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which survives today as the New Democratic Party (NDP). This party's success was made possible in large part by Canada's parliamentary system, which permitted the CCF to build a national movement by concentrating its resources on elections in those parliamentary districts where socialists had strength. As a result, the CCF was not forced to wage a viable national campaign before becoming a significant third party in terms of parliamentary representation.³⁰

Although constitutional factors were an important impediment to the emergence of an American socialist or social-democratic party in the 1930s, such factors alone cannot account for the effect of the political system on the failure of American socialism during the Great Depression. Major-party coalitions must make conscious policy adjustments to hold or win the discontented. They must respond to or co-opt those who are not with them, and Franklin Roosevelt proved to be extraordinarily skilled at such tactics.

III. THIRD PARTIES AND A MASTER POLITICIAN

President Roosevelt worked consciously to incorporate all forms of protest into his New Deal coalition. He used two basic tactics. First, he responded in policy and rhetoric to the demands of the various outgroups. Second, he absorbed the leaders of these groups into his following.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

Franklin Roosevelt demonstrated his skill at co-opting the rhetoric and demands of the opposition the year before his 1936 reelection. Huey Long threatened to run on a third-party

30. See Lipset, *Radicalism in North America: A Comparative View of the Party System in Canada and the United States*, 14 *TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA* 19, 38 (1976).

Share-Our-Wealth ticket.³¹ This possibility worried the President and his campaign chairman, James Farley, because a "secret" public opinion poll conducted in 1935 for the Democratic National Committee suggested that Long might get "between 3,000,000 to 4,000,000 votes at the head of a third party."³² Roosevelt and Farley feared that if Long ran as a third-party candidate the President would lose a number of states.³³ The President was also concerned because progressive senators "like LaFollette, Cutting, Nye, etc. . . . [were] flirting with the idea of a third ticket," and as a result he believed that the 1936 election might witness both a "third Progressive Republican ticket [headed by Robert LaFollette] and a fourth 'Share-Our-Wealth' ticket."³⁴

To prevent a third party from emerging, and to win the support of more left-oriented people, Roosevelt shifted to the left in rhetoric and to some extent in policy, consciously seeking to "steal the thunder" of his populist critics.³⁵ In discussions concerning radical and populist anti-capitalist protest, the President stated that to save capitalism from its opponents he would have to "equalize the distribution of wealth," which might necessitate "throw[ing] to the wolves the forty-six men who are reported to have incomes in excess of one million dollars a year."³⁶ Moreover, Roosevelt responded to "the share-our-wealth clamor" by advancing tax reforms designed to stop "an unjust concentration of wealth and economic power."³⁷ Attacking "the perpetuation of great and undesirable concentration of control in a relatively few individuals over the employment and welfare of many, many others," he complained specifically about "the disturbing effects upon our national life that come from inheritance of wealth and power."³⁸ The President proposed, therefore, to raise income and dividend taxes, to enact a

31. See *supra* text accompanying notes 16-18.

32. J. FARLEY, *JIM FARLEY'S STORY: THE ROOSEVELT YEARS* 51 (1948).

33. See 1 H. ICKES, *THE SECRET DIARY OF HAROLD L. ICKES: THE FIRST THOUSAND DAYS, 1933-1936*, at 462 (1953); J. FARLEY, *BEHIND THE BALLOTS* 250 (1938).

34. Letter from Franklin Roosevelt to Edward House (Feb. 16, 1935), reprinted in 1 F.D.R., *HIS PERSONAL LETTERS, 1928-1945*, at 452-53 (E. Roosevelt ed. 1950). See also P. MANEY, "YOUNG BOB" LAFOLLETTE 162 (1978).

35. Early in 1935, President Roosevelt "actually used the phrase 'steal Long's thunder'" in a conversation with Raymond Moley and others. R. MOLEY, *AFTER SEVEN YEARS* 305 (1939).

36. See 3 A. SCHLESINGER JR., *THE AGE OF ROOSEVELT: THE POLITICS OF UPHEAVAL* 325-26, 328-29 (1960).

37. *Id.* at 328.

38. *Id.*

sharply graduated inheritance tax, and to use tax policy to discriminate against large corporations. Huey Long reacted by charging that the President was stealing his program and "copying [his] share-the-wealth speeches."³⁹

President Roosevelt also became more overtly supportive of trade unions, although he had not supported the most important piece of labor legislation, Senator Robert Wagner's labor relations bill, until shortly before its passage.⁴⁰ The bill "threw the weight of government behind the right of labor to bargain collectively, and compelled employers to accede peacefully to the unionization of their plants. It imposed no reciprocal obligations of any kind on unions."⁴¹

Raymond Moley, an organizer of President Roosevelt's "brain trust" who later defected from the administration, emphasized that the President, through these and other policies and statements, sought to identify himself with the objectives of the unemployed, minorities, and farmers, as well as "the growing membership of the C.I.O., Norman Thomas' vanishing army of orthodox Socialists, Republican progressives and Farmer-Laborites, Share-the-Wealthers, single-taxers, Sinclairites, Townsendites, [and] Coughlinites."⁴²

B. ABSORPTION OF LEFTIST LEADERS

Beyond a strategy of offering progressive policies in exchange for support from leftist and economically depressed constituencies, President Roosevelt also sought to recruit the leaders of protest and radical groups by convincing them that they were part of his coalition. He gave those who held public office access to federal patronage, particularly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York where strong state-wide third parties existed. This strategy had an impact: in 1937 when Philip LaFollette was the Progressive governor of Wisconsin, his executive secretary told Daniel Hoan, the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, that a national third party never would be launched while Roosevelt was "in the saddle," because Roosevelt had "put so many outstanding liberals 'on his payroll' that any 'third party movement would lack sufficient leadership.'"⁴³

39. *Id.* at 329.

