

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1932 AS A  
SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

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SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

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## PREFACE

There are important and interesting forces at work in the American history of this generation. The history of the last decade has been a panorama of great change in American life. The changed social conditions of the American people have constituted the bulk of the change. I have been especially interested in the change of social policy in the federal government since the presidential election of 1932. The federal government has inaugurated policies during the F. D. Roosevelt administration that are unprecedented in American history; the phase of these new policies that strikes me as being very important is the social philosophy behind them.

The purpose of this thesis will be to show that the presidential election of 1932 marks a turning point socially for the American people. I shall trace primarily the social thread throughout, not dwelling any more than necessary on the political and economic aspects. I do not intend to discuss necessarily the pros and cons of the new national policy. I want merely to show that there has been a different social philosophy operating in the policies of the federal government since the presidential election of 1932. I want to show that before 1932 there was, for the large part, a "no government interference" social philosophy operating in the actions of the national government, and that after the Roosevelt administration took charge in Washington the philosophy changed to a direct participation in the different phases of

American life.

Since this social change or revolution, as I prefer to call it, has lasted for about seven years, I feel that it is worthy of a discussion. Personally, I have gained much, thanks to the authors, interviews, and works I have used, from my research on the subject. Many points have been cleared up in my thinking, and I hope that any reader of this thesis will find it helpful along the same line.

Contemporary life is many times difficult to evaluate because of its closeness. I have tried to avoid using material that is too controversial. If this thesis in a small way makes more transparent the present national social philosophy and attitude, I shall be satisfied.

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## CHAPTER I

## A BACKGROUND FOR THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION OF 1932

Revolution literally means change. It could be a great change or a small change depending on its duration and effects. A change of national scope would of necessity have well founded reasons for its happening. It would not just accidentally occur. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England came after a long struggle between parliament and the king, in which parliament finally triumphed. The French Revolution was an outgrowth of many years of royal absolutism and increasing poverty on the part of the French peasants.

History has revealed that a revolution in the national affairs of a country does not necessarily entail war and bloodshed. The Industrial Revolution, the Agricultural Revolution, and the English Revolution of 1688 were mostly peaceful revolutions. The revolution to be discussed in the following pages is also a peaceful revolution. It can be called a social change although its nature has not yet been fully shaped or its duration established.

The presidential election of 1932 marked a social change in the national life of the United States, a change that has lasted seven years at this writing; but that change had its roots in the earlier years of the twentieth century. A good starting place would be in the Theodore Roosevelt Administration. The Square Deal was used as the key phrase for Theodore's Administration. He inaugurated the policies of

"trust-busting" and the conservation of natural resources, which he hoped would create a stronger nationalism in the American people. Franklin D. Roosevelt's fight against the "economic royalists" and his public works program are a fuller expression of Theodore Roosevelt's pioneering in the same fields.

Woodrow Wilson's Administration gave further acceleration to these embryonic social ideas. Wilson had witnessed the corporation develop into what he termed "a little economic state." The scope of free initiative had narrowed; the life of the ordinary man was more and more at the mercy of economic powers over which he had no control. Mr. Wilson in commenting on the situation said:

We are facing the necessity of fitting a new social organization to the happiness and prosperity of the great body of citizens, for we are conscious that the new order of society has not made to fit and provide the convenience or prosperity of the average man.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Wilson's beginning toward the remodeling of the American social system was tragically interrupted by the World War. After the war the United States pursued a policy known as "normalcy." This policy of disillusionment and relapse which has been typical of a post war era was followed for twelve years. It produced some rather abnormal results. The United States grew rapidly industrially and financially, but it was an unhealthy growth. The effects of cancer are

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest K. Lindley, The Roosevelt Revolution, (The Viking Press, New York, 1933), p. 9.



not very noticeable until a critical stage in the malady is reached, and so it was with the national life of the United States. People were not interested in the future, just the realistic present. Mr. Wilson's "little economic states" grew into an enormous empire controlled by a comparatively small number of financiers. Laissez-faire was holy, and less government in business was advocated. The crash of 1929 wrecked the fond hopes of the "no government interference" group. It was the worst and most far-reaching social collapse of our history, and thus it set the stage for a reversal of national policy in the presidential election of 1932. The old order was ripe for a crushing defeat.

Another factor must be considered in the background for the social change of 1932. As has been true in all great movements in the history of the United States, there was a peculiarly well adapted leader for the social revolt of 1932. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had been making some unusual experiments in government as Governor of New York, came on the scene as the leader in the new venture of American history, a new frontier to cross but this time not of new lands to conquer.

The political philosophy of F. D. Roosevelt is not a new one. It is built on Jeffersonian democracy, the progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt, and the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson. Mr. Roosevelt is firmly imbued in the American tradition; he is exceptionally well versed in American history, particularly of the later colonial period and earlier years of the Republic. His speeches show that he paid his share of tribute

to the founding fathers, but it is significant that he has not quoted them as the authors of doctrine to be observed reverently for all times to come. He has had the habit, rather, of extolling them for their boldness and intelligence in handling the practical situations with which they were confronted. Jefferson has always been his idol. The bond is much stronger than that of the ordinary born-and-bred Democrat for the founder of his party. Possibly it is the affinity of one country squire for another. The real association of the two men is found in Mr. Roosevelt's belief in the good sense and elevation of the "larger good" above privilege.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Roosevelt's program as Governor of New York was in accord with his political philosophy and ultimate objectives in the national political arena. His programs for the relief of agriculture, reforestation, redistribution of population through land utilization, control of public utilities, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and unemployment relief showed his dissent from the creed of laissez-faire. He expressed a readiness to use the power of political government to redress the balance of the economic world.<sup>3</sup>

Roosevelt has a firm belief in the basic principles of American democracy but has seen a need for a larger interpretation of those basic principles. He expressed American democracy in terms of a contract in these words:

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2 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

3 Ibid., p. 11.

The Declaration of Independence discusses the problem of government in terms of a contract. Government is a relation of give and take--a contract, perforce, if we would follow the thinking out of which it grew. Under such a contract rulers were accorded certain rights, and the people consented to that power on consideration that they would be accorded certain rights. The task of statesmanship has always been the redefinition of these rights in terms of a changing and growing social order. New conditions impose new requirements upon government and those who conduct government.

