

# [How important was the strength of opposition between 1933-37 to the new deal? ess...](https://assignbuster.com/how-important-was-the-strength-of-opposition-between-1933-37-to-the-new-deal-essay-sample/)

When judging potency of political opposition, one has to consider both direct and indirect variables; the size of its following, the possibility in reality of the opposition working, and both its direct force and its indirect influences. All of these come into play in opposition to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal from 1933 to 1937, which was brought in as his attempt to raise America out of the Depression from the Wall Street Crash. As an extremely experimental project, it is easy to realise that Roosevelt would receive opposition from all sides. The left side of politics believed that Roosevelt’s plans were not taking reform far enough, and imposed pressure on him to do so. Meanwhile, the right-wing felt that the New Deal was far too radical, and saw Roosevelt as a character bringing the USA to communism. The Republican-dominated Supreme Court had many conflicts with the new Democrat President, and had more than enough power to make a stand against him. Various individuals such as Huey Long of Louisiana, and Dr Francis Townsend also rallied support against Roosevelt’s plans, as well as big businesses who saw Roosevelt as a class traitor. The strength of the opposition varies, as does opinion of how influential it was.

By far the strongest opponent to Roosevelt was the Supreme Court. As a group of Republican judges with the power to change and completely out rule any piece of legislation they choose, Doug & Susan Willoughby say ‘ It was inevitable that these clashes would occur’, echoed by Clements. Roosevelt came into problems when the Court began to deem his doings as unconstitutional, starting with ‘ Black Monday’ on 27th May 1935. As a result of the Schecher Poultry Corporation v. United States case (also known as the ‘ Sick Chickens’ case), the NIRA was seen as unconstitutional by the Court, and subsequently removed legal protection for labour unions.

Though the Supreme Court removed the act on the grounds that it went against the constitution, it was also as a reminder to Roosevelt of the limits on his power. Brogan tells us ‘’Black Monday’ was seen as a mortal blow to the New Deal. It proved to be nothing of the sort’ which plays down the idea that the Supreme Court were a sturdy opponent. However, Clements sees the Court as a powerful challenger, pointing out that ‘ In the 140 years before 1935, the Supreme Court had found only about 60 federal laws unconstitutional; in 18 months during 1935 and 1936, it found 11 to be so’. Strong positive opinion of the Court amongst American citizens meant that Roosevelt would have to tread carefully if he were to attempt to challenge the Supreme Court.

The ‘ Thunder on the Left’ was the strong left-wing criticisms and alternatives to the New Deal that threatened Roosevelt, and affected his experiments moving further to the left. The most notable left-wing critic was Huey Long, who Roosevelt noted as ‘ a political rival’. His ‘ Share Our Wealth’ campaign gained mass popularity: Long claimed ‘ that, in 1935, his movement had 7. 5 million members’, though Doug & Susan Willoughby are quick to remind us that ‘ he did exaggerate!’. A secret poll conducted in 1935 showed that up to 4 million people may vote for him in 1936, which meant that Long would hold the balance of power in the election. However, his assassination in 1935 meant that his influence in the votes could not be realised. In terms of his potency, Clements felt Roosevelt ‘ breathed a sigh of relief at the news’ of Long’s assassination, implying FDR felt threatened by the critic at the time. Albert Fried believes, however, ‘ Roosevelt welcomed a certain amount of militancy on his left so that he could keep the right in line and appear all the more moderate’, which suggests Long’s opposition did not affect Roosevelt as much as Clements argued.

‘ The Golden Hour of the Little Flower’ was a radio programme presented by Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930’s. As an influential hour tuned into by an estimated third of the nation at its peak (much higher than Roosevelt’s fireside chats), Coughlin originally rallied support for FDR’s plans, saying ‘ The New Deal is Christ’s Deal’. However Coughlin’s support slipped when he felt that the President hadn’t done enough to change the bank systems. His National Union for Social Justice, formed in 1935, only polled 882, 479 votes to FDR’s 27. 7 million in 1936, thus the Reverend’s attacks did not transfer to votes. Coughlin’s slip towards anti-Semitism and like-mindedness with European Fascist dictators eroded his popularity, due to the hatred of Hitler and Mussolini throughout the US. ‘ I am fighting Communism, Huey Longism, Coughlinism, Townsendism’ As the traditional rivals to the Democrats, Roosevelt was bound to find opposition from the right mainly in the form of the Republican Party. No matter what Roosevelt did, as a rival party the Republicans were likely to pick holes in the New Deal.