40. W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 151.

41. *Id.*

42. R. MOLEY, *supra* note 35, at 351.

43. L. Schmidt, *The Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation: The Study of a "United Front" Movement Among Wisconsin Liberals, 1934-1941*, at 375 (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1954).

The President gave these leaders strong indications that he was on their side and that his conscious, ultimate goal was to transform the Democratic party into an ideologically coherent progressive party in which they could hope to play a leading role, in some cases possibly by succeeding him.⁴⁴ He even, on rare occasions, implied that to secure ideological realignment, he might go the third-party route, following in the footsteps of his cousin, Theodore Roosevelt. In addition, Franklin Roosevelt did not hesitate to support electorally powerful non-Democrats, including Minnesota Governor Floyd Olson, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and Nebraska Senator George Norris, as well as Wisconsin Governor Philip LaFollette and his brother, Senator Robert LaFollette Jr.⁴⁵

The President used similar tactics to recruit leaders of the labor movement. His primary appeal to them was his administration's support of union organization drives. Equally important, particularly for the more politicized progressive and socialist sectors, were the President's welfare-state economic planning measures, designed to reduce unemployment, raise wages, reduce working hours, and support the aged and the unemployed. Beyond these measures, however, Roosevelt also effectively employed the tactics of co-optation, and status and power recognition. He invited labor leaders to meet with him and exhibited a greater willingness than any previous President to speak at labor meetings. He "always sent elaborate greetings to every CIO and AFL convention, and often to the conventions of large constituent unions."⁴⁶ During the 1938 mid-term election campaign, President Roosevelt went out of his way to praise Michigan Governor Frank Murphy's pro-union conduct during "the sit-down crisis."⁴⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt's frequent speeches at union conventions further aided the President's cause.⁴⁸

Roosevelt's impact on union leaders, even early in his Presidency, is evidenced by a speech given by Van Bittner, a miners union leader, at a union convention in the mid-1930s:

I, too, remember those dreary days prior to 1933. I was in Washing-

44. See P. MANEY, *supra* note 34, at 190; R. TUGWELL, *THE DEMOCRATIC ROOSEVELT* 409-15 (1957).

45. See, e.g., G. MAYER, *THE POLITICAL CAREER OF FLOYD B. OLSON* 240-41 (1951).

46. W. Riker, *The CIO in Politics, 1936-1946*, at 35 (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Government, Harvard University, 1948).

47. See McSeveney, *The Michigan Gubernatorial Campaign of 1938*, 45 *MICH. HIST.* 97, 115 (1961).

48. See W. Riker, *supra* note 46, at 35.

ton when Harding was President, I was there when Coolidge was President, I was there when Hoover was President, begging like a blind man with a tin cup for the Government to do something to help labor. And I never heard the tinkle of a single coin in that cup during those years.

Early in 1933 I visited the White House with . . . Philip Murray, and our old friend John Lewis, and Tom Kennedy At that time our union did not have enough members to pay the officers and during the course of that interview with the President he said this, "Boys, go home and have a good night's sleep because if I don't do anything else during my administration as President of the United States I am going to give the miners an opportunity to organize in the United Mine Workers of America."

Well, for a week I just was in sort of a daze

[C]ertainly after that I was for the President, and nothing he has done since would cause me to be against him.⁴⁹

Other reports further indicate Roosevelt's influence on union leaders. A semiofficial biography of Sidney Hillman, an important leader of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.), and president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, boasted about his "intimacy" with the President, claiming that he "was numbered among the dozen or so of Americans who were the President's most trusted political friends."⁵⁰ United Mine Workers and C.I.O. president John L. Lewis, speaking to his biographer in 1940 after a long period of quarreling with Roosevelt, invidiously described the President's tactics of co-opting C.I.O. leaders, which undermined Lewis's ability to organize labor opposition:

He has been carefully selecting my key lieutenants and appointing them to honorary posts in various of his multitudinous, grandiose commissions. He has his lackeys fawning upon and wining and dining many of my people. At proper intervals he has unveiled to them the glory of admission to the White House and permitted them to bask in his presence. . . .

