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Well Roosevelt was already an established figure in the democratic party, he had been assistant secretary of the navy during Wilson's administration, and subsequently and more important governor of N.Y. and in fact many of the policies which he first tried out in Washington, in his presidency had already been instituted in the state of N.Y. while he was governor there. In his campaign for the presidency there was little indication that he was going to represent anything remarkably new, in the country, he was able to win easily because the people were tired of the misery in which they were living and of having a federal government which refused to do anything, but his own campaign promises contained very little that was new, he was going to balance the budget, was I guess his major statement, and he also promised to concern himself more with the needs of the increasingly destitute population of the country and especially to get industry going once again. At first, he acted as an old American, saying jumping on his horse and riding off at all directions at once, the early years of the Roosevelt administration are filled with contradictory policies but what gained him the greatest popularity among working people were 3 things, first of all he immediately had congress appropriate large sums of money for relief of the poor, the state and city governments on which the Hoover administration had depended were virtually bankrupt, the government in Washington therefore under Roosevelt took on the task simply supplying food and securing housing for literally millions of people during the first years, 1933-34. At the same time he made himself very popular among workers, specially those of immigrant backgrounds by 2 things, he took measures to reduce or to give people who were being deported some constitutional rights to appeal, and Hoover had been attempting what you might call the French solution to unemployment, simply taking foreigners and sending them out of the country as rapidly as possible, Roosevelt put an end, I think to that policy at least for everyone except Mexicans, Mexicans did continue to be deported in very large numbers until about 1934, the other measure was to repeal the prohibition, that made it legal to sell and drink alcohol once again, these measures I think made him a very popular among specially working class voters whose parents had been immigrants and this was vitally important to the politics of the period that followed, because there is good evidence that the great support that put Roosevelt in such a position of power came from people who had never voted before, came from either children of immigrants becoming old enough to vote, or immigrants themselves becoming naturalized, or people who had not voted the voting levels in the 1920s who were as low as they are today in the Us. But the voters turned out in very large numbers up in the course of the 1930s, so that it wasn't so much that people who already voted shifted in large numbers to Roosevelt, but rather that large numbers of new voters came on the scene, and provided an electro base for the measures that the administration then wanted to carry out.

He selected Francis Perkins as secretary of labor in a measure that is unusual in 2 aspects, first she was, every secretary of labor prior to that time had come from the labor movement, she did not, she came from the movement of social workers, and she came from a very important movement of advocates of social insurance, minimum wages, and so forth, factory inspection that had developed already a good deal of experience in the state government of NY, and that's the group she came out of, in a sense Roosevelt brought her to Washington from NY with him and was clearly demonstrating that he expected much of the reform to be instituted from above in social insurance, in unemployment relief, etc, for which she was a very strong advocate. What I think neither Francis Perkins, nor Roosevelt expected was the eruption of militant struggle among the workers themselves, demanding the right to unionize, demanding unemployment insurance, it took huge lobbies in both Washington and especially the state legislators to get insurance provided for unemployed workers, something that in much of continental Europe had been existing since the early part of the century, this all had to be instituted for the first time in the Us, in the great depression of the 1930s, but it was instituted as a result of the struggles that were carried on by the unemployed themselves in demonstrations, in city after city all over the country, and as a result of the many strikes for union recognition that had emerged over the course of 1933-1934, these strikes built upon over a very important measure of the Roosevelt administration, the National Industry Recovery Act,

