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The Union Party and the 1936 Presidential Election

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Doctor of Philosophy in American Studies

The University of Sussex

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Work not submitted elsewhere for Examination

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Peggy and Charles Reeve.

University of Sussex

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The Union Party and the 1936 Presidential Election

Summary

The legacy of the Union Party, while small, should not be ignored. Although historians have largely disregarded the role of the Union Party in the 1936 presidential election, the argument presented in this thesis suggests that the Union Party emerged from a wide base of popular political opposition to the New Deal. Its failures were many, both as a party and as a coherent force. Ultimately, the Union Party faced a considerable power in the shape of the New Deal coalition, and the newly formed party proved incapable of draining voters away from the incumbent, President Franklin Roosevelt. The New Deal, moreover, was singularly successful in galvanising the American people. By turning his 1936 election campaign into a referendum on the success of the New Deal, Roosevelt challenged the electorate to choose the nation's future direction: an America where collective prosperity would be maintained, or a return to the divisive, individualistic self-interest that had brought about the Depression. The electorate made their choice clear: over 27.5 million Americans voted for Roosevelt – over 10 million more than for the Republican candidate, Alf Landon. Only 892,000 voted for William Lemke, presidential candidate of the Union Party.

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Introduction

Saturday, December 19, 1936, was a typical winter's day in Chicago. The snow was falling and the temperature hovered around freezing. The crowds, rushing about their last-minute Christmas shopping, barely paused to glance at the headline of the *Chicago Defender* reporting Joe Louis's record eighteen-second knockout of Eddie Simms as they passed the newspaper stand outside the downtown hotel.

¹ Inside, seventy-two men and women waited, cramped and silent, for a meeting to be called to order. They had all faced difficulties in travelling there, many from Chicago and the cities of Illinois, but others spurning the sunshine of Florida and California to ensure their attendance at this inaugural national conference. Finally, the moment arrived, and their attention focused on the podium at front of the room. As William Lemke entered, the eager crowd rose in warm appreciation. Reaching the small platform, the presidential candidate of the Union Party turned to address the audience. This was no moment of triumph. No time to bask in the glow of his adulation. Delivered in a tone as chilled as the weather outside, his opening words silenced the room. 'About two or three million people applauded for me just like you did today but they forgot about me on November third.'²

Lemke's words weighed heavily on the dedicated delegates of the Union Party convention, but they attracted little attention from the wider world. This contrasted sharply to the wave of publicity that had marked the birth of the Union Party on June 18, 1936. Front pages across the nation from New York to Madison to Los Angeles to Spartanburg, South Carolina ran with the news that Lemke, Republican member of the House of Representatives from North Dakota, had been declared as the presidential candidate of the newly formed Union Party. Standing on a platform of economic and social policies that Lemke claimed would 'save democracy and put an end to the so-

called Depression,' the Union Party launched a crusade against the 'reactionary elements of both parties.'³ Speaking to reporters from the Associated Press on the day of the launch, Lemke identified Illinois as a state likely to fall to the new party. Franklin Roosevelt had achieved an 18 per cent swing to seize the state for the Democrats in 1932, but, Lemke explained, with blocks of businesses and residential property in receivership, dissatisfaction rife in the mining and agricultural sectors, and both traditional parties torn apart by infighting, 'the situation in the state is ideal for the success of our party.'⁴ The situation described in Illinois was not unique. The papers hesitated to declare Lemke a significant contender for the presidency in November, but if the new party was able to harness the discontent of a nation still gripped by the Depression, there was a common belief that Lemke might accumulate a large share of the popular vote and undermine the president's chance of re-election. With Democrats possibly voting Union Party in 1936, there was a real and palpable concern among the Roosevelt team that Lemke might tip the election in favour of Republican candidate Alf Landon, deprive the administration of votes in several swing states, or even force the election to a dead heat. Democratic Representative Martin Sweeney of Ohio expressed such a sentiment when he declared that Lemke would 'garner 20,000,000 votes and possibly put the election of a president up to the House of Representatives.'⁵

Lemke himself was not an insignificant political figure nor was the threat of the Union Party improbable. An experienced political organiser, in his early career he had been responsible for the establishment of the North Dakota Non-Partisan League (NPL), which through its exploitation of the primary system had swept aside the traditional conservative Republican state leadership and delivered to its followers a package of substantial, lasting social and economic reforms. The political model that the NPL pioneered in North Dakota appealed in the western farm states, and in the form of the Farmer-Labor Party, remained the dominant political force in Minnesota.⁶ Upon his arrival in Congress in 1933, Lemke aligned himself with the bloc of reform-minded legislators, mainly within the Republican Party. These so-called 'insurgents',

elected mainly from the western states, had risen to challenge the pro-business-leaning leadership of the party during the Taft presidency and thereafter had supported Theodore Roosevelt's campaign in 1912 under the Progressive Party banner. Defeated, the insurgents had returned to the party coalition and, together with the northeastern party leadership, they formed a dominant power bloc in Congress. Constant tension remained, however, and in 1932, sympathetic with his pro-reform platform, the majority of insurgent legislators supported the Democrat Roosevelt instead.

The insurgents were not a formal voting bloc, but when their individual interests aligned, they were a powerful force. They had no leader, but the longest-serving member was Senator William Borah of Idaho. From Lemke's earliest days in Congress, Borah and the North Dakota representative formed a link based upon their shared ideological background. Lemke's connections, however, extended beyond the insurgent bloc. In particular, Lemke's disappointment with the pace and direction of Roosevelt's First New Deal brought him into at first a loose and then subsequently firm political alliance with the principal public opponents of the Roosevelt administration: the so-called 'radio priest' Father Charles Coughlin, the old-age pension campaigner Doctor Francis Townsend, and Gerald L.K. Smith, who had taken control of the Share-our-Wealth movement following the assassination of popular Senator Huey Long in 1935. With these powerful backers, Lemke would eventually form the Union Party. It was this combination of political influence and potential mass public support moreover that underpinned the Union Party's potential threat.⁷

The Union Party, however, remained in conception and reality a loose conglomerate. The Republican insurgents, movements such as Long's Share-our-Wealth (SoW), Townsend's Old-Age-Revolving-Pension (OARP) organisation, Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ) and Lemke's NPL all shared loose ideological connections. The Depression, they believed, had been brought about not by American failings, but by the manipulation of the U.S. financial system by European

banking families. They sought to free America from interference from international affairs and reassert traditional values of independence, isolation and self-determination. Finally, they shared a common belief that the state had an active role to play in resolving the economic and social crisis. Their proposed policy solutions were, however, entirely different. This pro-reform thrust placed them within the broad ideological tradition in American politics reflected in the Populist and Progressive movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historian Michael Kazin famously defined populism as: 'a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilise the former against the latter.' Populism is, Kazin concluded, 'a grand form of rhetorical optimism; once mobilized, there is nothing ordinary Americans cannot accomplish.' Just as these earlier movements represented a wide spectrum of political interests and no set of commonly agreed policy objectives, so too did the mass leaders of the 1930s.⁸

Such is the all-embracing nature of American populism that there is a danger in using a simple phrase like 'populist' or 'progressive' to describe the various individuals and formal or informal popular movements that might fall within Kazin's loose definition, as to do so suggests a detailed coherence in policy intentions that was not evident in reality. More problematically, to describe a particular movement as 'populist' risks confusion with the People's Party (commonly known as the Populist Party) or the Progressive Party that campaigned for the presidential elections in 1892, 1912 and 1924. Indeed, even beneath the canvas of these two parties, there was considerable variance in motive and policy solutions. As Kazin suggests, populism is 'more an impulse than an ideology,' and 'is too elastic and promiscuous' to be the basis for an individual's political or social adherence.⁹ As such, the term 'populist' itself becomes potentially unhelpful, as it 'leads to ahistorical debates about who is or is not a true populist, debates that are just an indirect way of announcing one's political opinions.'¹⁰ In recognition of this difficulty, in this thesis I have not employed the words 'populist' or

'progressive' to describe any individuals or formal or informal movements. Instead, I have adopted the phrase 'radical reform' to recognise the breadth of views advocated by the formal and informal movements that contributed in both large and small ways to the formation of the Union Party: such as the NPL, OARP, NUSJ and SoW; informal associations such as the Republican insurgents in Congress; and small third parties such as the Farm-Labor Party in Minnesota or the Progressive Party in Wisconsin. Each of these movements was loosely politically and ideologically connected by a desire to see the implementation of social and economic reforms in the early 1930s to ease the nation from the grip of the Depression and to provide citizens with some protection from concentrations of power be they industry, the wealthy, banks, or indeed, the federal government itself. They are 'radical' because in each case, they departed markedly from the usual or customary – they sought thorough-going and in many respects fundamental and essential reform to the social, economic underpinnings of American society. Their policy solutions were more far-reaching than those adopted by the Roosevelt administration in the legislation that made up the First and Second New Deals.