In a quiet, confidential way he approaches one of my lieutenants, weans his loyalty away, overpowers him with the dazzling glory of the White House, and appoints him to a federal post under such circumstances that his prime loyalty shall be to the President and only a secondary, residual one to the working-class movement from which he came⁵¹

The active role Roosevelt took in creating the American Labor Party (A.L.P.) in New York evidences his conscious concern with winning socialist unionists for his coalition. New York, particularly New York City, had a long history of electorally strong radical movements: hundreds of thousands

49. *Id.* at 16-17.

50. M. JOSEPHSON, SIDNEY HILLMAN: STATESMAN OF AMERICAN LABOR 453-54 (1952).

51. S. ALINSKY, JOHN L. LEWIS 182-84 (1949).

of New Yorkers regularly voted for leftist third-party candidates.⁵² In an effort to win over these votes, President Roosevelt, at the urging of Sidney Hillman, Fiorello LaGuardia, and Eleanor Roosevelt, helped to initiate a state-wide third party, the A.L.P. This newly created party was to nominate Roosevelt and other New Deal Democrats on its own separate ballot line, thus permitting "Socialists and others on the left to vote for Democratic candidates on a non-Democratic slate."⁵³ James Farley and Edward Flynn, the Democratic party leaders, initially opposed this proposal, worrying that they would be creating the basis for a rival party. Roosevelt, however, told Farley to order Democratic party clubs to help gather the petitions necessary to put the new party on the ballot.⁵⁴

The payoff for these efforts can be seen in the resignations from the Socialist party of various union officials. The A.L.P. refused to allow the Socialists to affiliate as a unit, a condition set by the Socialist party in 1924 for supporting a labor or farmer-labor party. Hence, Roosevelt supporters, such as Sidney Hillman and David Dubinsky, left the Socialist party and actively recruited radicals for Roosevelt. Hillman described his rationale at a 1936 union meeting:

52. W. MOSCOW, *POLITICS IN THE EMPIRE STATE* 105 (1948).

53. I. BERNSTEIN, *supra* note 13, at 449. *See also* J. Bakunin, *The Role of Socialists in the Formation of the American Labor Party* 5-6 (M.A. thesis, Department of History, City College of New York, 1965); R. Carter, *Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936-1954*, at 16-17 (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Syracuse University, 1965); W. Stewart, *A Political History of the American Labor Party* 3-5 (M.A. thesis, Department of Political Science, American University, 1959).

54. *See* W. MOSCOW, *supra* note 52, at 105; D. SAPOSS, *COMMUNISM IN AMERICAN POLITICS* 70 (1960); R. Carter, *supra* note 53, at 11-14. Edward Flynn has described the origin of the American Labor Party as follows:

President Roosevelt with Jim Farley and myself, brought the American Labor Party into being. It was entirely Roosevelt's suggestion. Farley and I never believed in it very much, but he felt at the time—and it is true today—that there were many people who believed in what Roosevelt stood for but who, for some reason or other . . . would not join the Democratic Party. If another party were created, you could bring these people into it actively. That was really why it was created. . . .

Sidney Hillman and David Dubinsky played a great part in it and we couldn't have formed the party without them. They were the nucleus. These and other people were names but the voting strength was from the unions that were controlled by Dubinsky and Hillman.

. . . At that time both of those unions were rather leftist—more so than the Democratic Party. There again it would attract a great many more who would . . . vote for Roosevelt who might not have voted at all.

E. Flynn, *The Reminiscences of Edward J. Flynn* (interviewed by Owen Bombard, Mar. 1950, Oral History Project, Butler Library, Columbia University), *quoted in* R. Carter, *supra* note 53, at 13-14.

We have had a policy, which was not to endorse either of the two political parties, and that if we took a position it should be along Socialist lines. The position of our organization is known: that we are for a labor party. We are today bound . . . to help bring about a labor or farmer-labor party—what is commonly known as independent political action.

But [since Roosevelt took office in 1933,] things have happened *We have participated in making the labor policy of this Administration.*

We know that the defeat of the Roosevelt Administration means no labor legislation for decades to come. . . . I don't know whether legislation would put all the unemployed back to work, but we do know in our industry that the reduction in hours took in 50,000 . . . and with improvement in business and farm income we would have 175,000 in our industry. A change in the Administration raises a definite question whether the Amalgamated would have to fight completely on its own and not get the support which it enjoyed under the NRA [National Recovery Administration].⁵⁵

David Dubinsky, head of the International Ladies Garment Workers, resigned from the Socialist party early in 1936 after twenty-five years of membership.⁵⁶ He explained this emotionally difficult decision as follows:

Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the first truly progressive President we have had in this generation. The NRA . . . has . . . given positive and concrete help to the labor movement . . . [.] We must bear in mind that all enemies of labor are now combining against the New Deal, against FDR, and that means against labor . . . [.] An FDR defeat, therefore, must be avoided at all costs.⁵⁷

1. *Eleanor Roosevelt's Role in Co-Opting the Left*

Eleanor Roosevelt played a crucial role in President Roosevelt's efforts to secure the backing of the Left and other discontented elements of American society. With his encouragement, she became the President's emissary to these groups. She spent time with black organizations, publicly supported their causes, and invited their leaders to the White House.⁵⁸ She exhibited concern for the plight of persecuted Jews in Europe and headed a committee to settle Jewish children in Palestine.⁵⁹ She willingly spoke to and helped organizations such as the Workers Alliance and youth and student groups "in which the Communists were active" and often rallied to their

55. M. JOSEPHSON, *supra* note 50, at 397 (emphasis added).

56. William Leuchtenburg notes that "[t]he defection of Socialist union leaders, and the immense appeal of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, all but destroyed the Socialist party." W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 188.