After it had become apparent that Roosevelt had actually saved the capitalist system in the USA, many of those who had supported this cause now turned against him when he started making changes to prevent future problems. As the party which represented large businesses and the upper class rich families, the Republicans particularly opposed the raised taxing on higher earners via the Revenue Act of 1935, which became known as the ‘ Soak the Rich’ tax, which Leuchtenburg comments on by saying ‘ Roosevelt’s tax proposal, the first which reached directly into the pockets of the wealthy, raised an outcry from business’. They criticised the large budget deficit that Roosevelt maintained to fund the high government expenditure in the form of alphabet agencies, they condemned the money which was, as they saw it, being wasted in jobs which had no real use, but the largest criticism of Roosevelt was his intervention in the economy, where the Republicans stood for laissez-faire and followed it strictly, as shown in Hoover’s time as president.

Hoover’s poor leadership during this period meant the Republicans were ignored as a party, which continued as Fried comments that ‘ After the election it was widely speculated that the Republican Party…would soon follow the Federalists and the Whigs into the dustbin of history’. Only when the Supreme Court mounted an assault on Roosevelt did the Republican party get any leverage, and even then it made little difference. The Republican Party were weak in opposition to the New Deal. The main body of right opposition, the American Liberty League (ALL), founded in 1934 when unemployment was at 11 million, were a group who promoted private property and enterprise free of law regulation. The group claimed their aims were not anti-Roosevelt, rather to “ teach the duty of government”. Opposition was found even within Roosevelt’s party, with the League being formed and backed by some Conservative Democrats. The group used terms such as ‘ that cripple in the White House’ to refer to Roosevelt and compared his actions to the Communist regime of the USSR, which was a large over-exaggeration.

Clements tells us ‘ There is even a suggestion that the Far Right planned a coup d’état against Roosevelt’, which would have marked the Liberty League as a very active opponent. However, the League only managed to conjure up 125, 000 members at its peak. Though the ALL were the main driving force of right-wing opposition of the New Deal, Clements believes Roosevelt “ was more concerned about threats from the Left”, as there were groups who could band together as a formidable voting force against him. The Liberty League become very subdued after FDR’s landslide in 1936, and as a threat, the group were minimal in the overall scheme. The opposition to the New Deal across the left, the right and the Supreme Court varied in its effective strengths between 1933 and 1937. The strongest figure early on in this period was Huey Long, who was rallying support against FDR and became a serious contender for his Presidency in the 1936 election before his untimely death. Along with Coughlin & Townsend, FDR’s policies were swayed to the left by this ‘ thunder’. Clements, however, believes Roosevelt’s opposition during the first New Deal ‘ did not constitute a serious threat’.

However, after FDR’s landslide in 1936, opposition began to heat up once more when he had run into problems with the Supreme Court. Riding on the back of the Court’s power and respect, the right wing parties and business corporations attacked Roosevelt and named him a dictator. The right’s influence affected Roosevelt’s social security acts, which had been originally pushed by left critic Francis Townsend. This shows how both sides had a part to play in the New Deal. However it is undeniably the Supreme Court who had the largest opposing force for Roosevelt to reckon with. With the ability to change or completely out-rule an act passed by the President, there was no way any of the figures or organisations who opposed FDR could match such power.

Henry Wallace was quoted by Tindall & Shi to have said “ The whole New Deal really went up in smoke as a result of the Supreme Court fight”. Not only did the Supreme Court deem various agencies and acts unconstitutional, they also wrecked Roosevelt’s popularity and allowed for new opposition to form, such as the revival of some right-wing force. Without a doubt, the Supreme Court were the strongest and most influential opposition to the New Deal; without it the right would not have been able to mount any focused opposition, and FDR’s popularity is likely to have stayed high without the feuds between the two.

References:

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