Despite the emergent threat of Lemke and his political backers, the Democratic leadership publically remained bullish as to Roosevelt's prospects for re-election in 1936. Arriving for the Democratic National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, in mid-July 1936, party chairman James A. Farley commented that 'to no degree' did the announcement of the formation of the Union Party alter his opinion that the president would carry every state come November.¹¹ Privately, though, Farley exhibited concern. Polling data gathered by Deputy Chairman of the Democratic National Committee Emil Hurja indicated the extent of the Union Party threat. His final report issued to the Democratic leadership on October 25, concluded that Roosevelt might win the election by ninety-five electoral votes, but that a swing of just 1.8 per cent in the five most closely contested states would hand the Republicans victory. Such was the apparent closeness of the election that a few thousand votes for the Union Party could influence

the overall outcome of the election. Indeed, in five of the seven states (Ohio, Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska and West Virginia), according to Hurja's data, the difference between a Roosevelt and a Landon victory was the size of the potential Lemke vote. A small increase in his support might have handed Landon the election.¹²

Irrespective of its potential power, the Union Party failed spectacularly in November. Its campaign was poorly managed, funded and conducted and its candidates for Congress were defeated in every election, both local and national. Despite Hurja's predictions, Lemke failed to get on the ballot in fourteen states (including Townsend's home state of California and Long's Louisiana). In addition, there were six further states in which the Union Party could not even run for election under its own name; instead the party had to operate with other party titles previously registered with the electoral authorities.¹³ In the final count, Lemke registered a national total of 891,886 popular votes. Winning no votes in the Electoral College, he received 5 per cent or more of the total votes cast in only five states.¹⁴ Summing up the new party's performance, the Washington correspondent of the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* commented, 'When you consider all the reams of publicity devoted to it and the fact that it commanded the support of some of America's most accomplished "rabble-rousers," you have to admit that the Union Party...wound up as a first rate fizzle.'¹⁵

In these circumstances, the Union Party did indeed appear as a rather insignificant footnote to the 1936 election. Certainly, Roosevelt achieved a considerable victory, securing forty-six states to his Republican opponent Alf Landon's two, as well as a sizeable margin in the popular vote. The election was indeed historic for its overwhelming endorsement of the president; no election, in fact, had been quite so one-sided since 1820, when incumbent James Monroe crushed John Quincy Adams. Landslide elections have occurred more frequently since Roosevelt's monumental victory in 1936, notably in 1972 and 1984, but under any justification the 1936 election proved seminal.¹⁶ It cemented Roosevelt's reputation as the principal

architect of the New Deal, it provided a huge popular mandate for his Depression-era measures, it established a new electoral base for the Democratic Party (notably among African-Americans and organised labour), and it sealed the political fate of Landon, Lemke and the rabble-rousing radical reformers of the early 1930s. Never again would Coughlin, Smith and Townsend gain the public support and notoriety they had enjoyed during Roosevelt's first term.

Despite its ultimate failure, however, the Union Party still emerged as an important, albeit transient, third party. The Union Party developed from the deep unease many Americans felt with the direction of the Roosevelt administration. It sprang from the radical protest traditions of Long, Coughlin, Townsend and a group of insurgents within Congress, attempting to bring these diverse groups under one electoral umbrella. It was impossible, though, to satisfy such a wide-ranging set of ideologies and the Union Party built a weak and inconsistent base from the constituent groups that loosely gathered behind the party in its development and in its electoral campaign. The party lacked cohesion; it had no core intellectual agenda that captured the will of the radical malcontents, and thus it failed to engage the electorate. It was additionally outmanoeuvred and ran a poor campaign. This analysis of the Union Party thus tells us much about the disunity of the radical insurgent reformers of the 1930s; it indicates that despite their common dislike of the president, they failed to deliver a collective blow to the administration or to organise themselves behind a single candidate with a consistent and encompassing message. Furthermore, the thesis shows how in a relatively short period (one presidential term), a third party rose and subsequently fell. I do not suggest that the Union Party was representative of other third-party failings, but the party most assuredly struggled to gain acceptance in a two-party system. Nevertheless, as Hurja recognised, third parties could indeed pose a credible threat, and the actions of the Roosevelt administration indicate how the president sought to weaken his political opponents, including Coughlin, Long, Lemke and indeed the Union Party itself.

This is a political history of the Union Party. In the first three chapters, I address the myriad groups who contributed to an anti-Roosevelt agenda and consider how, over time, they began to coalesce in the loosest of alliances (one marked by no small measure of mutual acrimony) and how that weak coalition ultimately fused into a party. As the final three chapters indicate, however, the glue that united the coalition proved an unsatisfactory and brittle compound; indeed, the only ones who strictly adhered to the party were Lemke himself and the few hundred thousand voters who stamped the ticket for Union on November 3, 1936.

Although there has been a substantial amount of biographical material produced on the major figures involved in the 1936 election, the scholarly material on the Union Party remains extremely limited. Indeed, most contemporaries and indeed historians have long forgotten the Union Party or relegated it to a few pages on the 1936 election.¹⁷ There has been only one monograph focused entirely on the history of the Union Party, David H. Bennett's *Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party 1932-1936*, published in 1969.¹⁸ In contrast to the biographical approach taken by Bennett, I present an analytic view of the origins of the party, its competing basis, both ideologically and politically, and, most importantly, a critical assessment of both the shortcomings of the alliance and the political party that ultimately arose from it.

This work draws upon a wide body of primary evidence derived from both private and public sources. In the first instance, to consider the motivations for union and political alliance, I have utilised the extensive public papers of Borah and Lemke and, in the absence of any significant archives, primary material obtained from a range of sources relating to the activities of Long, Townsend, Smith and Coughlin including autobiographies and private interviews. Secondly, the Democratic Party view of the development and potential threat of the Union Party is derived from the private papers of the president and those of the Democratic National Committee, James A. Farley and Emil Hurja. Finally, to gain a national portrait of the reception of the Union Party and

the forces that led to its creation, I have drawn upon a range of newspapers, the *Congressional Record*, published speeches and opinion polls produced by the Gallup organisation. Utilising these extensive sources, I attempt to provide an understanding of the motivation of the Union Party's main protagonists and the response of the Democratic administration, in particular Hurja, whose papers have been rarely used, to garner a detailed understanding of the perception of Lemke's new party amongst political contemporaries and the American electorate as a whole and to explain its ultimate failure.

The Union Party defeat had been near total. Driven to the very fringes of American politics, the Union Party continued to campaign, but its leading protagonists would never again achieve the levels of popular support they had enjoyed in the summer of 1936. Lemke instructed delegates at the December convention of that year to re-group, ready to 'sweep the nation' in 1940, but despite his best efforts he formally closed the Union Party in 1939.¹⁹ The party's sad defeat, however, stands in stark contrast to the enduring success of the legislation its founders pressed upon the administration and which was adopted in the Second New Deal. It is in this irony that perhaps the real story of the importance of the Union Party can be derived.

¹ *Chicago Defender*, December 19, 1936.

² Document titled 'Minutes of the 1936 National Conference of the Union Party,' December 19, 1936, William Lemke (hereafter WL) Papers (hereafter WLP), Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

³ *Spartanburg Herald*, June 20, 1936.

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- ⁴ Dave Leip, '1932 Presidential Election Results,' Dave *Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/> (18 November 2011); *Spartanburg Herald*, June 21, 1936.
- ⁵ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, June 20, 1936.
- ⁶ Edward C. Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), Chapters 2-3; David H. Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 90-92.
- ⁷ James Holt, *Congressional Insurgents and the Party System 1909-1916* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 29-33.
- ⁸ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-2.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 3.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 6.
- ¹¹ *Pittsburgh Press*, July 20, 1936.
- ¹² Document titled 'Preliminary Report on Election Situation,' September 1936, document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, and document titled 'National Inquirer Poll,' October 1936, Emil Hurja Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (hereafter FDRL), Hyde Park, New York (hereafter EHP).
- ¹³ David O. Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' *North Dakota History*, 34:2 (1967), 150.
- ¹⁴ Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/> (22 June 2011).
- ¹⁵ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
- ¹⁶ Election data derived from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.

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- ¹⁷ James MacGregor Burns, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (London: Secker & Warburg Limited, 1956), no mention of the Union Party; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1960) 555-561, 579, 626-630; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper, 1963) 181; Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR – the New Deal Years, 1933-1937* (New York: Random House, 1986), 639; Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 204, 207; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 116-122; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 282-284, 286; Robert S. McElvaine, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2002) 64; Conrad Black, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 385; Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 365, 371; H.W. Brands, *Traitor to his Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), no mention of the Union Party; Alan Brinkley, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), no mention of the Union Party; Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 217-233; Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 125-126, 128-132, 163-172, 245; Sheldon B. Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1973), 103, 107, 112-115, 122-125, 127-132, 136-139; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 255-258, 260-261; Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin and the New Deal* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 73, 84-93, 202-203; Abraham Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement: A Political Study* (New York: Bookman

Associates, 1963) 140, 172-178, 205; Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan & The Rise of Social Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 145; Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith: Minister of Hate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 52, 56, 58-62, 89; Marion C. McKenna, *Borah* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), no mention of the Union Party.