57. M. DANISH, *THE WORLD OF DAVID DUBINSKY* 94 (1957).

58. See J. LASH, *ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: A FRIEND'S MEMOIR* 171-72 (1964).

59. See *id.* at 80-81, 83.

defense.⁶⁰ According to one source, when friends "talked to her about the need for a third party, she would gently correct them: 'What we need is not a third party but a new party.' She would urge them to . . . help reform and transform the Democrats."⁶¹

During the 1936 election campaign, Democratic party chairperson Ed Flynn deeply involved Eleanor Roosevelt because he was "keenly aware of [her] strength and popularity with the New Deal sections of the Roosevelt coalition—women, young people, Negroes, labor, and the Independents."⁶² For instance, although the President occasionally acted in ways that angered blacks,⁶³ Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) remained committed to the President, largely, according to his own report, because of Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement in the cause.⁶⁴

C. PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S 1936 CAMPAIGN

Franklin Roosevelt ran his 1936 presidential campaign as a progressive coalition, not as a Democratic party activity. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has described Roosevelt's tactics as follows:

As the campaign developed, the Democratic party seemed more and more submerged in the New Deal coalition. The most active campaigners in addition to Roosevelt—Ickes, Wallace, Hugh Johnson—were men identified with the New Deal, not with the professional Democratic organization. Loyalty to the cause superseded loyalty to the party as the criterion for administration support. In Minnesota, the Democratic ticket thus withdrew in favor of the Farmer-Labor ticket; in Nebraska, Roosevelt ignored the Democratic candidate and endorsed George Norris; in Wisconsin, the New Deal worked with the Progressives; in Massachusetts, the administration declined to back James M. Curley, the

60. See J. LASH, *ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN* 595 (1971).

61. J. LASH, *supra* note 58, at 171.

62. *Id.*

63. The discontent among black leaders resulting from the President's restraint in supporting a federal anti-lynching bill has been described as follows:

Negro leaders also rebuked Roosevelt for the failure of New Deal Congresses to enact civil rights legislation. After a recrudescence of lynching in 1933, the N.A.A.C.P. drafted a federal antilynching bill, which was introduced in 1934 by Senators Costigan and Wagner. New lynchings in that year intensified the plea for federal action. . . . The President denounced lynching and was willing, after some urging, to support a vote on an antilynching measure, so long as it did not tie up other reform legislation. But he refused to make it "must" legislation, for, if he did, Southern committee chairmen might kill every economic proposal he asked them to advance. Without the President's help, supporters of the bill failed to break a filibuster of southern Democrats abetted by Senator Borah.

W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 186. See also F. FREIDEL, *F.D.R. AND THE SOUTH* 82-90 (1965).

64. See W. WHITE, *A MAN CALLED WHITE* 168-69 (1948).

Democratic candidate for senator. It was evident that the basis of the campaign would be the mobilization *beyond* the Democratic party of all the elements in the New Deal coalition—liberals, labor, farmers, women, minorities. To do this required the elaborate structure of subsidiary organizations and committees which Roosevelt began urging on Farley as early as January 1936.⁶⁵

These subsidiary committees promoted by President Roosevelt included Labor's Non-Partisan League and the Progressive National Committee, headed by Senator Robert LaFollette Jr., which counted Farmer-Labor Governor Elmer Benson of Minnesota, Independent Progressive Senator George Norris of Nebraska, radical Farmer-Labor Progressive Congressman Thomas Amlie of Wisconsin, Washington Commonwealth Senator Lewis Schwellenbach, and A.L.P. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York City among its members. Separate groups also organized women and blacks.⁶⁶

Although Huey Long's assassination in September 1935 ended the direct challenge of the Share-Our-Wealth plan, President Roosevelt continued his co-opting tactics throughout his 1936 reelection campaign. The progressive theme of the campaign, its appeal to populist anti-elitist, anti-business sentiment, was summed up in Roosevelt's last major campaign speech:

We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace—business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering.

They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob.

Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate of me—and I welcome their hatred.

I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces met their master.⁶⁷

D. PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S SECOND TERM

Roosevelt was reelected by an overwhelming majority in 1936—he carried every state except Maine and Vermont. Yet his second term proved much less innovative than his first. This was due, in part, to several Supreme Court decisions dur-

65. A. SCHLESINGER JR., *supra* note 36, at 592.

66. *See id.* at 592-600.

