

CRITICS OF THE NEW DEAL

American Liberty League

The A.L.L. was the most important conservative group to emerge in opposition to the New Deal. It was founded in 1934 by a group of businessmen—mostly Democrats who ironically had supported FDR in 1932 including former Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith.

President of the A.L.L. from 1934-1938, Jouett Shouse, wrote the following to explain the reason for its existence:

“The prevention of governmental encroachments upon the rights of citizens was one of the principal reasons for the division of the Federal Government into the legislative, judicial and executive branches. Where one man, or one bureau, is lawmaker, prosecuting attorney, judge, jury, and sheriff, there is no protection for the citizen....”

The American Liberty League believes that Congress, having been elected to represent the people, should not shirk its task by delegating authority to bureaus to promulgate arbitrary regulations having the force of laws. Likewise, the League believes that Congress should not attempt to delegate judicial power to executive bureaus. The courts of the nation and not government bureaus should pass upon questions of civil justice.”

Shouse summarized some of the New Deal performances in a radio address in 1936:

“...The New Deal has built up a huge bureaucracy which has shown no regard for the Constitutional rights and liberties of our citizens....”

The New Deal has spent huge sums upon public works, despite grave doubts as to the desirability or usefulness of the projects....”

The New Deal has harassed American business and has entered into competition in almost every possible way with private industry....”

The New Deal has misused the Federal taxing power in an effort to promote visionary schemes for the redistribution of wealth.

The New Deal has imposed taxes heavier than were ever before placed upon the nation in time of peace and by reckless borrowing has saddled huge obligations upon generations yet unborn.

The New Deal has led the nation far along the road toward national bankruptcy and has increased the national debt to unprecedented size....”

The New Deal, in the words of Mr. Roosevelt himself, has set up "new instruments of public power," admittedly dangerous in the hands of men who might misuse that power.

In a word, the New Deal has sought to destroy the American system of government composed of three coordinate branches and to upset the dual sovereignty as between state and nation which the Constitution provides. ...”

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Henry Ford

Henry Ford, pioneering automaker and founder of the Ford Motor Company, was perhaps the most famous American businessman of his time. A self-made man with little formal schooling, he occasionally wrote newspaper and magazine articles expounding his views on American social problems. The following are excerpts from two such editorials.

"I do not believe in routine charity. I think it shameful thing that any man should have to stoop to take it, or give it. I do not include human helpfulness under the name of charity. My quarrel with charity is that it is neither helpful nor human.... What we call charity is a modern substitute for being personally involved in the work of helping others in difficulty. True charity is a much more costly effort than money giving. ..."

"... there is ... another way, ..., so much better than the very best charitable endeavor that it simply forbids us to be satisfied with anything less. That is the way of Self-Help. ..."

If it is right and proper to help people to become wise managers of their own affairs in good times, it cannot be wrong to pursue the same object in dull times. In dependence through self-dependence is a method which must commend itself when understood.

Methods of self-help are numerous and great numbers of people have made the stimulating discovery that they need not depend on employers to find work for them – they can find work for themselves. ...

... it is fundamental law that no one is hurt by self-help."

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Herbert Hoover

Elected in 1928, Herbert Hoover was president of the United States during the first years of the Great Depression. His popularity suffered as economic conditions worsened in the early 1930s. Nonetheless, the Republican Party chose him to run for reelection as president in 1932. During the campaign he both defended his presidency and attacked his Democratic opponent, Franklin D. Roosevelt. The following is an excerpt from a campaign address given at Madison Square Garden on October 31, 1932.

“This campaign ... is a contest between two philosophies of government. ...

They [the Democrats] are proposing changes and so called new deals which would destroy the very foundations of our American system. ...

... The extension of Government expenditure beyond the minimum limit necessary to conduct the proper functions of the Government enslaves men to work for the Government. If we combine the whole governmental expenditure – National, state, and municipal – we will find that before the World War each citizen worked, theoretically, 25 days out of each year for the Government. In 1924 he worked 46 days a year for the Government. Today he works for the support of all forms of government 61 days out of the year.

No nation can conscript its citizens for this proportion of men’s time without national impoverishment and destruction of their liberties. Our nation cannot do it without destruction to our whole conception of the American system. ...

... Those who pay are, in the last analysis, the man who works at the bench, the desk, and on the farm. They take away his comfort, stifle his leisure, and destroy his equal opportunity. ...”

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Huey Long

In the 1930s Huey P. Long, a powerful Democratic senator and governor of Louisiana, emerged as a potential Roosevelt opponent from the left. The following are excerpts from several of his speeches.