The terms of the contract are as old as the Republic and as new as the new economic order. Every man has a right to life, and this means that he has also a right to make a comfortable living. He may by sloth or crime decline to exercise that right, but it must not be denied him. Our government, formal and informal, political and economic, owes to every man an avenue to possess himself of sufficient for his needs through his own work. Every man has a right to his own property, which means a right to be assured to the fullest extent attainable, in the safety of his earnings. By no other means can men carry the burdens of those parts of life which in the nature of things afford no chance of labor--childhood, sickness, old age. In all thought of property, this right is paramount; all other property rights must yield to it. If, in accordance with this principle, we must restrict the operations of the speculator, the manipulator, even the financier, I believe we must accept the restriction as needful, not to hamper individualism but to protect it.<sup>4</sup>

The above quotation is one of Mr. Roosevelt's best statements of his political philosophy. He first made this statement in his campaign for the presidency in the fall of 1932. He later incorporated it in his book Looking Forward published in March, 1933.

The embryonic development of social change in government and the personality of Mr. Roosevelt played great parts

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4 F. D. Roosevelt, Looking Forward, (The John Day Company, New York, 1933), pp. 34-35.



in forming the background for the social revolution of 1932; but another, perhaps greater, factor in this significant change was the temper of the time.

The depression of 1929-1933 has been conceded to be the worst in the history of the United States. Laissez-faire in the national government had managed to pull through in other crises, but it offered no relief this time. It was a senseless paradox of deepening poverty and economic and social disintegration in the midst of the means to produce plenty. There had never been a similar situation in the economic and social growth of the country. Capitalism had been able to expand before, but that era had ended. The means of production were plenty, but a system of distribution was not found in the laissez-faire criteria.

The depression was running its course; the millions of unemployed grew steadily; the price level continued to fall; the debt structure was cracking, and the chances of the American system's escaping complete collapse or forcible overthrow were much discussed. The Hoover Administration was taking a stoical attitude while waiting for the bottom to be reached and the chance event or self-restorative powers supposedly inherent in capitalism to start another upward cycle; it was supposed to be just another depression--or perhaps an unusual coincidence of several depressions. In short though, conditions of life were becoming unbearable to such large numbers of people that mass uprising was likely to occur at any time. People began to believe that unless the American system was altered swiftly and radically, it would

surely be doomed.<sup>5</sup>

Out of this deepening gloom fear began to grip the people. Action had to come soon. The feeling of revolution was in the air. The unemployed were becoming impatient. Mr. Hoover could not control congress, and neither congress nor Mr. Hoover had a domestic program worthy of mention. Wall street vented its dismay and trepidation in attacks on congress, and big business men began to talk guardedly of the need of a dictatorship. It is doubtful if the outcome of any presidential election has been more certain than the one of 1932. The country was prepared to rebuke the Hoover administration.<sup>6</sup>

This high pitched feeling of the time played a great part in bringing about the social revolution of 1932. Mr. Roosevelt was elected, but the united demand for a change by the American people made his election almost inevitable. The breaking point for the old order of laissez-faire had been reached.

Thus the stage was set for a social revolution in 1932. The presidential election of that year proved to be that revolution. New leaders and unparalleled congressional action were soon to display the nature of the revolution.

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5 Lindley, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

6 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

## CHAPTER II

A SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL  
ELECTION OF 1932

One can better appraise the presidential election of 1932 in the United States as a social revolution by analyzing certain elements in the events related to the election. The party platforms and campaigns, an appraisal of the official vote, and a comparison of the election of 1932 with the three preceding presidential elections, especially the election of 1928, are some important elements that can be considered.

Between June 14 and July 3 in 1932 the two major parties held their quadrennial conventions in the city of Chicago and through them presented to the country two men, one of whom would be the next President of the United States.

The Republican convention nominated Herbert Hoover and started him out in quest of another four years in the White House on the basis of his own record. The Democratic convention summoned Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the "liberal" Governor of New York, to lead a drive for more daring doctrines designed to "recover economic liberty" and recapture the National Government at Washington. The Republican convention was born in apathy and ended in confident smugness; the Democratic convention was ushered in with many apprehensions but ended up with a burst of exultation over prospects for the fall elections.

The Republicans proclaimed a 6,000 word platform



enunciating policies followed by the Hoover administration. Prohibition was about the only issue discussed at any length. The party proposed a resubmission of the eighteenth amendment to the States, but the proposal did not come outright for repeal. This proposal obviously was made to appeal to both wets and dries. It shows a conservatism peculiar to the Republican platform as a whole. The Republican convention was a quiet one and after three days adjourned.<sup>1</sup>

The Democratic convention convened immediately following the adjournment of the Republican convention. Its platform contained 1,500 words and in the main attacked the laissez-faire doctrines of the Republican party.

The Democratic platform was short and precise. It took a definite stand for the repeal of the eighteenth amendment. A change in social philosophy from the Republican "no government interference" policy to an active Federal program for the solution of social problems can be seen in parts of the platform. Seeds for social change can be seen in these proposals in the platform:

We advocate the extension of Federal credit to the states to provide unemployment relief wherever the diminishing resources of the states make it impossible for them to provide for the needy; expansion of the Federal program of necessary and useful construction affected with a public interest, such as adequate flood control and waterways.

We advocate the spread of employment by a substantial reduction in the hours of labor, the encouragement of the shorter week by applying

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1 Turner Catledge, "The National Conventions of 1932," Current History, XXXVI, pp. 521-522.

that principle in government service. We advocate the advance planning of public works.

Extension and development of the farm cooperative movement and effective control of crop surpluses so that our farmers may have the full benefit of the domestic market.