67. R. MOLEY, *supra* note 35, at 351-52.

ing the 1936 Term striking various New Deal laws as unconstitutional and the President's subsequent inability to mobilize popular protest against the Court. Reacting to an apparent shift in the public mood to the right, particularly from 1938 on, Roosevelt substantially reduced his reform efforts. The change, however, did not lead to a loss of leftist support. The Communist party, as a result of its Popular Front policy,⁶⁸ experienced increasing membership, control of large front groups, power in the labor movement, and considerable strength in various leftist political groups. The Communists strongly and uncritically backed the President because of his anti-fascist, collective-security foreign policy. In addition, the Communists actively opposed efforts in a number of states to create independent, radical anti-Roosevelt political campaigns.⁶⁹

1. *Progressive Party Failures*

On the assumption that the 1937-38 recession had undermined Roosevelt's prestige, Wisconsin Governor Philip LaFollette attempted in 1938 to create a new third party, the National Progressives of America. The President responded with a renewed effort to co-opt such opposition. He told Harold Ickes in May 1938 that he hoped to handle the problem by "a little confidential . . . talking with [Philip's brother, Wisconsin Senator] Bob La Follette."⁷⁰ As recorded by Ickes in his diary:

What he indicated that he would say to La Follette was that their Progressive movement was all right if they didn't get too far out.

He has it in mind, as 1940 approaches, to make overtures to the La Follettes and the Farmer-Labor group in Minnesota. He would be willing to make a deal with the La Follettes as the result of which Bob La Follette could go into the next Cabinet as Secretary of State. . . . [T]hen Phil could go into the Senate and this would take care of both of them. . . .

[The President further indicated that] [s]omething also could be done to bring in the Farmer-Labor group.⁷¹

The mid-term elections in November 1938, however, made it unnecessary for President Roosevelt to react to a possible elec-

68. Prior to 1935 the Communists had engaged in a policy of independent political action. From 1935 on, however, under the slogan of the Popular Front, the Communist policy underwent a transformation. The Communists made efforts to work "under the New Deal umbrella in both the Democratic party and the Washington bureaucracy." Derber, *The New Deal and Labor*, in *THE NEW DEAL: THE NATIONAL LEVEL* 128 (J. Braeman, R. Brenner & D. Brody eds. 1975).

69. See H. KLEHR, *supra* note 12, at ch. 12.

70. 2 H. ICKES, *THE SECRET DIARY OF HAROLD L. ICKES: THE INSIDE STRUGGLE, 1936-1939*, at 395 (1954).

71. *Id.*

toral threat from the Left. Both the Wisconsin Progressive party and the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party suffered crushing defeats, losing most of their congressional seats, and Republicans badly defeated both Philip LaFollette and Elmer Benson in their gubernatorial reelection campaigns.⁷² Although unhappy about the Republicans gaining eighty-one seats in the House, eight seats in the Senate, and thirteen governorships, the President wrote a postelection letter to his friend, Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels, in which he noted that some good things had occurred: "We have on the positive side eliminated Phil LaFollette and the Farmer-Labor people in the Northwest as a standing Third Party threat."⁷³

Despite the defeats, however, President Roosevelt made an effort to win maximum support for his third-term race and to integrate non-Democratic reformers into the party. In June 1939 Roosevelt told Henry Wallace and Harold Ickes of his desire to work out an alliance between Wisconsin Progressives and Democrats whereby the Democrats would support Progressive Bob LaFollette for reelection as Senator and the Progressives would back a Democratic gubernatorial candidate with progressive views. Roosevelt thought that "in this way Wisconsin [could] be won" for the Democratic presidential ticket.⁷⁴ In Minnesota, the Democratic National Committee, with Roosevelt's backing, worked to link the weakened Farmer-Labor party with the Democrats, hoping that the two parties could eventually be merged.⁷⁵

2. Communist and Fellow-traveler Support

To further quell dissension, the President met twice in early 1939 in the White House with Howard Costigan, head of the then Communist-dominated Washington Commonwealth Federation. Costigan, who had been actively pressing for Roosevelt's third term, together with California Governor Culbert Olson, the former chairperson of the EPIC movement, planned a meeting in Salt Lake City to set up an eleven-state Western Commonwealth Federation to unite the Left and New

72. See W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 271.

73. Letter from Franklin Roosevelt to Josephus Daniels (Nov. 14, 1938), reprinted in 2 F.D.R.: HIS PERSONAL LETTERS 1928-1945, at 827 (E. Roosevelt ed. 1950) (emphasis added).

74. 2 H. ICKES, *supra* note 70, at 654.

75. See 1 J. Haynes, *Liberals, Communists, and the Popular Front in Minnesota: The Struggle to Control the Political Direction of the Labor Movement and Organized Liberalism, 1936-1950*, at 107, 109-11, 177-79 (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Minnesota, 1978).