which in effect established sort of government sponsored cartels for industry ,to fix prices, to reduce hours, actually to reduce production in the country in order to get rid of inventories and help business recover from the depression, but the bill included a provision that in every industry workers had the right to organize and bargain collectively and that was taken very seriously by workers all over the country, they dreamed up the famous slogan " The president wants you to join the union", actually the president never said any such thing, but this was the workers interpretation of the speeches of president Roosevelt and of the approval of collective bargaining that was in this National Industrial Recovery act. As it turned out the resistance of major industries to the unionizing effort of 1933-1934 was ferocious, and in major industries like the automobile industry, steel industry, the efforts of workers to unionize were completely defeated, only a few for example scattered automobile plants ended up with union contracts by 1934, in the textile industry workers went out on strike from one end of the country to the other and faced furious repression from the national guard, from police forces, both local and company police forces and in the end the strike went down with nothing but a promise from the federal government to investigate but with no union for the workers, the only successes of that however left a very important legacy for the future, because in San Francisco and in Minneapolis the strikes of longshore workers in San Francisco, truckers in Minneapolis were supported by general strikes from the other union, that ended up enabling the new unions to become established in those cities, in Toledo, the famous Toledo auto light factory, an independent union of automobile, battery workers was successful again because of the very wide spreads support it received from workers elsewhere in that city, and these early cases were major springboards for future unionizing activities of the working class later on in the 1930s, but they were rather isolated pockets of success at that time.

I think in those first few years of the Roosevelt administration the main thing that he gave to workers was hope, hope that there was a federal government that would intervene to give them relief, to help them organize , most of the actual assistance that came from Washington went to big companies, to try and get started again, went to agriculture and that meant largely to the big units of agriculture not to the labors and tenants in the land, but those hopes that had developed unleashed a new militancy among working people that was strongly reflected in the state and congressional elections of 1934, and pushed the new congress very much to the left and many of the state governments very much to the left, a state like Pennsylvania developed its local new deal which was much more radical then anything that was going on in Washington at the time, Minnesota did much the same thing, so that

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the political dynamics were pulling the federal government by 1934 and 35 much more in the direction of making major concessions to the working class and I think this is a very important thing to remember because in most of the industrial world, certainly in most of Europe and South America the great depression resulted in governments moving mainly to the right, not to the left, there would be a few openings in the middle of the decade, maybe a year and a half in France, a brief open to Spanish republic, Belgium a couple of years in the middle of the 30s but nationalist authoritarian regimes were the main product of the great depression politically, this meant that the Us really stood out to something quite unusual in a movement, in a politics that was still very definitely pro-capitalist politics not at all socialist, or anything of this sort but never the less opened all sorts of hopes for working people and resulted then in a very important wave of legislation of 1935, that was culmination of the new deal as far as workers were concerned.

The Wagner act to assist unions in getting recognized by employers, the social security act to provide old age pensions, sort of regularize unemployment compensation around the country, the wealth tax act that at least for the first attempted time to put the main burden of taxation on the wealthiest people in the

country as a whole, the public utilities holding company act which is attempting to brake up some of the big syndicates that control electrical power , gas power and so forth around the land , these measures it seems to me represented the culmination of the power in the legislation that the workers had come to achieve for themselves over the course of the middle years of the 1930s.

The center piece of Roosevelt's early legislation was the National recovery act, the NRA, it was ruled unconstitutional by the supreme court in 1935, with the court ruling that the power to regulate interstate commerce did not extend to a power to regulate manufacturing and pricing practices, the way the NRA was doing and more over that the act had given to legislative power, power to establish codes of fare trade practices to private groups, trade associations, which were largely dominated by business groups, this was the official rouling of the court that these measures were in violation of the US constitution, its also worth noting tough that by the time the NRA was ruled unconstitutional it had very little support left in the population as a whole, business leaders had come to think that they could expand their power better with out it and control prices with out government regulation and most workers had come to think that the promises for collective bargaining that were held in that act had not been fulfilled, that the defeats in strikes in 1934 had shown them that this measure was a rather hollow one, so the slogan that became very popular among workers in 1934 took up on the NRA proposal that there should be codes of fare trade practice for every industry, and the workers slogan was "Write your own codes on the picket line", and so that there was in effect very little popular support for the measure left, but there was great deal of support for some law that would really guarantee the rights of workers to unionize and bargain collectively and that need was picked up by the Wagner act in 1935.