¹⁸ Bennett, *Demagogues*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 274-275.

Chapter One

Divergence

We must tame these fellows and make them useful to us.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932.¹

Franklin Roosevelt won the 1932 election promising to end the Depression. Yet by December 1934, little progress had been made. The stock market remained stagnant and unemployment was at record levels. The New Deal that the president had offered the nation appeared to be seriously misfiring. In the face of this failure, opposition grew toward the Democratic administration. Conservative Republicans channelled their discontent through existing party structures, but opponents proposing social and economic reform more radical than that adopted by the Democratic administration had no such structures within the traditional political parties through which to vent their frustrations. Within this vacuum, a diverse range of critics emerged, offering radical solutions to the Depression. These men would together influence the formation of the Union Party in 1936.

Franklin Roosevelt had won the presidential election in 1932 promising to end the Depression. It had taken 20 years for the Dow Jones Industrial Average to double from 100 to 200 points, but between spring 1927 and summer 1929, it practically doubled again – hitting a high of 381 points in September. Then, in October 1929, the bubble burst and panic selling set in. The index collapsed, losing 40 per cent of its value in one month.² The crash set off an economic disaster on an unprecedented scale. Between 1928 and 1932, gross national product fell by 30 per cent and unemployment rose from 3 to 25 per cent. The severe economic downturn particularly affected the banks. In 1930, 1,345 small rural banks, lacking sufficient reserves to

weather economic fluctuations, closed. Including both rural and metropolitan institutions, 3,747 banks had closed by 1932. By 1933, the crisis began to impact on the credit system of entire states. In March 1932, 34 states closed all their banks.³ America was ideologically and practically unprepared for the consequences of mass unemployment. Whereas Germany and Great Britain had put in place sophisticated mechanisms of social support including unemployment insurance and old-age pension entitlements a generation earlier, America had stuck vigorously to individualistic and local solutions. This placed the federal government apart from substantial intervention in the economy and left the provision of welfare to state and local government or charitable bodies. These sources proved inadequate, however, to deal with the sheer numbers of Americans seeking relief from the social and economic effects of the financial collapse. For those who had little, the Depression only made their lives more difficult. For those with more to lose, the Depression was a devastating economic and psychological blow. White-collar workers, factory managers, skilled manufacturing employees, local shop owners and small farmers had all benefitted from the boom years of the 1920s. Owners had mortgaged their homes and farms to provide money for investment in expansion of their businesses. Their workers had enjoyed increased salaries, which in turn they had invested in property. Most, likely, had savings tied up in the banks. When the economy collapsed, they found their businesses unsustainable, mortgages un-payable and savings wiped out.⁴ United by their common suffering, the newly unemployed were willing to come together to protest against those they blamed for their economic downfall: big business, banks, international money lenders and the government that had slavishly served their interests. With state and charitable donations running dry, as many as two million people took part in some form of collective protest in the 1930s.⁵

In the election campaign, Roosevelt reached out directly to those disempowered lower-middle-class voters most affected by the Depression. As he explained in a national broadcast in April 1932, providing relief to the 'forgotten man' at

the bottom of the economic pyramid (the farmer, the small banker, the businessman and the home owner) would restore buying power to the masses, stimulating demand for products and services, increasing employment and, in turn, boosting growth across the economy.⁶ His platform comprised of plans for a series of radical social and economic reforms including the destruction of monopoly, strict federal regulation of utilities companies and the introduction of unemployment and old-age insurance. Offering a diametrically opposed platform to Hoover's, Roosevelt pledged in his acceptance speech nothing less than 'a new deal for the American people.'⁷

Roosevelt's campaign message was immensely popular. In November 1932, he won an overwhelming victory with 23 million votes to Hoover's 16 million and a 472 to 59 margin in the Electoral College. Yet, despite appearances, a revolution had not occurred. So unpopular was Hoover amongst middle-class voters that any Democratic candidate offering some form of relief would have won the election. Despite the heady rhetoric, in November 1932, the Democratic Party remained conventional in its political and economic rationale. The party's national leadership retained links with big business that were as strong as the Republicans' and Roosevelt, like his predecessor, remained committed to balancing the budget. The Democratic victory was not a result of any shift in the electoral or ideological map, but rather a consequence of the Republicans' failure to manage the Depression.⁸

Aware that much of his party remained ideologically conservative and that policy success necessitated a middle way that incorporated diverse perspectives, Roosevelt established his so-called 'Brains Trust.' This group of intellectuals developed a coherent analysis of the causes of the Depression intended to appeal to both liberal and conservative wings of the party and the electorate. The First New Deal created by the Brains Trust and passed by Congress set out a framework not for replacement of the existing capitalistic structure, but for its rehabilitation. The origin of the Depression was, they concluded, not international abuse of the credit system, but flaws in the domestic economy – a 'fundamental mal-distribution of income' that had

resulted in a critical loss in consumer purchasing power. Seeking to keep costs low and profits high, industry had abused the economic system – reducing income in the farm sector, failing to increase workers' wages, keeping conditions poor through lack of investment, and keeping prices high. With the nation unable to consume what it had the capacity to produce, the economic system collapsed. The Depression, they concluded, could not be cured by implementing reforms to break the control of industry and artificially inflate the value of the currency, for large-scale concentrations of power were unavoidable within a modern industrial state. What was needed was not to break up the corporations, but to make them more accountable for their actions; to establish a new economic system in which the needs and interests of industry, owners and stockholders could be balanced directly with the purchasing power of the nation. To achieve this balance, they proposed the creation of a government partnership with industry through which businesses could cooperate to regulate themselves. As Brains Trust member Rexford Tugwell explained, '[I]t is not proposed to have the government run industry; it is proposed to have the government furnish the requisite leadership.'⁹

Given the conservative tenor struck by the Roosevelt administration, it is perhaps not surprising that when Congress convened, the president's business-friendly reform proposals found support amongst the traditional wealthy leadership of the Republican Party (the so-called 'old guard'), drawn mainly from the northeastern states that had remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War. Twenty-five per cent of old-guard senators and 35 per cent of old-guard representatives voted in favour of the legislation that made up the First New Deal in its entirety.¹⁰ The First New Deal found less support amongst the president's more radical supporters. Radical reforms, however, were improbable as any such proposals were unlikely to receive the support of business or the substantial minority of conservatives from both parties in Congress. For radical reformers, such considerations seemed nonsensical. North Dakota representative and future Union Party presidential candidate William Lemke summed up their mood, writing to a close political confidante in early 1934:

I sometimes feel rather disgusted with the situation here, as we are living in a fool's paradise. Those surrounding the administration honestly believe everything is coming up lovely.¹¹

Lemke's despondent mood was backed up by economic data that demonstrated, despite impressive early gains – the Dow Jones reached 109 points in June 1932, an increase of over 100 per cent since March – the First New Deal appeared to have failed to generate sustained economy recovery. In spite of the best efforts of the administration, by November 1934 the Dow Jones remained stubbornly in the 90 to 100 point band and unemployment, had dropped only 9 per cent to 23 per cent.¹² The First New Deal experiment appeared to have failed. The actions of the Roosevelt administration, Lemke concluded in his letter, reminded him of Hoover in his 'balmyist [sic] days,' when he told the people that the corner had been turned but the employment figures continued to rise. 'All this C.W.A., and P.W.A, and all the other letters of the alphabet,' he concluded, 'are doomed to failure unless something more substantial is done.'¹³

In the face of stuttering progress under the First New Deal, sustained popular opposition to the administration emerged from a group of individuals, working independently, who would go on to influence, lead or back the formation of the Union Party in 1936. Three came from within the traditional political system: Republican Senator William Borah, Republican Representative William Lemke and Democratic Senator Huey Long. The final two, the so-called 'Radio Priest' Father Coughlin and the pension crusader Doctor Francis Townsend, emerged from outside the traditional political system. Who were these individuals, what were their political philosophies and what was the nature of their opposition to the president?