The enactment of every constitutional measure that will aid the farmers to receive for their basic farm commodities prices in excess of cost.

We advocate continuous responsibility of government for human welfare, especially for the protection of children.

Regulation to the full extent of Federal power of:

- (a) Holding companies which sell securities in interstate commerce;
- (b) Rates of utility companies operating across State lines;
- (c) Exchange in securities and commodities.<sup>2</sup>

And in the last paragraph of the platform are these words:

In conclusion, to accomplish these purposes and to recover economic liberty we pledge the nominees of this convention the best efforts of a great party whose father announced the doctrine which guides us now in the hour of our country's need:

Equal rights to all; special privileges to none.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the proposals of the Democratic platform such as an attempt to balance the budget and the reduction of governmental expenditures have been put in the background since the party came into power, but the democratic platform does show that the members of the party sensed the need for a definite change in governmental policy as

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<sup>2</sup> The Literary Digest Political Encyclopedia, (Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1932), pp. 131-132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

applied to the grave social problems facing the country. The Republicans on the other hand tried to make prohibition the big issue. They made very few definite innovations for Federal participation directly in solving social ills. In the Republican platform of 1932 is found this statement: The Republican party "is opposed to the Federal government entering directly into the field of private charity and direct relief to the individual."<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Republican and Democratic party platforms show an underlying difference in social philosophy. This underlying difference adds to the presidential election of 1932 as a social change.

The presidential campaign of 1932 indicated that a social change was at stake in the election of president in that year. President Hoover in a speech at the climax of his campaign made this statement before some 62,000 people at Madison Square Garden in New York City just a week preceding the election:

This campaign is more than a contest between two men. It is more than a contest between two parties. It is a contest between two philosophies of government.<sup>5</sup>

That was one statement by Mr. Hoover to which Mr. Roosevelt agreed in the campaign of 1932. It was really the central issue in the campaign, and for that reason adds to the statement that the election of 1932 was a social change of significance in the national policy of the United

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4 Ibid., p. 115.

5 H. C. Hoover, A Presidential Campaign Speech of October 31, 1932, The New York Times. (LXXXII, No. 27, 310).



States. Further highlights of the campaign will strengthen this point of discussion.

The campaign may be said to have opened on August 11, when President Hoover delivered his speech accepting the nomination. His speech dealt largely with the prohibition question. He may have thought that prohibition was to be the big issue, as it had been in the election of 1928, but he was soon to learn that the American people were thinking of greater issues. After this speech the Republican campaign lagged until after the Maine elections, which went Democratic in a big way and caused alarm in the Republican camp.

The Democrats on the other hand were extremely active. Roosevelt had broken precedent by coming to the Democratic convention by airplane to accept his nomination. He began his campaign at Columbus, Ohio, on August 20. Here he sounded the keynote of his campaign by attacking the record of the Republicans and setting forth his "new deal" for rebuilding the national economy.

As the campaign progressed the issues became clearer cut. The social distress of the United States and the failure of the Republicans to meet the needs were the chief points of criticism by Roosevelt. The speech he made at Wheeling, West Virginia, on October 19, 1932, is rather typical of his campaign speeches and shows his dissent with the laissez-faire policies of the Republicans:

I shall continue in this campaign to be constructive and to state my position on the great

issues which face our government. My first thought is that government exists for individual men and women, and that its first objective is to promote their happiness and well-being. It must carry out economic reforms, not solely for the sake of railroads or for agriculture, or for banks or for industry, but for the people who work and use those railroads, for the farmers and their families, for the bank depositors, for consumers and for workers. Unless they prosper the nation falters.

I seek a sound administration, but I seek a humane administration. To me government is not a machine driven by technicians, but a human, sympathetic and responsive institution. I refuse to believe that the people of the nation can be made to fear false bogies. The choice is deeper than that. It is indeed one between restored order and dangerous drift, between constructive planning and the forces of mismanagement.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand Hoover continued to advocate an adherence to old principles followed by his administration. When the Maine election results, which went predominantly Democratic, were known, Hoover made this statement:

The result of the election in Maine imposes the need for renewal and stronger effort that the people may fully understand the issues at stake. We have known all along that, owing to the ravages of the world depression, our fight is a hard one; but we have a strong case and a right cause. Our task is to acquaint every man and woman in the country with the facts and issues which confront the nation.

In periods of emergency and stress, steadfast adherence to sound principles of government is indispensable to national security and a prerequisite to recovery in business, agriculture and employment. Adherence to these principles has saved the country during the last twelve months from all manner of destructive panaceas. This adherence and the measures and policies we have adopted have preserved these principles and laid the foundation for recovery.<sup>7</sup>

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6 F. D. Roosevelt, "Presidential Campaign Speech of October 19, 1932," The New York Times (LXXXII, No. 27,298).

7 H. C. Hoover, "Reply to Chairman of the Republican National Committee on the Maine Election Results," The New York Times (LXXXII, No. 27,262).

Thus Hoover proclaimed that the "strict adherence" to the policies of his administration would solve the social problems of the American people. He meant by that no government interference of any consequence, which had been followed by the Republicans for twelve years.

Roosevelt certainly advocated a different social program. In Boston on October 31, just a week before the election, he advocated stricter government control of the power trusts, the five day week for the working man, and a governmental employment program of unprecedented scope. He explained the employment program in these words:

In the field that looks further ahead, we call for a coordinated system of employment exchanges, the advance planning of public works, and unemployment reserves. Who, then, is to carry out these measures?

The first is clearly and inescapably a task of the Federal government, although it will require the loyal and intelligent cooperation of State and local agencies throughout the land.

The second, that of advance planning of public works, again calls for a strong lead from the government of Washington.

The third, that of unemployment reserves, must under our system of government be primarily the responsibility of the several states.