I think that Roosevelt was definitely pulled to the left by the population of the country as a whole, by the working people, not only because workers had come to get a clear and clearer vision among themselves of what it was they wanted, and through their strikes and organizing a unified set of ideas, for example the most popular idea among workers was that there should be social insurance covering any loss of income provided out of the general tax revenues, for health measures, for old age, for unemployment, for what ever, this act was not passed but when it won the support of more then a hundred and ten people in congress it gave great support to the much more limited social security act which Roosevelt put forward in its place as a substitute for that measure that was then so popular among workers themselves, but the other side of the coin is that actually the economy had picked up somewhat in 1934-35 , still there was very heavy unemployment and more and more long term unemployment was becoming evident but the totally devastated economy of 1929-1931 had been improved somewhat by 1934-35, in this setting the opposition to Roosevelt strengthened just as much as the support for social reform strengthened and is very clear evidence, seems to me, that among the middle and upper classes the republicans actually were becoming stronger by the middle of the 1930s, in other words voting in America was becoming more sharply divided along class lines then ever before over the course of the 1930s and this was clear also to Roosevelt and he saw that he would really need to consolidate support among the people who were most likely to favor him and keep him in, and that was basically the working people of the country and this is why the concessions of the mid 30s.

Well, let me say that in one sense the kind of priming the pump as Roosevelt then called it, government expenditures to get the economy going were really, had a very limited success until the war itself and then the economy just took off, but it was kept going for a whole generation after the war by government expenditures on a scale that even Roosevelt never dreamed of, most of them now were not associated with social reform, associated with the military budget , associated with Eisenhower times, enormous highway constructions, enormous government sponsorship of housing construction, to build the new suburban residences all over the country, so that in a very important sense government expenditures continued to be central to the sustained economic growth in the years after 1940, its quite clear that more then a quarter of all the purchases in the economy, national economy, began with the state in the 1950s and in 1960s, but it

was that economy that ended up in the US as in so much of the rest of the world by the end of the 60s beginning of the 70s in what was then called stagflation, once again the economy was lagging and but at the same time prices were still going very , very rapidly upwards, and stagflation is a very bad situation for business profits, it was in that setting that the business leaders in the country decided it was necessary to brake completely with the Roosevelt legacy, what some have called the great U turn, in business policy , this meant first of all slashing government expenditures , it meant developing great hostility to unions in demanding concessions , a removal of what unions had already won, but above all else the answer was to move more and more production out of the country all together, they already had a lot of experience in moving from places where workers had improved their wages to other places where they were lower paid, but now the flight out of the US became the order of the hour, and by I would say the years between 1970-1973 were decisive in this shift so that at the end of that when at simultaneously a very dramatic transformation of the American economy was the kind of manufacturing that the new deal had tried to stimulate, actually leaving the country all together, and with a massive campaign on the part of the business world to convince the population that government itself was the enemy, government regulation, government taxes, those became the great symbols of evil picked up most famously and successfully by Ronald Reagan, in his presidential campaigns, and that theme still sets the tone for American political life, its dominated the programmes of the Clinton administration, it seems to me, in our recent years, what is absent from public discussion today is any kind of a programmatic sense of an alternative, we see that some people have become richer and richer while others have had their incomes, about good two thirds of the population, has not improved at all or has got worst off since the 1970s, in the incomes and what they had to live on in the US. But nobody has successfully formulated a program to speak to the needs of those people in today's type of international economy. The first signs of something new taking shape, the first very clear signs were in Seattle with the coalition of Unions , of minority groups, of environmentalists, all protesting together against this kind of economy devoted exclusively to the needs of bigger and bigger profits on the stock exchange, and forgetting all about the needs of the great bulk of the population here and elsewhere around the world, there has been a bit of sense of renewal and reorganization in the union movement around the land but as yet no strong political force has emerged to speak as the voice of this group, indeed the protest of working people are often easily picked up by demagogic groups on the right , like the famous Pat Buchanan who simply says foreigners are our enemies .