In the Senate, pressure for reform had historically been driven by an informal grouping of western Republican senators. Shaped by their experiences in small town America, these western Republicans had developed a strong belief in individualism and social enterprise combined with the realism of dealing with everyday hardship and poverty, which often hit even the hardest-working without any fault of their own. Their

willingness to recognise that the state often had a responsibility to assist citizens in their moment of need saw them develop policy somewhat in opposition to the party leadership dominated by the established industrial and financial interests in the northeast.¹⁴ The inherent tension between the western and northeastern sections of the Republican Party reached its head during a debate on the 1909 Tariff Bill, when a group of western Republican senators had aligned with Democrats to oppose President Taft's proposals to protect the interest of wealthy industrialists through an extensive increase in tariff levels. The Republican rebels did not form a cohesive bloc and the exact number of rebellious senators varied on the various votes throughout the tariff debate, but the press identified the loose grouping under the single collective title: 'insurgents.'¹⁵

Historians Ronald Feinman and Ronald Mulder have separately suggested membership of the senatorial insurgent bloc in 1932 (in order of first election/appointment to the Senate) as follows: William E. Borah (Idaho), George W. Norris (Nebraska), Hiram W. Johnson (California), Arthur Capper (Kansas), Peter Norbeck (South Dakota), James Couzens (Michigan), Lynn J. Frazier (North Dakota), Robert M. La Follette, Jr. (Wisconsin), Gerald P. Nye (North Dakota) and Bronson M. Cutting (New Mexico). Farmer-Laborite Henrik Shipstead (Minnesota) also aligned himself with the bloc. In addition, Ronald Feinman awarded membership to the moderate conservative Republican Charles McNary (Oregon), who acted as a bridge between the core insurgent bloc and the old-guard Republicans. With the exception of Nye, all had held political office at state level prior to their elevation to the Senate. Of these, seven had achieved high political office: four served as governors (Johnson, Capper, Norbeck and Frazier); two as mayors (Couzens and Shipstead); and Norris had served for ten years in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁶

As the most senior of the senators, William Borah was regarded as the insurgent bloc's informal leader. He was, however, fiercely independent and had not sought out this position. Borah entered the Senate in 1907, a successful lawyer and

acknowledged leader of the economic and social-reforming faction of the Idaho Republican Party. An ardent isolationist, following the end of World War One, he opposed further involvement in European affairs and led the senators opposed to President Wilson's plan to establish a League of Nations. In the 1920s, he became chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and continued his campaigns for non-involvement in international organisations, isolation from international affairs, and disarmament. Domestically he was ideologically an economic and social reformer. His reformist credentials surfaced during his first term when he bitterly opposed trusts and fought for amendments promoting the direct election of senators and the introduction of an income tax. He was a strong advocate of silver remonetisation, believing that exploitation of the abundant supplies of the precious metal in the western states would protect the nation from the manipulation of gold prices by the European bankers who he believed lay at the root of the economic unrest. He retained a strong belief in free enterprise, but he also recognised that the state had a role to support individuals who found themselves unemployed due to natural fluctuations in the economic cycle. In February 1932, during a Senate debate on a bill proposing an appropriation of \$375 million in direct federal aid, Borah's speech captured the insurgents' passion. 'You may call this a dole but hungry people call it something to eat,' he declared. 'A government which does not protect its people is flying a flag which is a dirty rag and contaminates the air.'¹⁷

In September 1932, six insurgent Republicans formally backed Roosevelt's nomination.¹⁸ Borah remained publically neutral, though there was no question he opposed the Republican nominee. 'I will not advocate a program,' he wrote in response to an Idaho editor who urged him to declare for Hoover, 'in which I do not believe nor prostitute my intellect in defense of policies I believe unwise, if not unpatriotic.'¹⁹ Further, Borah told reporters in September, 'The people are looking for a constructive program and, take my word for it, when they find that program, they are going to vote for the candidate who proposes it.'²⁰ Borah's observations proved

prescient, and across the western states voters backing Roosevelt's reform proposals followed the lead of the elected representatives and switched their presidential preference to the Democratic Party. Whilst the insurgents had played a part in Roosevelt's victory, it was unclear whether the new president would indeed be capable of delivering his progressive reform promise.

Roosevelt's election campaign had received the support of insurgent members of the Republican Party in the Senate; it had been also been significantly boosted by the reform-minded senators in the Democratic Party. The most notable of these was Huey Long, the demagogic Governor of Louisiana who had been elected to the U.S. Senate in the November 1930, but had chosen to complete his gubernatorial term before taking up his Senate seat in January 1932.

Although the *New Republic* declared Long in December 1931 'a net loss from whatever angle he is viewed,' he had brought unparalleled social change to his state.²¹ Elected to the governorship in 1928, Long embraced the state's responsibility to protect and improve the lives of its citizens. A series of massive, state-funded construction projects provided Louisiana with much-needed modernisation and at the same time employed tens of thousands in emergency jobs. He provided free textbooks to all children, reducing the cost of schooling and increasing enrolment by 20 per cent. A drive to improve adult literacy halved the number of illiterates, most of them African-American.²² Upon taking up his Senate seat, Long established himself as one of the nation's leading advocates of radical reform. In April 1932, in a speech entitled 'The Doom of America's Dream,' the senator issued what amounted to a new radical-reformist manifesto. If Congress did not react to the needs of its people, Long declared, he saw a popular revolution approaching: with 'my children starving and my wife starving,' the nation's laws against robbery and looting 'would not amount to any more to me than they would to any other man.' Long's solution was a radical redistribution of wealth. 'I am not asking any man in the United States Senate to do anything harmful to the rich people of the country,' Long said. 'If you want to do them a

favor, provide some way to put some of that wealth among all of the people.'²³ The passion and power of Long's rhetoric surprised the Washington press corps. 'No such stirring plea for the impoverished masses has been made in the Senate for years,' wrote the *Baltimore Sun*.²⁴

As a prominent reformer, Long was an early backer of Roosevelt's presidential candidacy. He assisted in keeping the southern delegates behind Roosevelt at the nominating convention and campaigned for the candidate across the western states, where his attacks on the wealthy and his positive message of social and financial reform played well with the electorate. Each of the states Long visited was ultimately won by Roosevelt.²⁵ The November 1932 *Time* magazine featured Long's picture on the front cover along with the prediction that he would be the most influential southern Democrat in the Roosevelt administration.²⁶ Despite his overall importance to Roosevelt's campaign strategy, however, Long's reputation for volatility and potential for embarrassment excluded him from the candidate's inner circle. Highly personally ambitious, Long would quickly plunge himself into opposition to the administration.²⁷

The difficulties that the new administration would have in dealing with Huey Long and Borah and his insurgent colleagues were established on the opening day of the lame-duck congressional session on January 3, 1933. Long spoke for the insurgent bloc when he reminded the Senate that Franklin Roosevelt had been elected so 'that he might carry out the one great fundamental necessary principle of the decentralisation of wealth.' When Roosevelt visited Washington later that month, Long demanded an appointment, telling reporters, 'I'm going to ask him did you mean it, or didn't you mean it?'²⁸ Despite supporting Roosevelt's election, Long and the insurgent senators were determined to pressure the president to take a radical approach to his reform plans. The reform-minded senators rejected what they viewed as conservative emergency banking legislation, drawn up by the bankers themselves, which would establish mechanisms to reopen and sustain banks closed during the financial crisis, and an economy bill intended to balance the federal budget and limit inflation.²⁹ This

early congressional rebellion intensified around the two significant legislative planks of the First New Deal: the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). For the radical-minded reformers of both political parties, the NIRA and AAA became symbols of folly and disappointment with the New Deal.

The strength of radical reform-minded congressional opposition to the central architecture of the New Deal was evident in the debate surrounding the passage of the NIRA. Presented for consideration in June 1933, the bill allowed the creation of trade associations responsible for the establishment of production codes exempt from anti-trust legislation. The proposed suspension of the anti-trust laws, however, concerned the insurgents and their Democratic allies. Borah contended that the trade associations would be controlled by the existing monopolies and would be used by them to undermine the competitiveness of small enterprise. The recovery of small enterprises, he believed, required the destruction of the trusts, not an enhancement of their power. In a series of heated debates on the floor of the Senate, Borah stood resolutely in opposition to legislation believed to be 'a very advanced step towards the ultimate concentration of wealth.'³⁰ Joining Borah in mounting a two-hour filibuster against passage of the bill on June 7, Long was equally derisory. 'Oh yes, you'll put people back to work with this bill,' he cried. 'They'll all be in jail for violating this infernal thing.'³¹ With Long's support, Borah successfully incorporated an amendment explicitly prohibiting price-fixing and monopolistic practices. Recognising that the amendment rendered the legislation unworkable, however, it was removed by the Democratic leadership. When the report returned to the Senate for final consideration on June 13, the highly dissatisfied reformists dominated the debate. Quoting from the 250 telegrams he had received overnight in support of his amendment, Borah concluded the debate by accusing the traditional parties of having been enslaved by the big corporations that had funded their campaigns and now 'expected something in return.' At the final roll call, Borah, Long and the insurgents united in opposition. The administration found itself dependent upon the support of the Republican old guard,

who joined with the administration to favour the NIRA. It passed on a vote of forty-six to thirty-nine.³² 'I have no apologies,' Borah announced in a powerful and revealing statement during the debate on the NIRA, 'for the party of which I am occasionally a member.'³³