To advocate a less drastic program would be to misread the lessons of the depression and be indifferent to the country's welfare.<sup>8</sup>

Roosevelt in so many words was advocating a social revolution or change in the national government, something rarely proposed since the days of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

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<sup>8</sup> F. D. Roosevelt, "Presidential Campaign Speech of October 31, 1932," The New York Times (LXXXII, No. 27,310).



President Hoover undoubtedly realized that the Roosevelt proposals were not ordinary, or he would not have made this statement in the campaign:

Our opponents are proposing changes and so-called new deals which would destroy the very foundations of our American system.<sup>9</sup>

Hoover indicates what he meant by "American System" in this quotation from the same speech:

It is a false liberalism that interprets itself into government operation of business.<sup>10</sup>

In looking at the presidential campaign in retrospect, in analyzing the party candidates, speeches and the situations in which they were delivered, a social change in the Federal Government loomed with the election of Roosevelt as President. The extent of the change could not be approximated until after the election, but the change was shaped as a conscious one in which the American people were very much interested. A chance for social readjustment was at stake.

The presidential election of 1932 took place on November 8. Straw votes taken preceding the election indicated that Roosevelt would win by a landslide. The predication was true. Roosevelt carried forty-two states in the electoral college as well as forty-two states in the popular vote. Roosevelt received 472 electoral votes as compared to fifty-nine for Hoover, the Republican candidate only carrying Connecticut, Maryland, Delaware, New Hampshire,

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<sup>9</sup> Hoover, op. cit., LXXXII, No. 27,310.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Pennsylvania, and Vermont.<sup>11</sup>

In the popular vote Roosevelt received over a seven million plurality over Hoover. The official results were:

Roosevelt . . . . .	22,813,786
Hoover . . . . .	15,759,266.

Hoover only managed to carry Delaware, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Vermont in the popular vote.<sup>12</sup>

The results in the election were sweeping in magnitude. The outcome meant that Roosevelt had polled the largest popular vote ever given a winner. It also meant that he had won the largest electoral vote in the history of the country. In The New York Times, following the election, was published a compilation of reactions from metropolitan newspapers in various sections of the United States. This compilation is noteworthy because it gives such a united and vivid first impression of the election's outcome. It shows that the people must have had some definite convictions in their voting. The reactions read in this manner:

New York _____	"Roosevelt Wins by a Landslide"
	"Democratic Sweep Will Reestablish Party Control in Both Houses"
Richmond, Va. _____	"Peaceful Social Revolution"
Detroit, Mich. _____	"Result of Demand for Change"

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11 Congressional Record, Vol. 76, part 4, p. 3639.

12 "Official Vote in Presidential Election of November 8, 1932, as Certified by Secretaries of State and compiled by Associated Press," The Literary Digest, Vol. 115, p. 7.

"Michigan--Republican  
Birthplace--Gives  
Roosevelt First Democratic  
Plurality in 80 years"

Philadelphia, Pa. \_\_\_\_\_ "People's Will Must be  
Respected"

Milwaukee, Wis. \_\_\_\_\_ "A Crushing Answer"

Chicago, Ill. \_\_\_\_\_ "New Deal at Washington  
Desired."13

Thus in analyzing the actual vote and outcome of the election, one must surely be impressed at the results. The American people had reached a noteworthy turning point in their history.

Another observation can be made on the Democratic victory in 1932. It was a complete reversal of the three preceding presidential elections, especially the one of 1928. From 1920 until 1932 the Republicans had dominated the Federal Government. Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover had won the presidency by similar wide margins; then in 1932 the Republicans were almost completely rejected. Such a sharp reversal indicates outworn policies and a united demand for a change.

In order to contrast the outcome of the 1932 election with the three preceding Republican victories, the election of 1928 can best be used since it immediately precedes the 1932 election and thus more vividly shows the reversal.

The Republicans were almost as victorious in 1928 as the Democrats were in 1932. Hoover had over a 6,000,000 plurality



in the popular vote and gained 444 electoral votes as compared to 87 for Al Smith, the Democratic candidate.<sup>14</sup>

In commenting on the outcome of the 1928 presidential election, a western newspaper, The Independent of Helena, Montana, made this typical national interpretation of that election:

The majority of American people are prosperous and satisfied; the country is contented, snug, happy, and Republican.<sup>15</sup>

The country was getting accustomed to prosperity under the Republicans in 1928. Prohibition was the big, and about the only, issue in the 1928 presidential campaign; unemployment and other social problems of the 1932 campaign were put in the background in 1928.

The crash of the "normalcy" policy started by Harding and followed by Coolidge and Hoover came in the first year of Hoover's administration. For three years this "normalcy" policy offered no hope for the deepening situation. The American people began to reshape their social philosophy. Why hadn't they been warned by their national leaders of this collapse? Hoover had prophesied even greater prosperity. Why didn't some action come from Washington? Hoover was a bewildered man, and he could not find a satisfactory plan in his laissez-faire portfolio to remedy the situation.

The American people were ready for a social change in

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15 "What Hoover's Smashing Victory Means," The Literary Digest, (November 17, 1928, p. 6), Vol. 99.

government by 1932. Everlasting prosperity was becoming everlasting poverty in a land of plenty under the laissez-faire doctrine of government. The people saw the need of new social experimentation, and they saw the need of it immediately. That accounts for such a reversal in public opinion in 1932 from that of 1928. That accounts for many progressive Republicans voting for Roosevelt in 1932. Precedents were broken on every hand. A social revolution was taking place. The rapid events that followed March 4, 1933, were to indicate the nature of the social revolution that was given its first great impetus in the presidential election of November 8, 1932.

## CHAPTER III

SOCIAL CHANGES WROUGHT BY THE ROOSEVELT  
ADMINISTRATION 1933-1937

The national social change that started with the presidential election of 1932 officially got under way with the inauguration of Mr. F. D. Roosevelt as President on March 4, 1933. The social thread thus far developed can now be stitched through the rapid events that followed that memorable date. Such a development should aid in forming an appraisal of the change in national thought that took place in the election of 1932.