I think the first period of the new deal is one that's filled with contradictions, in 2 respects, first of all, the measures undertaken by the Roosevelt administration and by congress, often were self-contradictory and pointed in many different directions, much of the original effort was toward a kind of autarky that we saw in other parts of the world, going off the gold standard, actually increasing tariffs for a few years, attempting to make a kind of economic isolation in which through the NRA monopoly power in industry could be consolidated, the ability of a few corporations to set prices , to set the terms of trade were by that act they were given legal authority , at the same time these very same years saw the emergence of very militant working class struggle usually under the leadership of the left, of communists in a few places of Trotskyists in a some places of old groups of socialists , who moved forward as the organizers of non unionized working class and helped consolidate a kind of political program for social insurance , for unemployment compensation, and for measures which were never won, for example a lot of advocacy that the government should take over industries that had closed down, and reopen them as a way of employing people without any jobs, so that in this contradiction seems to me there was a Roosevelt administration whose own direction was not at all clear, in some respects it looked like it might be going toward a sort of nationalist, autarkic, authoritarian regime and some people even said this was the first stage of American fascism, on the other hand it gave great hopes to working people and it lead to an increase of participation in popular struggles and in voting that made the second new deal possible, it was congressional and local elections of 1934, that really shifted the character of the government very strongly in the direction of the needs of urban working people.

the liberty league was a very, very influential voice of major corporations in the US, the Dupont I guess were the most important, the owners of the big chemical firms over the most important single group behind it, but the liberty league carried on constant public propaganda against the Roosevelt administration, was very influential in the newspapers. Most newspapers in 1934-36, most of the big commercial urban newspapers opposed the Roosevelt administration, actually only a minority of papers favored him, but this influence had its strongest manifestation after the Wagner act was passed, because at that time there was established a national labor relations board that could prosecute employers for unfair labor practices, like firing workers who wanted to join unions, and could allow workers to conduct elections, to determine if they wanted a union, the liberty league put in, went into courts in every federal district of the country and got an injunction to prevent the national labor relations board from acting until the supreme court had ruled whether or not the Wagner act was constitutional, so in other words for the first year and a half after the Wagner act was passed it was a law without any effect, in the early unionizing of workers say the sit down strikes of 1936-37, the unionizing even in the steel industry all took place under the shadow of the Wagner act, the hopes that it would be the law but with actually no help from it, because the liberty league had seen to it that in every court of the land, the courts had issued an order forbidding the NRA to carry out its tasks, unless employers voluntarily agreed to it.

There was a group in the American legion, especially in the state of Pennsylvania, that wanted to have a march on Washington, Mussolini had a lot of influence in the US, the idea of a march, you know,

I meant it seriously when I said that to have a government that went toward the left in the 1930s was very unusual, even the French popular front only lasted about a year, what was the most common thing was either an actual open fascist regime, over most of central and eastern Europe or a national unity coalition, so that there were no elections, no opposition parties, and so forth.

One of the things that is most distinctive about the US in these years is that it went through the depression not only with a elected government and a freedom of speech, an open opposition parties and so forth, is very, very much alive and active unlike indeed most of the world, certainly most of the Americas during the 1930s, but also that it was in this period that the working people first began to believe that it was possible for the government to be a major force on their side, a force for social justice, in previous years the most they hoped for the government was that it would stay out of their way, and not put them in jail if they tried to go out on strike or something, but now they discovered that it was possible to have government administration, government agencies that could actually intervene to offset the local established power of big business, this was especially important by the way to workers in the American south, the American south of course was still under an absolutely segregated racist regime, throughout the 1930s, and the efforts of unions to become established were generally buried under the defeat of the great textile workers of 1934, but in some areas like the iron and steel region of Birmingham, Alabama or Tobacco region of Winston, Salem or the shipping areas of Memphis Tennessee, workers were able to organize always with a strong left wing leadership that would attempt to bring white and black workers together but also always demanding the assistance of government agencies in Washington to help them counter act the deeply established feudal power really of the racist regimes that existed in those areas, so that this sense that it

was possible to find a friend in the white house I think it counts for much of the legend of popularity that Roosevelt brought with him,