Despite the actions of the administration to ensure passage of the NIRA, it was the insurgents pursuing their campaign against the legislation who ultimately emerged the victors. In the summer of 1934, a review board established under pressure from the insurgent bloc found, counter to the administration's claims, that the effects of the NIRA had enhanced the power of dominant corporations at the cost of workers, small businesses and consumers. This news fatally undermined the act.³⁴ The partnership between government and industry which lay at the heart of the First New Deal, as the radical reformers had warned, had not achieved what the Brains Trust had intended. Embarrassed, in September 1934, Roosevelt explained in his Fireside Chat that the time had come to move the National Recovery Agency (established under the NIRA) on to a new second phase and accepted the resignation of its head, Hugh Johnson.³⁵

Further successful opposition to the administration evident in the debate surrounding the passage of the NIRA was also reflected in combined radical reformist opposition to the other central plank of the First New Deal, the AAA. Rather than look to methods of increasing production to increase farm incomes, the AAA urged farmers to act like businessmen and imitate the production control methods used by the most successful businesses to reduce supply and increase demand. To redress the balance between over-production and under-consumption, the act proposed the creation of artificial scarcity whereby, in return for a federal benefit payment financed by the introduction of a new foods processing tax, farmers would undertake a controlled mass destruction of crops and slaughter of healthy animals.³⁶

The insurgents were convinced of the need to raise prices, but they profoundly disliked the AAA. Firstly, they fundamentally opposed a policy designed to create scarcity in a time of starvation. Secondly, to pay farmers for not undertaking labour

was intrinsically problematic for the national character, ran counter to the Protestant work ethic and clashed with notions of upward mobility through the fruits of one's labour. They believed the provision of aid for welfare as an insurance policy against times of economic downturn was acceptable as a reward for past taxes paid. In contrast, the payment of federal aid as an encouragement not to work as set out in the AAA was unethical and set a dangerous precedent of government interference in legitimate free enterprise. Under what other circumstances, they questioned, would citizens be actively discouraged from engaging in productive employment? Furthermore, they believed the entire proposal was unworkable. How could the federal government ensure that farmers did as they had promised? Would a federal police force roam the country, monitoring production? On April 11, 1933, Long summed up his thoughts on the failings of the Roosevelt administration in the harshest terms. In drafting the laws presented to the Senate for consideration, Roosevelt's Brains Trust and the partners of Morgan & Co., he said, 'have set us up in a situation that is two-fold more the son of hell than what we promised to put out in the election on the eighth day of last November.' The proposed AAA was, he concluded, in its current form 'very little use.'³⁷ Borah summed up the insurgent view, exclaiming, 'I think this is bureaucracy gone mad!'³⁸

With Long and the Republican insurgents' in outright opposition to the administration's proposed agricultural plans, they sought an alternative acceptable solution. They found this in the proposals developed by North Dakotan Representative William Lemke. Born in 1878, the son of a wealthy North Dakotan farmer and state legislator, between 1915 and 1919 Lemke was the head of the North Dakota Non-Partisan League. In this role, Lemke was responsible for the passage of a radical package of economic and social reform that delivered real and lasting positive change to the population of the poor rural state.³⁹ Elected to the House of Representatives in 1932, Lemke blamed the economic collapse on the manipulation of government by international bankers and wealthy industrialists and believed that to return the nation to

prosperity, control over currency should revert back into the hands of American citizens.

Lemke's position as an important regional politician was recognised by Roosevelt. Personally courted by the presidential candidate, Lemke agreed to back the Democratic campaign in exchange for a public statement 'at the earliest opportunity' detailing the Roosevelt's commitment to his farm relief proposals, reducing the cost of the transportation of farm products, and favouring the appointment of men representing agriculture to the positions of Secretary of Agriculture, head of the Federal Land Bank, and to the Farm Board.⁴⁰ When Lemke showed copies of his detailed farm relief proposals to Roosevelt, he scanned the material, and said, 'Yes, yes, I am for all that.'⁴¹ When Roosevelt emerged victorious in November 1932, Lemke's supporters concluded that they saw a great future for the new congressman. 'The character and courage you displayed in the campaign were admirable,' wrote one correspondent, 'and I am sure that the Roosevelt administration will rely upon your judgment as to Federal appointments and other matters touching North Dakota.'⁴² However, Lemke, blinkered by his overwhelming desire for passage of his reform proposals and flattered by the attention of the Democratic leadership, had misunderstood the nature of Roosevelt's commitment. Following their meeting, Roosevelt had written to clarify his understanding. Writing in the most general terms, he expressed support for legislation to relieve the situation faced by farmers – but avoided specific mention of Lemke's proposals. Lemke, however, with the president's earlier statement, 'Yes, yes, I am for all that,' at the forefront of his mind, read the letter as an absolute commitment.⁴³ With the AAA legislation before the House, Lemke realised he had been misled. 'We have before us an idiotic farm relief bill,' he wrote to a North Dakota constituent in the spring of 1933. 'I think the president will hear from the farmers that Wall Street must not write bills for the farmer.'⁴⁴ During the month of March, Lemke repeatedly sought access to the president, but was blocked on every occasion.⁴⁵ On March 25, 1933, his

relationship with the Roosevelt administration having reached breaking point, he wrote bitterly to a friend in North Dakota:

It seems there is less intelligence in Washington, D.C., than in any other place in the United States. Any three persons of ordinary intelligence could solve the problems confronting this nation, and end the depression, but we have been getting nowhere.⁴⁶

Accepting that his attempts to reconcile himself with the administration had failed, Lemke sought to force the passage of his alternative agricultural plans through Congress. His 'cost of production plan' which found the support of Long and the insurgent bloc in the Senate proposed that the government should fix prices on basic farm products for sale within the United States with the remaining crop sold overseas for whatever price it achieved. In contrast to administration attempts to limit production, he proposed farmers should be able to grow as much as they could and sell as much as they grew. He believed increased prices would provide financial stability to farmers and in the process create inflationary pressure within the domestic market that would contribute towards the national economic recovery.⁴⁷

Generating substantial support on both sides of the Senate, an amendment encapsulating Lemke's plan was incorporated into the AAA on April 13 by a vote of 47 to 41. Significantly, support for the plan was bi-partisan with a slight majority of both Democrats (28 voting in favour and 27 in opposition) and Republicans (19 in favour and 14 in opposition). Notably, the majority of support in favour of the amendment came from the agricultural states of the west and the south. Both Long and Borah backed the amendment. However, under heavy pressure from the Democratic administration, it was removed at the conference stage.⁴⁸ The AAA finally passed the Senate on May 10 with a substantial minority of reform-minded senators (12 Republicans and 21 Democrats), including Long and Borah, resolute in opposition.⁴⁹

Though defeated, Long believed that the opposition from the insurgent bloc to the AAA and NIRA could provide him with a launching pad from which to gather support amongst the wider electorate. In February 1934, in an NBC radio broadcast,

he presented to the nation his political alternative. Building on the theme of wealth redistribution that he had rehearsed in his Senate speeches, he accused Roosevelt of betraying the people's trust. America, he said, faced a challenge. It had more wealth, more goods, more food and more houses than ever. It had everything in abundance, yet it was in the depth of an economic depression. People were homeless and starving, and children went unclothed. The problem was not that there was not enough for everyone, but that too much was concentrated in the hands of a few. 'We have in America today,' he explained, 'a condition by which about ten men dominate the means of activity in at least 85 per cent of the activities that you own.' They owned the banks, the steel mills, the railroads, the bonds, the mortgages and the stores. By this total domination, 'they have chained the country from one end to the other until there is not any kind of business that a small independent man can go into and make a living.' The time had come, he said, for them to take the future into their own hands.⁵⁰

To those 'new unemployed,' the discontented middle-class voters desperate for a return to economic stability, Long offered the earth. His most radical proposal, however, was to guarantee an annual income of \$5,000 to every family. This amount would be enough, Long said, to provide families with 'a fairly comfortable home, an automobile, a radio, other reasonable home conveniences, and a place to educate their children.' These reforms, he concluded, would be funded by the federal government taxing all millionaires to reduce their combined wealth to around \$50 million. Proudly displaying his political heritage, he ended the speech by directly quoting three-time Democratic candidate and People's Party hero William Jennings Bryan: the effect of his plan, he said, would be a new America, where 'Every man would be a King.'⁵¹

Economists quickly dismissed Long's proposals; there were simply too many poor and not enough millionaires for his plan to provide enough wealth to be redistributed from the latter to the former. Such criticism bothered Long little. His 'Share-our-Wealth' (SoW) plan offered hope to a desperate nation. In private, Long

admitted that it would not work, but confided, 'When they figure that out, I'll have something new for them.'⁵²

To take forward his wealth redistribution plan, Long encouraged his supporters to form SoW societies. Within a month, 200,000 members had registered with the Washington office. By the end of 1934, Long boasted 3 million members.⁵³ Following official registration, each club received a pamphlet containing suggested operational instructions, educational material detailing the aims of the organisation, a copy of Long's autobiography and a subscription to the new national newsletter, *American Progress*. The creation of SoW gave Long a potentially powerful national voice outside of the traditional political system.⁵⁴