First, a picture of social conditions in the United States at the time of the presidential inauguration in 1933 must be given. From the start of the presidential campaigns in the summer of 1932 until after the inauguration, conditions in American life had steadily become worse. Dwindling industrial activity had cast off between 12,000,000 and 15,000,000 workers by 1933. Counting children, between 30,000,000 and 35,000,000 persons in the world's richest country were dependent on private or public charity for their very existence. Perhaps another forty or fifty percent of the population, including most of the farmers and small tradesmen were barely subsisting by their own efforts. These are all estimates made by conservative people in the winter of 1932-1933. There were no central agencies for gathering and analyzing accurate statistics. There had never been such a prolonged depression before in the United



States.<sup>1</sup>

Still further in the background stood more disquieting evidence of social disintegration. In many communities throughout the country the lack of funds compelled many schools to close and the operation of others on part time. Poverty was forcing many young people to discontinue their education. "The transmission line of civilization was beginning to fray."<sup>2</sup>

It was neither safe nor humane for the existing order to let such large numbers of people remain on the verge of starvation and disillusionment. The dole had already eaten its way through diminishing private resources and vanishing funds and credit of municipalities. It had overrun state credit in many instances and arrived at the Federal Treasury. Even the stalwart foes of a federal dole were forced to relent to the extent of permitting the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to lend funds for public works and relief. The state of mind of the unemployed, compounded of blind despair, unquenchable hope, and imperviousness to radical agitators, was one of the wonders of the depression.<sup>3</sup>

The first signs that the economic state of the country had become unbearable came from the richest section of the American farm belt. It was a property owners' revolt in

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1 Lindley, op. cit., pp. 65, 66.

2 Ibid., p. 66.

3 Ibid., p. 67.

Iowa, the birthplace of Mr. Hoover. Since neither the law or the "American System" protected his home and farm, the Iowa farmer decided to protect it himself with rifle, shotgun, and noose in the true frontier manner glorified in the American tradition. He banded together with his neighbors to frustrate the legal processes of tax sales and foreclosures by agents, sheriffs, and judges bidding in property for a few cents or a few dollars and restoring it to the former owners.<sup>4</sup>

As the property owners' rebellion met with success, it spread rapidly. In the late summer of 1932, under the militant leadership of Milo Reno, Iowa farmers experimented with a second method: the strike. The first Iowa milk strikes were suppressed after some violence. The Farmers' Holiday movement, utilizing both methods, spread quickly and haphazardly over the country. In the first months of 1933 foreclosures were prevented by grim bands of farmers as far west as the Pacific Coast, as far south as Kentucky and Oklahoma, and as far east as the Delaware River. Revolting farmers marched to uncounted court houses and into the capitols of Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa and other states in the farm belt. Late in January Governor Herring of Iowa appealed to all mortgage holders to withhold foreclosure proceedings until the State Legislature could act. Other states took action of one kind or another to allay the

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4 Ibid., p. 68.

the rebellion. At the end of January, the Senate Agriculture Committee heard a warning from Edward A. O'Neal, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation, which represented the more conservative farmers of the corn belt. Mr. O'Neal said:

Unless something is done for the American farmer, we'll have revolution in the countryside in less than twelve months.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. E. K. Lindley sums up the national crisis before Roosevelt's inauguration in these words:

At the beginning of February 1933, it was a nice question which would crack first: the twisted framework of the credit structure or human endurance. That was settled by the Detroit banking crisis and the bank moratorium in Michigan. From Michigan paralysis of the banking system spread, at first gradually, then at a quickening pace, until it reached the two great financial centers, Chicago and New York, on the very eve of Mr. Roosevelt's inauguration. In all history there have been few such ironic coincidences as this collapse of an economic order in the last minutes of its zealous guardianship by the man who thought it fundamentally perfect. At 1:06 o'clock Saturday afternoon, March 4, Mr. Hoover presented the prostrate form of his American system to Mr. Roosevelt.<sup>6</sup>

March 4, 1933, served as a prologue to a new era. Gloom was widespread as that day dawned. Even the clouds in the sky hung low as President Roosevelt delivered his inaugural address.

Considering the occasion, the inaugural speech was a masterful one; it was delivered in a courageous tone.

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5 Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

6 Ibid., p. 69.



Roosevelt proclaimed that a changed social philosophy had taken place in the American people when he spoke these words:

The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.<sup>7</sup>

A few sentences later he struck a fiery note when he said:

Restoration calls, however, not for changes in ethics alone. This nation asks for action, and action now.<sup>8</sup>

In the closing part of his address Roosevelt expressed his trust in democratic institutions and the American people:

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

In this dedication of a nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May he guide me in the days to come.<sup>9</sup>

The events that followed the inauguration were many and hurried. They were accomplished peacefully without the aid of a black or brown-shirted organization. They expired within the framework of the American constitutional democracy. In the atmosphere of peace warlike changes were taking place.

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7 F. D. Roosevelt, Public Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt (DeVorss and Company, Los Angeles, 1936), p. 34.

8 Ibid., p. 35.

9 Ibid., p. 38.

The Cabinet was sworn in at the White House the night after the inauguration in an unprecedented ceremony. The new Congress was summoned into special session on March 9. Then came a lightning stroke from the White House--every bank was ordered to close, an embargo placed on gold, and the hoarding of gold and currency was made a penal offense. The country had a momentary release from terror in laughter at its predicament. Mr. Woodin, the Secretary of Treasury, moved among the turmoil of bankers and distraught "big minds" with the elfin happiness of a character from one of his own nursery ballads. The New Deal was on its way.<sup>10</sup>

Many acts of Congress passed since the election of 1932 have been unprecedented in their nature and scope. Most of the acts have been social in their nature. The thesis of the New Deal has been the three R's--Relief, Recovery, and Reform. Such a program would indicate social rearrangement.

The special session of Congress called on March 9, 1933, has been referred to as the "hundred days" session.