Deal activists. According to a report by Drew Pearson and Robert Allen, the President encouraged the "young radical" and "assured him of full cooperation."⁷⁶ He told Costigan that he would see to it that the administration was prominently represented at the Salt Lake conference.⁷⁷

Between early 1936 and the Stalin-Hitler pact in the summer of 1939, and again immediately following the June 22, 1941, invasion of the Soviet Union, the Communists and their fellow-travelers played an important role in Roosevelt's efforts to co-opt the Left. The Communists saw Roosevelt and the New Deal as the American form of the Popular Front, the alliance of all "progressive" anti-fascist forces that they worked for in all democratic countries, and pressed every group they could influence to back him.⁷⁸ Because of their links to the Russian Revolution and the Third International and their ultra-leftist policies prior to the 1936 shift to the Popular Front strategy, Communists were perceived by many as the extreme left of radicalism. This made it easier for Socialists and other non-

76. See A. Acena, *supra* note 5, at 285. Material in Pearson and Allen's column relating to Costigan's meeting with President Roosevelt was omitted from the version printed in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. See *id.* at 286 for a discussion of the possible reasons for this omission.

77. *Id.*

78. In a discussion of the Communist party's support of President Roosevelt and the New Deal during the period from 1936 to 1939, Maurice Isserman notes:

[B]y a happy coincidence for the Communists, the 1935 Congress of the Communist International made it legitimate for the American [Communist party] to moderate its political position at about the same time that Franklin Roosevelt was moving to the left to build popular support for the New Deal. The Communists began to identify themselves as part of the political coalition that supported the New Deal's domestic programs, while enthusiastically welcoming every move by the Roosevelt Administration that could be interpreted as favoring collective international security. The Communists argued that their own political program corresponded to Roosevelt's true intentions, which, they said, were frustrated by a reactionary Supreme Court, Congress, and press. Supporting both the Soviet Union and the New Deal, the Communists could continue to think of themselves as revolutionaries even as they immersed themselves in reform-oriented day-to-day politics.

M. ISSERMAN, *WHICH SIDE WERE YOU ON?* 3-4 (1982). Such day-to-day politics included:

support [for] reactionaries under certain conditions, as was the case in [the Communist party's] endorsement of Mayor Hague of Jersey City. The [1943] endorsement was given on the ground that the Hague machine supported Roosevelt, and also in order to head off a labor revolt that was threatening to develop into a third party movement [capable of splitting] Roosevelt's support in the State.

Moore, *The Communist Party of the USA: An Analysis of a Social Movement*, 39 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 31, 41 (1945).

Communist radicals and progressives to back Roosevelt. If the "Left," as the Communists and their allies were usually described by the media and anti-Communist investigative agencies, could support Roosevelt, oppose the formation of a third party, and favor a collective-security foreign policy, then others could also accept such policies without fear of betraying a radical or progressive position. Within both the labor and youth movements, the Communists provided an impetus for actual or potential radical groups to accept the liberal New Deal position as the best obtainable in this period.

3. *Limits on Roosevelt's Coalition Tactics*

There were limits, of course, to how far President Roosevelt would go to extend or preserve his coalition. John L. Lewis had increasingly criticized the administration during its second term, in general for not backing the C.I.O. and other unions in different strike situations and in particular for not giving unions representation in the top rungs of government.⁷⁹ To appease the labor and liberal critics who considered President Roosevelt's second term too conservative, Lewis suggested to the President in January 1940 that he be named as the vice-presidential candidate on the President's third-term ticket. According to an account by Francis Perkins, Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, Lewis told the President that "[a] strong labor man would insure full support, not only of all the labor people but of all the liberals."⁸⁰ For some months after President Roosevelt's promise to consider the suggestion, Lewis warned that he would refuse to reveal to Secretary Perkins whether he would support the administration on various bills until the President had "come to some conclusions" about "some suggestions" he had made to him earlier. Roosevelt, of course, never did agree to Lewis's "suggestion."⁸¹

Roosevelt's efforts to enlarge and maintain his coalition were not limited to his dealings with those to his political left. A major part of his electoral and congressional support came from southern whites and Catholics. Thus, although Roosevelt was probably more open to sympathetic discussions with black leaders and more supportive of their requests than previous Presidents, he refused to press for measures, such as an anti-

79. See M. JOSEPHSON, *supra* note 50, at 475.

80. F. PERKINS, *THE ROOSEVELT I* KNEW 127 (1946).

81. See *id.*

lynching bill, likely to alienate white southerners.⁸²

Similarly, Roosevelt's dependence on Catholic support made him unresponsive to the Left's concerns during the Spanish Civil War. Although the Left urged support of the Loyalist cause, Roosevelt insisted on maintaining an embargo on the supply of arms to both sides, even though the embargo effectively inhibited only the Loyalists because Franco's forces had other sources of supply. Roosevelt's Spanish policy was undoubtedly influenced by his awareness that the Catholic part of his coalition was pro-Franco:

Pro-Loyalist intellectuals were a negligible political force compared to the large bloc of pro-Franco Catholics. . . . [T]he Catholic press and hierarchy were uniformly pro-Franco, and polls revealed that the proportion of Catholics who backed Franco was more than four times as great as the proportion of Protestants. . . . Roosevelt told [Harold Ickes] that to raise the embargo "would mean the loss of every Catholic vote next fall"⁸³