With SoW demonstrating his growing power outside of Congress, Long determined to enhance his prestige amongst his reform-minded colleagues by supporting Lemke in his continued campaigns to force the passage of new agricultural policy in opposition to the AAA. With the Democratic administration, in which he had placed his personal trust and political credibility, having rejected his cost-of-production plan, Lemke presented to the House an alternative farm mortgage refinancing plan. Under this proposal, a federal farm credit agency would be established to refinance all farm mortgages. Private banks would be removed from the farm loan business and control passed to the federal government. The farmer would then pay the agency 3 per cent of his loan annually. Half of the payment would cover interest, and half would contribute towards the repayment of the loan. The long repayment period would enable the farmer to pay his debts in small, affordable amounts at a lowered, fixed interest rate. The most radical element was the proposal that the farm credit agency sell bonds to raise the finance necessary to provide the loans. Lemke anticipated that, should the bonds not prove saleable, the Federal Reserve banks should issue notes not backed by gold to purchase the bonds up to a total of \$3 billion. The injection of this new money into the economy would provide inflationary pressure, increasing farm prices and restoring the farmers' financial position. Lemke believed that placing \$3

billion of farm debt into the hands of the federal government and weakening the link between circulating money and the gold supply, moreover, would weaken the power of the international bankers to control the economy. In relieving the farmer, Lemke believed the entire economy would be placed upon a stable footing.⁵⁵

Again Lemke received support for this campaign from the insurgent bloc. Borah expressed his belief that government action to relieve mortgage interest rates was the farmers' highest priority. 'It is the most vital part of the farm question as I see it,' he informed the press in early March 1933.⁵⁶ Once again, however, Lemke found his path blocked by the administration. Opposed by the congressional leadership, the bill was allocated to the Committee on Agriculture for consideration under strict instructions that it be pigeon-holed.⁵⁷ Believing that an open debate on the farm mortgage refinance measure would consolidate the strong cross-party opposition to the president's farm plan, Lemke set about gathering the signatures of the 145 congressmen required on a petition to discharge his bill onto the floor of the House. As Lemke's campaign to gather signatures continued into the spring of 1934, the president's advisors began to worry that the congressman's personal crusade would end not only in the discharge petition's success, but also in the bill's passage. Tensions reached a head on April 9, 1934. With Lemke now needing only eleven more names, Roosevelt's private secretary, Stephen Early, sent a flurry of telegrams to the president, who was out of Washington, seeking instructions as to how to proceed. Roosevelt, clearly irate, replied:

I not only have never endorsed Frazier-Lemke Bill but am getting tired of such preposterous stories.... If this type of wild legislation passes, the responsibility for wrecking recovery will be squarely on the Congress, and I will not hesitate to say so to the nation in plain language.⁵⁸

On April 10, Speaker Homer Rainey hastily arranged a press conference to inform reporters of the president's opposition to Lemke's plan. Lemke, however, was unimpressed: 'We are going ahead and expect no difficulty in getting the necessary 145 signatures on the petition.'⁵⁹ Lemke proved to be as good as his word. On June 2,

in clear defiance of the administration, with the signatures gathered, the motion to discharge the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill from the Agriculture Committee was placed before the House. Victory was short-lived however as the Democratic majority leadership used parliamentary rules to stop Lemke and his supporters from bringing the bill to the floor for debate.⁶⁰ On June 18, Lemke made his complete opposition to the administration clear. 'The battle is on,' he announced to the House, and would continue until the people 'win a final and complete victory.'⁶¹

The publication of the discharge petition itself, however, marked a significant moment in the gathering opposition to the First New Deal. According to congressional rules, the names on the petition remained strictly secret until the date of publication. If the majority of signatories were Republicans, the administration could simply dismiss the petition as political mischief. Given the strength of administration opposition to the proposals, however, should the majority be Democrats, the publication of the petition would potentially be a significant embarrassment. The administration's worst fears were confirmed. Out of the 145 signatures, 63 per cent were Democrats. What was of more concern was the heavy concentration of Democratic dissenters (74 per cent) from the western states. In all, including Republicans and other small parties, 74 per cent of total signatories came from the west. Lemke had failed to achieve the passage of his bill, but by revealing the level of general opposition to the administration within the western Democratic bloc and the general dissatisfaction of the western representatives as a whole, the discharge petition in itself was of political importance. How Lemke and his radical reform-minded colleagues would capitalise upon this knowledge and how the administration would respond would lead the representative directly on the path to the Union Party nomination.⁶²

Lemke's failure to bring his Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill to the floor of the House did not end his campaign to force amendments to the administration's agricultural reform plans. Rather, with the support of Long, insurgent support was mobilised behind Lemke's alternative plan to extend to farmers the rights available to

businesses under the Bankruptcy Act. Under Lemke's 'farm bankruptcy' proposal, existing bankruptcy laws would be made more lenient towards farmers whose total debt so exceeded the value of their property that there was little possibility they would ever return to a sound financial footing. The legislation proposed the establishment of legal machinery in each county to value the property of farmers heavily in debt. The federal courts would also follow a new bankruptcy procedure to reduce the debts of the farmer to a level comparable to the value of the property. The farmer would thus continue to work on the land until the re-valued debt was cleared. At this point, ownership would return to the farmer. The federal government would gain an element of control over private financiers by setting interest rates and reducing loan repayments. In addition, relief to the farmer offered through the bankruptcy legislation would cause a trickle-up effect, reducing deflationary pressures on the wider economy.⁶³

A combination of pressure from the House, public support and the committee's sympathetic view towards legislation that equalised access under the law meant that the Farm Bankruptcy Bill was quickly reported and passed out of the Judiciary Committee. In debate, Lemke rallied representatives to pass legislation that would protect home ownership and weaken the power of the international banker. 'No one,' he finished, 'should be permitted to destroy society in order to exact the last pound of flesh.' With minimal opposition, in June 1934, the Farm Bankruptcy Bill was passed by the House with an overwhelming majority of 133 votes to 16.⁶⁴ The fate of the bill now rested with the Senate, and Long set himself the challenge of driving it through. Lemke had not sought out Long's support, but the senator offered tremendous personal and political value in backing the representative's campaign. Driven into opposition by the administration and keen to articulate their own political visions (and careers), Long and Lemke found themselves working together to achieve their individual aims.

When the Senate convened on Saturday, June 16, Long addressed the chair, announcing that he would not sit down until Lemke's Farm Bankruptcy Bill had been

referred to a joint conference committee for debate. With the congressional session rapidly drawing to a close, and fearing a filibuster would hold up the passage of important administration legislation, the congressional leadership agreed to Long's demands. On Monday, June 18, the Senate passed the bill by sixty votes to sixteen.⁶⁵ With the bill overwhelmingly supported in Congress, Roosevelt signed the Farm Bankruptcy Bill into law.

The passage of the Farm Bankruptcy Act marked an important moment in the evolution of radical opposition to the New Deal and in the political alliance of two prominent opponents of Roosevelt. Long's personal achievement in pushing the bill through was widely recognised. 'Nobody would have bet a nickel on the chances of the...bill as late as six o'clock Saturday afternoon,' wrote the *New York Times*. Yet despite this, with his 'endurance, gall and indifference to being considered a nuisance, Mr Long put his bill through.'⁶⁶ In doing so, Long strengthened his national support, demonstrated particularly his commitment to the principles of his SoW plan and garnered the respect of the Senate reformist bloc. In the last hours of the congressional session that had seen the passage of the First New Deal legislation, the disparate forces of radical opposition had for the first time started to coalesce around a core set of individuals and ideological objectives. These objectives were expressed in Lemke's comments upon the passage of the Farm Bankruptcy Bill. He told the House:

I have confidence in the future. We are going back to the democracy of Jefferson and Lincoln – forward to a happy, prosperous, self-reliant, and self-governed people, a people with hopes and aspirations; forward to the true grandeur of this Nation, where every man is a King.⁶⁷

Long's battle cry had become Lemke's own. Through economic nationalism, self-governance and reliance, opportunity would be restored to the new mass middle-class unemployed.

Borah and Lemke were insurgent Republicans, whilst Long was from the president's own party. All three had used their positions of political influence in Congress to oppose the reforms implemented during the First New Deal and had

achieved some success in forcing amendments to them despite the wishes of the president. Long, seeking to enhance his position as a leading opponent of the administration, had built upon his campaigns within Congress by establishing a national independent quasi-political opposition movement. Like Long, the remaining two men who would unite to back the formation of the Union Party in 1936 had taken different paths to their positions of national influence. Both Francis Townsend and Charles Coughlin were representatives of a new media age in which popular support generated through the press or the radio substituted for votes at the ballot box. Despite the alternative route to power, their influence over the electorate was no less extensive than their future congressional colleagues and their moves to oppose the administration no less a concern.