Schlesinger makes this observation about that session:

The measures adopted by Congress during its hundred-day special session in the summer of 1933 prefigured the lines along which the New Deal was to develop during the next three and a half years. Later acts supplemented and modified the methods, but the spirit, the purpose, and in large part, the substance of the original legislation remained unchanged.<sup>11</sup>

The Roosevelt administration stated that relief to the

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<sup>10</sup> Lindley, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> A. M. Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action. (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1938), p. 493.

unemployed was a national responsibility. Thus it launched a gigantic relief program, something unprecedented in American history. The New Deal policy involved outright contributions of federal funds and thus indirectly imposed on the taxpayers of wealthier states the burden of helping the poorer states. Food, clothing, and fuel were provided for the jobless. The dole was replaced by work relief as soon as possible, for it was believed that labor for pay would better sustain the morale of the unemployed.

Special agencies were created to administer the huge sums which congress made available. The first of these, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, began operations in May 1933, under charge of Harry L. Hopkins who had directed the state relief activities of New York when Roosevelt was governor. Its principal purpose was to augment the depleted revenues of the states, leaving the local administrators to use the money for direct or work relief as they saw fit. So great was the exhaustion of local funds that in thirteen states the F E R A grants totaled over ninety percent of the entire relief expenditures. Only three of the states of the Union bore as much as fifty percent of the cost. The F E R A, which continued until 1935, disbursed about three billion for relief.<sup>12</sup>

In 1935 Congress set up the Works Progress Administration to take the place of the F E R A. The W P A undertook a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 496, 497.



"coordinated execution of the work relief program as a whole." An initial appropriation of \$4,880,000,000 was made for this purpose. The new arrangement provided for a closer supervision and control of projects by Washington.<sup>13</sup>

Hastily conceived projects gave way to better considered plans. Public improvements of lasting value resulted in every part of the land. The work program, initiated primarily for manual and clerical workers, expanded to include many thousands of unemployed writers, artists, architects, musicians, and actors as well as research experts in the natural and social sciences. By the summer of 1936 over 6,000 schoolhouses had been erected or repaired; modernized sewerage had been installed in 5,000 communities; numerous playgrounds, libraries, hospitals and airports had been constructed or improved; and about 128,000 miles of secondary roads had been built or repaired. Relief funds were used in the construction of twenty-three great irrigation projects in the West. Free concerts and inexpensive plays were produced for great audiences which would otherwise find time heavy on their hands.<sup>14</sup>

Relief measures were also taken to aid the youth of the land. The Civilian Conservation Corps was instituted to help the hordes of youths roaming the country in a vain search for employment--likely recruits for a career of crime. A

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13 Congressional Record, Vol. 79, part 7, pp. 8029-8031.

14 Schlesinger, op. cit., pp. 489, 499.

varying membership of 250,000 to 500,000 young men joined the 2,600 camps established by the C C C. These young men were chosen from families on relief. They were paid wages which they were obliged to share with their families; they were given opportunities of schooling in their leisure time, and they undertook and finished an extensive work of drainage, fighting forest fires, planting trees and building erosion dams in order to protect the nation's natural resources. By the middle of 1936 over 1,600,000 men had received C C C training. Based on similar principles, educational camps for jobless girls were started in 1934. These youth projects received solid popular approval.<sup>15</sup>

Another youth project designed primarily to keep young people in school was the National Youth Administration, established in June, 1935, as a branch of the W P A. Earlier F E R A grants had enabled rural schools in twenty-three states to remain open, but the N Y A reorganized and enlarged the earlier program of student aid. The new program paid small stipends to over 400,000 youths in the schools, colleges and graduate schools during the first scholastic year 1935-1936 in return for work done after school hours. It also employed 200,000 young men and women beyond the legal school age in special projects. This program counteracted enforced idleness of youth, better equipped the rising generation for its life work, and delayed the young people's entry into an already crowded labor market.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Ibid., p. 499.

16 Ibid., pp. 499, 500.

In fulfilling the aim of recovery, the new administration used a "prime the pump" policy to enable the economic life of the nation to function continuously on its own motion. In other words the government gave direct relief to business hoping that business would thereby recover. Such an elaborate program had never been devised by any preceding administration at Washington.

The Reconstruction Finance Corporation had been initiated by the Hoover administration, but it applied only to financial institutions and railroads. Under the Roosevelt administration, its authority was extended to aid industrial enterprises as well. By making loans on adequate security and by purchasing bonds and preferred stock in banking and business concerns, the R F C steadied the country's basic economic structure. From the start to October 1, 1936, it handled over eleven billion dollars, of which a considerable part was soon repaid by the beneficiaries.<sup>17</sup>

Another important step was taken with the introduction of the Public Works Administration in June, 1933, headed by Secretary Ickes of the Interior Department. It was a far-reaching scheme of internal improvements and concentrated on heavy construction projects. The work was performed by contract to private firms which need not hire relief labor. In other words it sought to continue the normal course of business enterprise by providing major undertakings of enduring public benefit. When the enterprises partook of a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 500.



local character, the federal government aided the states and municipalities not only through loans but also through gifts varying in amount from thirty to forty-five percent of the total cost.<sup>18</sup>

By July 1, 1936, the P W A had carried out projects costing nearly \$2,500,000,000, thus giving a tremendous stimulus to all lines of business. These projects included about 1,500 waterworks, 250 hospitals, high school and college buildings valued at nearly half a billion dollars, seventy city power plants, a great number of federal, state and municipal buildings, an expenditure of eight million on public health work and more than a quarter of a billion on naval construction.<sup>19</sup>

A revival of residential construction was given consideration by the Roosevelt administration. Private building had shrunk ninety-five percent from 1928 to March, 1933, and owners of dwellings had neglected even essential repairs. Besides, at the latter date, homes were being sacrificed by auction at the rate of a thousand a day. Congress created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation in June, 1933, to enable persons to recover their properties, or to pay off outstanding mortgages, by means of government loans over a long period of moderate interest rates. With this help more than a million residences were saved to their owners within three years.

