

The new deal by paul k.conkin

Literature



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Conkin argues that the New Deal is, in fact, a series of disparate moves and programs that are unified in Roosevelt's personality, hence inseparable from his life. The next two chapters outline the generally accepted parts of the New Deal; the first consists of the programs that were seen as pro-business with the second part beginning with welfare legislation. Roosevelt's failure to pursue a coherent program during the Depression allowed a variety of fascinating people to enter the government.

The second New Deal was characterized by Congress passing the National Labor Relations Act, securing the future of organized labor, and the creation of the Works Progress Administration to provide temporary unemployment relief. In a way, Conkin believes it to be a precursor to the welfare state. And yet, government and business were not talking, and so mistrust ensued. In the final chapter, the court fight and depression of 1937 hurt FDR's status, but yet it proved to be the catalyst for the final recovery. With Keynesian economists advocating deficit spending, Roosevelt reluctantly went on a borrowing spree instead of trying to balance the budget. Conkin finally notes that here it proves that the strategists of the New Deal learned very little, with major economic decisions still being done by private parties. Yet, in his final words, he says that the thirties could have been much better or worse, and that judgment has to be reserved towards Roosevelt. After mostly criticizing Roosevelt and his policies directly and indirectly, here Conkin gives a small disclaimer, undermining support for his objective.

Written in a straightforward manner, The New Deal is organized somewhat chronologically, in a way that presents Roosevelt as the New Deal himself. Often it slips that though architects of the New Deal were many, as a personality Roosevelt took it on himself to be a face to the American people

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on the government's intervention during the Depression. It's a brief treatise on the role of Roosevelt and his many failures and relatively few successes during the time.

As a book originally written thirty years after the New Deal, it leads the number of New Left interpretations of how Roosevelt failed to truly alleviate the common man in America. It is a deviation from more popular depictions of Roosevelt having saved America. It is worth reading, just for another view of the Depression years; however, it lacks the final point that would have made Conkin's criticism complete.