“Now in the third year of his administration [FDR], we find more of our people unemployed than at any other time. We find our houses empty and our people hungry, many of them half-clothed and many of them not clothed at all.

... Number one, we propose that every family in America should at least own a homestead equal in value to not less than one third the average family wealth. The average family wealth of America, at normal values, is approximately \$16,000. So our first proposition means that every family will have a home and the comforts of a home up to a value of not less than around \$5,000 or a little more than that.

Number two, we propose that no family shall own more than three hundred times the average family wealth, which means that no family shall possess more than a wealth of approximately \$5 million—none to own less than \$5,000, none to own more than \$5 million. We think that’s too much to allow them to own, but at least it’s extremely conservative.

Number three, we propose that every family shall have an income equal to at least one third of the average family income in America. If all were allowed to work, there’d be an income of from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per family. We propose that one third would be the minimum. We propose that no family will have an earning of less than around \$2,000 to \$2,500 and that none will have more than three hundred times the average less the ordinary income taxes, which means that a million dollars would be the limit on the highest income. ...”

“There is nothing wrong with the United states. We have more food than we can eat. We have more clothes and things out of which to make clothes than we can wear. We have more houses and lands than the whole 120 million can use if they all had good homes. So what is the trouble? Nothing except that a handful of men have everything and the balance of the people have nothing if their debts were paid. There should be every man a king in this land flowing with milk and honey instead of the lords of finance at the top and slaves and peasants at the bottom”

CRITICS OF THE NEW DEAL Father Charles Coughlin

Charles Edward was ordained a Catholic priest in 1916. In 1926 he was assigned to the new Shrine of the Little Flower Church in Royal Oak, Michigan, which at the time had only twenty-five parishioners. As a way to raise money to support the parish, he approached a local radio station, and on October 17, 1926 he began broadcasting over WJR in Detroit. Coughlin's broadcasts were so popular that he was able to add stations to his audience, and in 1930, he was placed on the CBS radio network, where more than 40 million people were estimated to listen to his sermons on his "Golden Hour of the Little Flower." His views became increasingly extreme, and, by the latter part of the decade, he became increasingly anti-Semitic, stridently anti-communist, a fervent isolationist, and an admirer of European fascism. The following is an excerpt from a 1936 address:

"No man in modern times received such plaudits from the poor as did Franklin Roosevelt when he promised to drive the money changers from the temple--the money changers who had clipped the coins of wages, who had manufactured spurious money and who had brought proud America to her knees.

March 4, 1933! I shall never forget the inaugural address, which seemed to re-echo the very words of Christ Himself as He actually drove the money changers from the temple.

The thrill that was mine was yours. Through dim clouds of the depression this man Roosevelt was, as it were, a new savior of his people! . . .

Such were our hopes in the springtime of 1933.

My friends, what have we witnessed as the finger of time turned the pages of the calendar? Nineteen hundred and thirty-three and the National Recovery Act which multiplied profits for the monopolists; 1934 and the AAA which raised the price of foodstuffs by throwing back God's best gifts into His face; 1935 and the Banking Act which rewarded the exploiters of the poor, the Federal Reserve bankers and their associates, by handing over to them the temple from which they were to have been cast! . . .

Alas! The temple still remains the private property of the money changers. The golden key has been handed over to them for safekeeping--the key which now is fashioned in the shape of a double cross.

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Dr. Francis Townsend

Townsend was a doctor that served in the Army Medical Corps during World War I. After the war he and his wife lived in Long Beach, Calif. But Townsend's private medical practice did not prosper so he took a position as assistant city health director. Because of the Great Depression, he soon lost that job. Then, at the age of 66 and wanting to retire, Townsend grew increasingly indignant over the plight of the large number of poverty-stricken old people like himself. He introduced a plan to help those like himself in 1933 in a letter to a California newspaper. The excerpt below is from his plan:

"Have the National Government enact Legislation to the effect that all citizens of the United States—man or woman—over the age of 60 years may retire on a pension of \$200 per month on the following conditions:

- 1. That they engage in no further labor, business or profession for gain.*
- 2. That their past life is free from habitual criminality.*
- 3. That they take oath to, and actually do spend, within the confines of the United States, the entire amount of their pension within thirty days after receiving same.*

Have the National Government create the revolving fund by levying a general sales tax; have the rate just high enough to produce the amount necessary to keep the Old Age Revolving Pensions Fund adequate to pay the monthly Pensions. Have the act so drawn that such sales tax can only be used for the Old Age Revolving Pensions Fund."