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18 Ibid., p. 501.

19 Ibid.

The Federal Housing Administration created in 1934 provided funds for the repair and modernization of dwellings, apartment houses, and business buildings. The federal government also directed its effort toward better housing for the poor. This phase of construction was aided by gifts and loans from the Washington authorities to local governments. By the summer of 1936 slum clearance had been undertaken in twenty-seven city districts. Fifty demonstration units of model tenements were provided in different places. By the Resettlement Administration created in 1935 the government also initiated the construction near large industrial centers of four "greenbelt" suburban communities where wage-earners living in semirural surroundings might eke out their earnings with subsistence gardening.<sup>20</sup>

Business and home owners' relief were not the only phases of the recovery plan. An unprecedented venture in the field of agriculture was made by the Roosevelt administration. The value of agricultural holdings had shrunk twenty billion dollars from 1920 to 1929, and twenty-two billion more from 1929 to 1933. When Roosevelt entered office, two out of every five farms were under mortgage. The fact of the inability of a quarter of the nation's inhabitants to buy needed supplies at the time of general business decline acted as a drag on economic recovery everywhere. Laws of 1933 and 1934 authorized the federal land banks and other designated agencies acting under the supervision of the newly created

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 502.

Farm Credit Administration to refinance agricultural mortgages at substantially lower interest rates, and also to advance money for current operations and for buying back property that had already been foreclosed.

By the summer of 1933 the Farm Credit Administration had made available approximately \$3,700,000,000 to rural borrowers. The Resettlement Administration in the meantime had purchased about 17,000 farms so that impoverished owners might get a fresh start. Most of the land was purchased in the South. Long time loans were made on easy terms. "Subsistence homestead" communities were made in some parts such as those at Reedsville, West Virginia, Crossville, Tennessee, and Groveton, Texas.<sup>21</sup>

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, passed in June, 1933, provided means whereby the growers of important staples could, through voluntary collective action, adjust the supply to the demand. Farmers who agreed to limit their acreage were to be paid for doing so out of money raised from taxing processors (meat packers, flour millers, and others who prepare agricultural products for the market). During 1933 over a million contracts were signed with cotton farmers, and more than ten million acres withdrawn from planting. Over half a million wheat growers made similar contracts for 1933-1934, removing seven and a half million acres from tillage. Like agreements were concluded with the producers of other

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 509.



commodities.

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Under this program, with some modifications, the farmers' cash earnings rose from four and a third billion dollars in 1932 to nearly seven in 1935. The market value of such commodities as wheat, corn, cotton and tobacco doubled or nearly doubled. This program ran into some difficulty when the Supreme Court upset the A A A law by a six-to-three vote in January, 1936 (United States v. Butler). The court held that Congress had invaded the "reserved rights of the States," for "a statutory plan to regulate and control agricultural production" lies "beyond the powers delegated to the Federal Government."<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the essential parts of the agricultural program were not lost by the court decision. Within two months Congress passed the soil-conservation-and-domestic-allotment act, designed to attain much the same end by a less vulnerable method. Under the new plan the federal treasury was authorized to make payments to farmers for such purposes as retiring worn-out land, limiting production to amounts set by the government, and furthering soil enrichment by shifting crops. Out of deference to the court's state-rights views, the execution of the program after January 1, 1938, was to devolve upon state agencies operating in accordance with federal standards. Large discretion was given the Secretary of Agriculture to select crops and make other arrangements. Thus the new scheme promised to become a permanent policy of

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22 Ibid., pp. 509, 510.

the nation.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to reform measures the Roosevelt administration also travelled untrodden paths. One of the first problems comprehensively dealt with by the New Deal administration was the problem of investments and speculation. The principle to be used, declared President Roosevelt, was to "add to the ancient rule of caveat emptor the further doctrine, let the seller also beware."<sup>24</sup>

The congressional act of May, 1933, imposed heavy penalties for failure to give the public full and accurate information concerning newly issued securities sent through the mails or other channels of interstate commerce. In June, 1934, Congress transferred the administration of this requirement from the Federal Trade Commission to the new agency, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and empowered the S E C to license stock exchanges and regulate their practices as specified in the rules it might lay down. Thus, for the first time, the Federal Government exerted its authority to make stock exchanges less gambling resorts and more genuine market places.<sup>25</sup>

With even greater boldness the New Deal attacked the question of hydroelectric power. The administration leaders deemed electric energy a basic natural resource which, thanks to government neglect, had fallen into the hands of selfish private utility interests; the excessive rates had enabled

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23 Ibid., p. 511.

24 F. D. Roosevelt, Congressional Record, Vol.77, part 1, p. 937.

25 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 512.

only one in three American homes to afford the use of electricity from central power plants, and only three in twenty of farm homes. The Tennessee River basin, touching seven southern states and rich in undeveloped human and natural resources, presented an opportunity to demonstrate the value of a more enlightened policy and also the advantages of regional planning.

The Tennessee Valley Authority act, established by Congress in May 1933, undertook the construction of a series of great dams not only for flood control, navigation improvement and the production of nitrates, but also for generating electric power. The T V A at the same time pushed forward plans for reforestation, scientific agriculture, and the development of a rounded community life through public health measures and recreational facilities; transmission lines were built, and surplus power was sold to towns in the region and to private power companies at rates so attractive as to multiply the number of users.