Broadcasting his Sunday afternoon sermons from his church in Detroit, Coughlin was one of the first stars of the new media age. It was his popular message that caught the imagination of his listeners.⁶⁸ Coughlin's basic political beliefs could be traced to his religious education. The writings of St Thomas Aquinas and Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of the Working Classes* taught that governments should raise living standards for the poor and that through 'charity and a recognition of the mutuality of capital and labour, all members of society should work to reduce class divisions.'⁶⁹ In 1931, Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadregesimo Anno: After Forty Years* called upon Catholics 'to oppose the unjust economic conditions that had created the present crisis.' The responsibility for the economic malaise, Pope Pius claimed, lay with the 'dictatorship' of those who 'control credit...and the rule of lending money.' Pius called his philosophy 'Social Justice.'⁷⁰ Coughlin's interpretation of 'Social Justice' was informed by his central belief, as with Long, Borah and Lemke, that manipulation of the currency by international bankers was the root source of the Depression. By carefully controlling supply, Coughlin claimed, the wealth of the nation had become concentrated into the hands of a few international bankers, who were able to use this power to manipulate economies, bringing about cycles of

inflation and recession through which they increased their personal wealth. It was time, Coughlin suggested in a sermon in October 1930, for the power of the international banker to be broken. 'Governments exist primarily to protect human rights and not financial rights,' he declared. 'Governments are for the people and not for the colleagues of Carnegie!'⁷¹ Linking *Rerum Novarum* to long-standing belief in 'the money problem,' Coughlin's alignment of Catholic theology with traditional reformist beliefs was a powerful mix of forces and, among the lower and lower-middle classes – rural and urban, Protestant and Catholic – he was able to galvanise a feeling of common class discrimination. The scope for influence was large. In 1930, two out of five American families had a radio. At the height of his fame, he claimed an audience of thirty to forty-five million listeners.⁷²

Coughlin's status as a national celebrity and opposition political commentator attracted Roosevelt. At the candidate's personal invitation, Coughlin delivered a speech at the Democratic Convention that he described as 'very enthusiastic for Mr. Roosevelt.' This speech helped to shore up Democratic and Catholic delegates who might have favoured the re-nomination of conservative candidate, and prominent Catholic, Al Smith.⁷³ When Roosevelt won the nomination, Coughlin telegraphed to congratulate him on his victory: 'I am with you to the end. Say the word and I will follow.'⁷⁴ True to his word, in the month before the presidential election, Coughlin delivered a series of enthusiastic broadcasts in support of the Democrat. However, although Coughlin's influence over his massed radio audience assisted Roosevelt win the election, his outspoken behaviour and unrestrained personal ambition quickly made him a liability to the administration.

Coughlin had long been an advocate of inflation and linked this explicitly to the gold standard. The Detroit priest believed what he called the national 'money famine' could be ended through legislation to revalue gold at a ratio of two to one of its current value. This would, Coughlin believed, raise the level of currency in circulation, and the increased purchasing would weaken the grip of the Depression. Further, he proposed

that all gold be nationalised, with the government compensating current holders with paper money. This would, he said, remove the power of the international banker to control the supply and value of gold, and further increase the total amount of paper currency in circulation.⁷⁵ Seeking to reward the priest for his support on the campaign trail, Coughlin's plan was embodied in an administration-backed amendment to the AAA presented to the Senate in April 1932.

Despite Coughlin's popular support outside of Congress, within the Senate he found his proposal strongly criticised by the insurgent bloc who presented an alternative series of amendments to remonetise silver.⁷⁶ The power of silver to boost the economy was a long-standing insurgent belief. In the depths of the agricultural depression of the 1890s, Americans grew increasingly fascinated by the potential of silver to solve the nation's problems. The insurgents wanted the federal government to set its value at sixteen grains of silver to one part gold and demanded that the currency be minted free of charge. They viewed the plentiful supply of silver in the mountains of the western states as a counter to the deflationary gold standard manipulated by the wealthy eastern bankers and controlled by the gold families of western Europe. Silver was America's metal; they believed that adoption of the silver standard would break international ties and assert the nation's economic freedom.⁷⁷ Concerned that the continuing debate on the inflationary element of the bill was holding up passage of the entire AAA, the administration supported the passage of an uncomfortable compromise – an inflationary amendment authorising the president to choose between the gold and silver manipulation plans.⁷⁸

The passage of the AAA had an immediate effect, and agricultural commodity prices quickly moved above pre-1914 levels. In July, however, as the effect of the Economy Act increased deflationary pressures on the economy, the price of wheat started to fall back sharply.⁷⁹ Believing that a small amount of controlled inflation might kick-start the economy, Roosevelt declared in his Fireside Chat on October 22 that, despite the progress made, he was unsatisfied with the 'amount and the extent' of the

increase in farm income. 'If we cannot do this one way,' he promised, 'we will do it another. Do it, we will.'⁸⁰

Choosing between the options presented to him in the AAA, Roosevelt elected to bring about inflation through the purchase of gold. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) was authorised to purchase all newly minted gold in the United States and, if necessary, all gold available on the open world market. By creating scarcity in the market place the theory was that the RFC would be able to push up the price of gold. As the amount of paper currency in circulation was matched by the total value of the gold held by the Federal Reserve, increasing the price would enable further paper currency to be issued. Increasing the amount of currency in the system would hypothetically increase buying power. Increased buying power would increase demand and, thus, prices. However, the gold purchasing policy was ultimately a failure. An element of inflation was introduced in the economy but prices slowly began to fall once more.⁸¹ Opponents of the president, including former mayor of New York and Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith, ridiculed Roosevelt for his actions, writing in an open letter: 'I'm for gold dollars as against baloney dollars. I am for experience against experiment.'⁸² In late November, seeking to protect himself from criticism, the president distanced himself. It was characteristic of Roosevelt to determine how far to back a policy. On January 30, 1934, having fired Dean Acheson, who as undersecretary at the Treasury Department had taken responsibility for implementing the plan, Roosevelt ended his extraordinary powers and the Gold Purchase Act pegged the value of gold at \$35 an ounce, half its pre-1933 value. With this action, Roosevelt's brief flirtation with inflation ended.⁸³

Coughlin, however, misinterpreted Roosevelt's actions and also became a casualty of the gold purchase experiment. Believing that he had been instrumental in forcing the administration to adopt the gold purchase policy which was now being abandoned due to pressure from the president's misguided advisors and Roosevelt's opponents in the Democratic Party, the priest directly challenged the authority of the

administration. In a November 27 speech before 7,000 supporters at the New York Hippodrome, Coughlin demanded, 'Stop Roosevelt from being stopped!' Accusing Al Smith of being merely 'a puppet,' he declared: 'Are we forgetful that Mr. Smith is a wealthy banker?' 'My friends, this is but part of the organised attack on our leader who is trying to redeem us from the money changers.' Explaining his motivation to journalists following the event: 'When anyone stands in the way of President Roosevelt, and it's Roosevelt or ruin, I've got to take a stand. This is war.'⁸⁴ Roosevelt, still smarting from the embarrassment of the experiment's failure, reacted badly to Coughlin's public efforts on his behalf. Coughlin had not been asked to defend the administration and the president wanted no such defence. Furious, Roosevelt fumed to Democratic Party Chairman Jim Farley: 'He should run for the Presidency himself. Who the hell does he think he is!'⁸⁵ The failure of the gold purchase experiment marked a turning point in the priest's relationship with the administration. Having inadvertently defied the president, he too found himself in opposition.

The election of Roosevelt as president marked a moment of triumph for Borah, Long, Lemke and Coughlin. Each had in their own individual way contributed to the downfall of the Hoover administration and ushered in what they now believed to be a new age of reform. By contrast, the political career of Townsend, the last of the prominent Union Party backers in 1936, had yet to begin. Yet, Townsend's quasi-political powerbase established in 1933 would prove a threat to the administration in excess of Long's.