IV. CONCLUSION

The Great Depression had a major long-term impact on American society and politics. The welfare-planning state became a national commitment and the bases of support of the major parties were realigned. The Democrats became the party of the workers and the minorities, particularly the blacks, the Jews, and the Catholics. Trade union members, those in the C.I.O. slightly more than those in the A.F.L., also voted overwhelmingly for the Democrats. Conversely, those segments of the business elite that previously backed the Democrats shifted their support to the Republicans. Contributions from trade unions, however, provided the Democrats with a new financial base that replaced the lost business and bank support.⁸⁴ Samuel Lubell, who conducted in-depth interviews of many voters

82. See *supra* note 63. Walter White, former president of the NAACP, reported that President Roosevelt expressly admitted this policy to him in a private discussion at the White House. Roosevelt told White "I did not choose the tools with which I must work." F. FREIDEL, *supra* note 63, at 86; W. WHITE, *supra* note 64, at 169. Nevertheless, Mr. White, according to his own account, remained committed to the President for years to come, primarily because of Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement in the cause. See F. FREIDEL, *supra* note 63, at 71-103; W. WHITE, *supra* note 64, at 168-69.

83. W. LEUCHTENBURG, *supra* note 4, at 224 (footnote omitted).

84. See, e.g., W. BURNHAM, *CRITICAL ELECTIONS AND THE MAINSPRINGS OF AMERICAN POLITICS* (1970); A. CAMPBELL, P. CONVERSE, W. MILLER & D. STOKES, *THE AMERICAN VOTER* 153-60, 534-36 (1960); E. LADD JR. & C. HADLEY, *TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM: POLITICAL COALITIONS FROM THE NEW DEAL TO THE 1970s* 31-87 (1975); J. SUNDQUIST, *DYNAMICS OF THE PARTY SYSTEM* 183-217 (1973); Ogburn & Hill, *Income Classes and the Roosevelt Vote in*

in 1940, concluded that the support for Roosevelt and his programs constituted "a class-conscious vote for the first time in American history The New Deal appears to have accomplished what the Socialists, the I.W.W. [Industrial Workers of the World] and the Communists never could approach. It has drawn a class line across the face of American politics."⁸⁵

Although party divisions came to be more class-based, efforts to build a national left-wing third party clearly failed. By the end of the decade, the Socialist and Communist parties received far fewer votes than in 1932, despite the growth in the Communist party's membership. The absence of protest or popular support cannot explain the failure of third-party efforts. The mass demonstrations and organization of the unemployed, the aggressive tactics and radical views expressed by major farm groups, the widespread militancy and disdain for private property exhibited by large groups of workers, the leftist views expressed by large minorities in the opinion surveys, the strong electoral support given to leftist third parties and organized factions within the major parties in New York, Washington, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, and California, and the growth of class divisions and consciousness all attest to the vigor and extent of the anti-capitalist feeling resulting from the Great Depression. This economic crisis presented American radicals with their greatest opportunity in the twentieth century to build a third party. The formation of such a party in Canada, where socialist and labor movements had been weaker prior to the 1930s, demonstrates that under other political conditions discontent could have been used for such purposes. As noted previously, the failure of American radicals and third-party advocates can be explained in part by the unique attributes of the American electoral system. Inherent in the American focus on the direct election of the President are factors that sustain the two-party system. A parliamentary system, in contrast, encourages groups with regional or occupational strength to seek separate representation.

But the fortuitous circumstances that brought Franklin Roosevelt, a brilliant master politician, to the White House from 1933 on, and the conscious attempts on the part of Roosevelt and his colleagues to incorporate all forms of protest

1932, 50 POL. SCI. Q. 186 (1935); Snively, *A Reinterpretation of the New Deal Realignment*, 35 PUB. OP. Q. 621 (1971-72).

85. Lubell, *Post-Mortem: Who Elected Roosevelt?*, SAT. EVE. POST, Jan. 25, 1941, at 9. See also S. LUBELL, *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS* 55-68 (3d ed. 1965).

in the New Deal coalition, also contributed to the failure of the third-party movement. Roosevelt responded both in policy and rhetoric to various outgroups and co-opted their leaders, gathering them into his following. He met the demands of the discontented by aiding the unemployed, promoting legislation and administrative policies supportive of labor organization, designing programs to increase farm prices and to lift the income floor of workers, developing various social security and welfare programs, and attacking oratorically the power and income of the wealthy and the large corporations and banks. Moreover, Roosevelt opened the White House to the leaders, sometimes down to the second echelon, of diverse protest groups, including some dominated by Communists. People as varied as Walter White, Upton Sinclair, Floyd Olson, Robert LaFollette Jr., Tom Amlie, Norman Thomas, David Dubinsky, Sidney Hillman, John L. Lewis, William Green, and innumerable others in the labor and leftist movements visited the White House to talk with the President. The famed Roosevelt charm, the sense of aristocratic status, proved effective with most.