The T V A also offered its rates as a "yardstick" to measure the charges of private utility companies in all parts of the country. As a result many private utility companies found reasons for scaling down their rates. In June, 1935, the annual saving to consumers was reckoned at nearly fifty million dollars.<sup>26</sup>

Other New-Deal measures struck more directly at the problem of cheap electricity for the nation. The P W A helped

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 513.



with loans to a few hundred municipalities for erecting or modernizing publicly owned power plants; in April, 1935, Congress set up the Rural Electrification Administration, empowered to lend government money for building power plants to serve the farming regions. The great Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams on the Columbia River were also designed to provide electricity as well as irrigation for millions of settlers in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1920's giant utility holding companies had formed. Senator Norris of Nebraska cited one example of the Cumberland County Power and Light Company of Portland, Maine, which was in turn controlled by six other holding companies in different parts of the country. Thus there grew up holding companies on top of holding companies affording irresistible opportunities for financial racketeering. To destroy this system the Senate, at the President's bidding, framed the Wheeler-Rayburn Act which was passed in August, 1935, and required the Securities Exchange Commission, as soon as practicable after January 1, 1938, to dissolve all interstate utility holding companies except those directly above the operating concerns, and specified further that the latter variety must be confined to integrated systems within natural regions. Other provisions granted the Federal Power Commission authority to regulate the rates of electrical concerns in interstate commerce, and gave the Federal Trade

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 513, 514.

Commission similar authority in regard to gas.<sup>28</sup>

One of the greatest social changes inaugurated by the Roosevelt administration was wrought by the passage of the Social Security Act in August, 1935. This law dealt with the underprivileged problem. It sought to anticipate the effects of future depressions by providing federal subsidies to the states for setting up permanent systems of unemployment insurance and old-age compensation. At the time only seven states had ventured upon unemployment insurance, six of them having acted in the half-year before the passage of the national statute, while pensions for the aged, a much older interest in the United States, prevailed in but thirty-five states.

As to the unemployment compensation, the social-security act requires employers of eight or more persons to pay a tax on their payrolls, rising to three percent by 1938. The proceeds are to be held in the federal treasury for eventual distribution through the state insurance systems, and the payments to beneficiaries will depend on the size of the sum thus collected. Separate sections of the act apply to destitute persons already sixty-five years of age, and to employees in active service who shall in the future retire at that age. For the former class, federal pensions up to fifteen dollars are provided on condition that the states concerned give a like amount. For the latter, a fund is to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 514, 515.

be accumulated in the United States treasury, derived from equal contributions by employers and employees and rising in each case to three percent of the wages by 1949. The old-age retirement allowances, payable from 1942, are to be not less than ten or more than eighty-five dollars a month. The arrangements for unemployment and old-age retirement do not, however, include public employees, farm laborers, marine workers, domestic servants, casual workers and employees in religious charitable and nonprofit education institutions. Finally, the act pledged annual grants to the states for aiding dependent children and the blind, and for child welfare, public-health work and vocational rehabilitation.<sup>29</sup>

The social-security law was hailed by President Roosevelt as "a cornerstone in a structure which is being built." In the next two years virtually all the states set up unemployment and old-age insurance systems which met the requirements laid down by the Social Security Board in whose charge the administration of the act was placed. By the end of 1937 nearly twenty-one million wage earners were insured against unemployment, and over thirty-six million had joined the old-age retirement program. Minor improvements in the act are still being discussed in Congress.<sup>30</sup>

The passage of the social-security law marked a climax to the sweeping social legislation enacted by the New Deal administration. Observers were wondering in the summer of

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29 Ibid., pp. 515, 516.

30 Ibid., p. 516.



1936 how the presidential election in the coming fall would reflect on the New Deal. All of the unprecedented social legislation would not mean much if the Roosevelt administration should be repudiated. On the other hand a sweeping reelection victory for Roosevelt and his party would indicate a correct interpretation of the public mind as enveloped in the New-Deal measures.

The question was answered in a very definite manner. The congressional elections of 1934 had increased the already existing majorities of the democratic party in both houses of Congress, but the presidential election of 1936 gave Roosevelt and his party a much wider margin. The New Deal was the issue, and Roosevelt carried every state in the Union except Maine and Vermont; he carried 60.7 percent of the popular vote or 27,650,000 votes. Landon, the Republican candidate and his rival, carried 36.4 percent or 16,680,000 votes. The remainder of the vote went to minor parties. In the electoral college Roosevelt won 523 votes to 8 for Landon.<sup>31</sup>

The American Institute of Public Opinion in an analysis of its advance poll of voters in the 1936 election found that Roosevelt received huge support from all classes of American people. According to the poll 47 percent of the top income group, 67 percent of the middle income group, and 75 percent of the bottom income group favored Roosevelt.<sup>32</sup>

Roosevelt's victory of 1936 was the greatest presidential victory since James Monroe's victory in the early history of

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31 Congressional Record, Vol. 81, part 1, p. 83.

32 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 524.

the United States. The Roosevelt victory indicated that the American people endorsed the New Deal with its vast and unprecedented social change. This victory in turn pointed to the election of 1932, which was the start of the New Deal, as a turning point in American history not likely to be soon forgotten or erased.

## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

I have attempted to develop the social thread that forms the handiwork for the present federal governmental policy; I have traced this social thread's accessible roots from the early years of the twentieth century; it has been followed through the platforms and campaigns of the two major parties preceding the presidential election of 1932, through the election proper, and then through the legislation of the standard bearers of this unique social handiwork. At the conclusion of the development, this new social philosophy was given an important trial test in the presidential election of 1936 and was overwhelmingly approved. Out of all of this analysis the opinion that the presidential election of 1932 proved to be a social revolution in the United States has been ventured.

It would be too adventurous to say that the present social program of the federal government will remain intact, but most observers agree that many basic features, especially the reforms in utility racketeering and securities practices, social-security legislation, and the agricultural program, are not likely to be repudiated even by a conservative national administration. The relief features of the New-Deal administration are still in the experimental stage; thus their future is not clear. One thing seems sure; the social program of the New Deal could not be erased in a short length of time.

It has entered almost every phase of American life--industry, agriculture, education, and the basic phases of social security.

The Presidential election of 1932 marked a change in social philosophy for the federal government. The philosophy before 1932 was one of "no government interference," and after 1932 it was one of direct participation in the solution of social problems in American life. Such being the case the presidential election of 1932 can be called a social revolution, a change that has inaugurated a unique program for American life, a change that has lasted through seven interesting and action-packed years, something that fills the columns of newspapers and the talk of the average American citizen.



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