The Roosevelt administration and indeed the general leftward swing around the country was very seriously checked, halted in 1938, the story really begins in late 1937 when the economy that had becoming better and better and better, very slowly suddenly collapsed once again, and there was a second great drop in some areas even more severe than in 1929-30 in the country, the steel industry for example in the month of September 1937 dismissed one half of its workers, around the country as a whole, in this setting the opponents of Roosevelt now were able to cry look the new deal is complete failure, it is not succeeded even in the main promise that it made to you, and right wing groups became increasingly vocal around the country as a whole, Philip Jenkins has recently published a marvelous book about the far right in Pennsylvania, the great industrial heartland of the country, called HOODS AND SHIRTS, and between the various black shirts, brown shirts, KKK hoods, there was a major mobilization by 1938 calling itself the Christian front, and using anti-semitism as the main weapon of its attack on the Roosevelt administration. This counter attack was strong enough that in 1938 many of the most progressive state administrations were defeated, the Earl regime in Pennsylvania, the farmer labor government in Minnesota, others around the land went down to defeat and more conservative republican regimes came in while at the same time enough republicans were elected to congress from the north, that by joining together with the racist southern democrats there was actually a right wing majority in congress, from 1938 on, and the first efforts were made to try and undo some of what the new deal had done, especially to cut back on the government workers projects, that were then in existence, so that a law was passed in 1939, saying that anyone that had on a government project 18 months or more had to be fired, no foreigners could be eligible for relief work, that anyone who wanted relief work had to sign that he was not a communist, all of this goes into the law, in 1939,

This actually became the law, the beginning of 1939 and as a result there were large scale dismissals from the relief projects and a lot of the projects were ended, these were the ones you see that people from the left had hoped were going to be the beginning of a new public sector of the economy, and so this is what the right clearly wanted to stop at this point, the result was a wave of strikes of workers on relief across the country, the first time I know the unemployed went on strike but they were unemployed working for the government and in some places were successful in restoring some of what was cut back by various states, but there was a strong swing back toward the right in American politics that in some ways resembled France in 1939, that still had officially the same coalition of parties governing but the politics were going in the opposite direction by this point and in the early years of the war really tended to strengthen this reactionary current in American politics, but the early years of the war did one other thing, with very high levels of employment workers now had extremely good chances of winning strikes, the sizes of the union movement just expanded astronomically in 1940-41, elections could now be held because the Wagner act had been ruled constitutional and in almost every case the workers just swept in the elections, even the great company that everybody had in mind Ford Motor works, Ford had promised that before he recognized a union he would blow up the factories, but there was a brief strike and then an election and the unions were recognized and even Henry Ford had to sit down and deal with unions so that there was still then all of these powerful tendencies in both directions, even at the end of the 1930s but with the strong consolidation of the right wing current in national and state politics over most of the country.

I think really from 1936 on much of Roosevelt's policy was based on the belief that another world war was coming, this meant first of all that he started devoting increasing amounts of funds to rearmament, especially to navy expenditures, in 1937 and 1938, it meant that in terms of foreign policy toward Europe he pretty much followed the British lead, that is meant he went along with Chamberlain, and the peacemaking policy, but increasingly began to distance himself from them, and speaking friendly ways

about collective security against aggressors around the world, especially in 1937-1938 taking on that line and certainly after Japan reopened its war against China in 1937 he was quite certain that was a front that war was most likely to come from to the US, this had one very positive effect in US policy towards South America, because it encourages the development of what Roosevelt calls the good neighbor policy, as early as 1934 he had attempted to win more friendly relations with governments of South America, by putting a stop to the frequent invasions of countries especially in the Caribbean, by American marines, the last troops withdrawn from Nicaragua and from Cuba in 1934, and most significantly of all perhaps when Mexico nationalized its oil industry in 1938 the Roosevelt administration did not open up economic warfare against Mexico, now this is important because every other government would have done so, before that time or indeed after and there was enormous pressure for in the State Department to try and do to Mexico then what the US has tried to do to Cuba since 1960, but Roosevelt fought this off, and developed an increasingly open alliance with the very progressive government of Mexico at the end of the 1930s, so much of this policy I think is informed by the knowledge that both Germany, Italy and Japan had decided that the cure for the depression they faced is to redraw the map of the world, is to take on colonies, Italy's unemployment can be solved in Ethiopia, Germany's? , Japan above all needs economic control of China and the rubber of the Indies, so that facing this pressure Roosevelt was aware that the prospect of war was more and more real as the stories went on.