Norman Thomas, one of the few leftist leaders whom the President could not recruit, noted that in discussions with radicals, Roosevelt placed himself on the left, in favor of the ultimate achievement of the reform that most concerned his visitor. Thomas described a 1935 visit to the White House on behalf of southern sharecroppers as follows:

[Roosevelt] really handled interviews his own way. He tried to keep the conversation in his own hands. He did it rather charmingly And so it was this time. He began to tell me about his wrath about some chamber of commerce at some meeting

[And Roosevelt stressed to me:] "I know the South and there is arising a new generation of leaders in the South and we've got to be patient."⁸⁶

The President was still trying nine years later. In 1944 he replied to a telegram of congratulations from Thomas, who had run against him for the fourth time, saying: "I was amused during the campaign to think that now I am very far to the left of you. Do come to see me one of these days."⁸⁷

The President recognized that the long-range interests of his coalition and the Democratic party were best served by encouraging radical groups, whether inside or outside the party, to feel as though they were part of his political entourage. Thus, he showed a willingness to endorse local and statewide

86. See F. FREIDEL, *supra* note 63, at 65-66 (quoting Norman Thomas).

87. See E. ROBINSON, *THE ROOSEVELT LEADERSHIP 1933-1945*, at 341 (1955).

third-party or independent candidates and to give them a share of the federal patronage in their areas. In return, they were expected to support the President's reelection and to help him in other situations. Time and again between 1935 and 1940, meetings to lay the basis for a national third party went awry because those involved recognized that the bulk of their constituencies favored reelecting the President. And in the last analysis, most of the radical, labor, and minority group leaders supported the President as well. Certainly these leaders objected to particular Roosevelt policies, to his compromises with conservatives, or to his refusals to back their group or organization in some major conflict. Nevertheless, they invariably concluded that a government in which they could play a part, which had shown some responsiveness to their concerns, which was open to their suggestions, and which acknowledged their importance was far preferable to its more conservative alternative with strong links to the business community.

Franklin Roosevelt, aided by his wife Eleanor and bolstered by the support of the Communists, clearly deserves a considerable amount of credit or blame for defusing the discontent of the Great Depression. In many ways, the conclusions of various New Left revisionist historians are correct; the ultimate long-range impact of the Roosevelt Presidency was a conservative one. He helped preserve the basic integrity and legitimacy of American capitalism by his willingness to transform it by, as he once put it, making major changes that avoided a threat to the system itself. Yet, as John Garraty has emphasized, "today's radicals" fail to understand the sense of participation in a great movement for social change that Roosevelt provided to the less privileged. "[T]he blacks, the poor, and the unemployed voted overwhelmingly for Roosevelt . . . not because, as the modern radicals would have it, they were 'seduced' by his 'rhetoric.' New Deal efforts, however incompletely successful, gave the victims of the depression a sense of being part of a massive national struggle . . ." ⁸⁸ Regardless of how one evaluates the achievements of the New Deal, it would seem possible to agree with the thrust of Norman Thomas's one-word answer to the question of why a significant socialist party did not emerge in the 1930s: "Roosevelt." ⁸⁹

88. Garraty, *Radicalism in the Great Depression*, in *ESSAYS ON RADICALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA* 81, 113-14 (L. Blair ed. 1972).

89. D. SHANNON, *THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF AMERICA* 248 (1967) (quoting *The Reminiscences of Norman Thomas*, pt. I, 65 (Columbia University Oral History Project, Columbia University Library)).

Still, it must be noted that the economic growth and high levels of social mobility in the post-war era gradually reduced the impetus to class-based politics and trade unionism in the United States stimulated by the 1930s. Studies of elections reveal that the correlation between class and party that grew in the depression decade has been curtailed sharply in recent years.⁹⁰ At least as significant is the steady drop in the proportion of the nonagricultural labor force belonging to trade unions from close to 33% in the 1950s to 15% in 1983.⁹¹

These developments suggest that the social forces that undermine class-conscious politics in the United States, although weakened in the 1930s, revived in the post-war decades. Hence, it may be argued that even if a socialist movement comparable to that of Canada had emerged during the 1930s, it would have lost much of its strength in more recent times. National opinion surveys taken in 1976 and 1981 reinforce this conclusion: the percentage of Americans favoring socialism in those years stood at 10-12%, compared with 25% in 1942. In addition, over 90% of all Americans typically endorse free enterprise.⁹² The socialist movement in Canada is also experiencing a decline. The social-democratic New Democratic Party lost control of its hold on the government of the three provinces, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, which it had controlled, and at present its standing in national polls has fallen to 15%.

In 1906, Werner Sombart queried: "Why is there no socialism in the United States?"⁹³ This conundrum, which has puzzled students of comparative politics and frustrated radicals, still faces us. Although primary responsibility must be placed on basic differences in structures and values between America and other industrialized countries, it remains true that socialists missed their greatest opportunity to build a party during the 1930s in part because of the way Franklin Roosevelt dealt with efforts to mobilize discontent.

90. See S.M. LIPSET, *supra* note 1, at 504-05.

91. See *The De-unionisation of America*, THE ECONOMIST, October 29, 1983, at 71.

92. See S.M. LIPSET & W. SCHNEIDER, *supra* note 24, at 282.

93. W. SOMBART, WARUM GIBT ES IN DEN VEREINIGTEN STAATEN KEINEN SOZIALISMUS? (1906).