Born in 1867, Townsend's climb to national power was not meteoric. In 1929, aged 62, the doctor saw his entire life savings wiped out in the stock market crash. By the summer of 1933, he was, aged 66, unemployed and in a desperate financial position. Roosevelt had been elected upon a platform that itself had explicitly committed the administration to 'advocate unemployment and old-age insurance under state laws.'⁸⁶ In accordance with this commitment, Roosevelt had indicated that he wished to introduce unemployment insurance and an old-age pension system. The

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was established in May 1933, charged with distributing federal funds to support directly the neediest in the population. FERA distributed \$3.25 billion in less than three years, including substantial payments to the aged. Early in 1933, seeking to place these emergency measures on a permanent footing, Roosevelt urged Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative David Lewis of Maryland to put forward their draft bill on unemployment insurance and pension provision.⁸⁷ Frustrated at the apparent lack of progress from the administration and seeking to find a solution to his problems and those of millions of elderly Americans, Townsend, in a letter to the Long Beach *Press-Telegram* published on September 30, 1933, outlined proposals to solve unemployment by the removal of the elderly from the workforce. It was fundamentally wrong, he believed, that those responsible for the economic prosperity of the nation did not receive financial assistance from the state in their old age. Without this support, Townsend argued, the elderly were forced to stay in employment far beyond their most effective years. By doing so, they barred the entry of the young to positions of rightful employment and thus were a direct cause of both mass unemployment and the nation's fall in economic effectiveness. 'It is just as necessary to make some disposal of our surplus workers, as it is to dispose of our surplus wheat or corn,' he explained. The central plank of the plan was a monthly pension of \$200 to be distributed to every eligible person over the age of 60 in return for their removal from the workforce. The pension would be financed by a national transaction tax on all goods and services.⁸⁸

Like his future Union Party colleagues, Townsend believed that the root cause of the Depression lay with the international banking corporations. 'The power over the circulation of money,' Townsend explained, 'cannot, must not, be subject to the timidity or cowardice of a few men who have it in their power to order the business world to call its loans and restrict its credit.' This power, he concluded, 'must become the sole property of the citizenry of the nation.' Thus, the ingenious part of his plan was that every pensioner would be required to spend their pension in the month they received it.

This would, Townsend estimated, ensure ‘an even distribution throughout the nation of two or three billions of fresh money each month.’ Pumping millions of dollars a month into the economy exert inflationary pressure and might help restore a healthy economy.⁸⁹ ‘The plan is only incidentally a pension plan,’ Townsend concluded, ‘the old people are simply to be used as a means by which prosperity will be restored to all of us.’⁹⁰ Economists doubted, however, that it would work. They estimated that roughly 10 million Americans would be eligible for the pension, requiring an annual expenditure of \$24 billion. If any administration were foolish enough to attempt to put the plan in action, the imposition of such a huge tax would plunge the country even further into depression.⁹¹

Townsend’s letter of September 30, 1933, was not written with the intention of setting up a pension movement but simply, as he later recalled, ‘an idea which might restore hope.’ His simple message, however, immediately connected with elderly Californians’ pent-up demand for action. By November 1933, supporters of his newly formed ‘Old-Age Revolving Pension’ movement (OARP) had gathered 75,000 signatures on a petition to lobby Congress to consider the Townsend pension plan.⁹² Seeking to turn this pressure in coordinated action, Townsend established a partnership with California real estate agent Robert Clements. It was through Clements that the true power of the movement was revealed.

In January 1934, sensing an opportunity to turn the OARP into a for-profit business, Clements persuaded Townsend to hire local organisers to mount door-to-door petition campaigns providing funds through the sale of pamphlets, memorabilia and, later, a newspaper. Motivated by their sales commission, these professional organisers were hugely effective in spreading the movement outside of its California base. By the summer of 1934, local OARP clubs had been formed in 30 states, most notably in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, North and South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming and California.⁹³ Townsend claimed that by December 1934 there were 2,000 OARP clubs with 300,000 members. The organisation’s

financial records suggest that the numbers were in reality smaller, although still an impressive 150,000.⁹⁴ By December 1934, Clements was employing 300 locally based OARP organisers. Dependent on his commission-based professionals and local volunteers to sustain the continued growth of the organisation, Clements exerted tight control from the centre. Local organisers were required to stick closely to their scripts. No local member had a say in the operation of the national OARP.⁹⁵ So successful was the company financially that Clements and Townsend awarded themselves a \$100 monthly remuneration package including salary and expenses.⁹⁶

What had begun as a letter-writing campaign quickly took on considerable popular and political momentum. Throughout 1934, Townsend repeatedly requested a personal meeting with the president to discuss the OARP plan. Roosevelt, preferring to develop his own proposals free of the undue influence of others, rejected the approach out of hand but in a confidential letter to his nephew James Davis, expressed clearly his concerns at the true threat of the pension movement. Not only would the pension plan simply not work, he wrote, it would 'bankrupt the Government.'⁹⁷ In March 1934, frustrated at the lack of progress of the Wagner-Lewis Unemployment Bill through Congress, Roosevelt publicly backed the bill and challenged legislators to pass it before the end of the session.⁹⁸ However, in June, with it mired in committee, Roosevelt abandoned hope of its passage. In its place, he announced the establishment of a cabinet-level Committee on Economic Security to develop a new plan for 'Social Security.' Roosevelt warned his new committee of the need to solve the old-age pension problem. 'We have to have it,' he said. 'The Congress can't stand the pressure of the Townsend plan unless we have a real old-age insurance system.'⁹⁹ Seeking to establish permanent distance between his own plans and the OARP, on October 12, 1934, Townsend was informed via telegram that Roosevelt was uninterested in any form of cooperation: 'No chance of personal interview for you or any other for that matter.'¹⁰⁰ Rejected, the elderly doctor mobilised his supporters to force passage of his alternative pension plan.

By the autumn of 1934, the Roosevelt Administration found itself under considerable pressure – not from the old-guard Republican right, which in Congress had found itself largely aligned with the New Deal reform package, but from a group seeking reform more radical than that implemented by the administration. Together Townsend's pension plan, Long's wealth redistribution proposals, Lemke's farm reforms, and Borah's and Coughlin's currency manipulation ideas represented a set of popular alternatives to the New Deal. Where their anti-New-Deal campaigns had generated momentum, they represented a serious annoyance to the administration. Townsend had not at this stage enjoyed the national exposure of his future Union Party colleagues, but the truth was that his well-organised grassroots movement represented at that stage a potentially more significant foe. Should Townsend continue to mobilise the population behind his cause, in the absence of a viable alternative, he might pressure Congress to pass his plan. In this circumstance, Roosevelt had no alternative but to challenge his opponents directly. He could not let their campaigns generate enough support to derail his reform agenda.

In 1946, Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's close personal friend and Secretary of Labor throughout his presidency, looked back upon their long relationship in her book *The Roosevelt I Knew*. To Perkins, Roosevelt was not an economic radical. Rather, she wrote, he 'took the *status quo* in our economic system as much for granted as his family. They were part of his life, and so was our system; he was content with it.' That was not to say the president considered it perfect. The challenge of the New Deal, he believed, was to see 'adjustments' made 'so that that the people would not suffer from poverty and neglect, and so that all would share.' But in doing so, Perkins was certain Roosevelt 'had no dream of great changes in the economic or political patterns of our life.' To those outspoken reformers who had emerged in opposition to the president, however, the First New Deal's limited 'adjustments' were simply not enough. They believed the economic system required fundamental change. With the support for

these alternative policy agendas gathering speed, the administration embarked upon a series of actions to determinedly limit the support for the radical reformers.¹⁰¹

As the only prominent Democrat amongst Roosevelt's radical reformist critics, Long found himself the first targeted by the administration. In late June 1933, Roosevelt ordered the Treasury Department to reopen an investigation into income tax evasion in Louisiana instigated by the Hoover administration in 1932 and informed Long that he would no longer be consulted on issues related to the distribution of federal patronage.¹⁰² As part of New Deal relief measures, moreover, states were required to match each dollar of federal relief with three of state money. In retaliation for Long's alienation, and at the senator's direction, Louisiana defaulted on its obligation. In May 1934, Long was warned that federal support for relief would be withdrawn if the state did not meet its financial commitments. On August 1, all federal unemployment benefit to Louisiana ceased. The 400,000 citizens dependent on federal benefits (roughly a fifth of the state's population) found themselves once again solely dependent upon charity.¹⁰³

The strength of the administration's determination shocked Long. Clearly, Roosevelt was willing to play hard to defeat his rivals. Aware that he needed to regain the initiative at home in Louisiana and in his conflict with Roosevelt, Long told a FERA official, 'Hereafter I'll be giving you...and that fucker in the White House unshirted hell every day!'¹⁰⁴ Long recognised that when offered the choice between relief and politics, the starving chose relief. In a two-pronged assault, the senator regained control of federal spending within Louisiana. In a series of special legislative sessions, the legislature obediently transferred nearly every vestige of authority away from the towns and the parishes to state-appointed boards controlled by Long's loyal governor, Oscar K. Allen. Allen had been hand-picked by Long and was no more than a figurehead for the senator's continued control over Louisiana politics. Under the state-appointed boards, so tight became the governor's grip over Louisiana that no municipal officer – policeman, fireman, teacher – could hold a job without his (and thus Long's)

approval.¹⁰⁵ In this skirmish, it appeared that although tested, Long had emerged bruised but victorious.

As the administration had turned against Long, they also turned against Borah and his insurgent colleagues in the Senate. The administration's main target in the insurgent bloc was Republican Senator Bronson Cutting of New Mexico. Elected in 1928, Cutting quickly commanded the respect of the insurgent bloc.¹⁰⁶ In the insurgent challenges to the legislation that made up the First New Deal, he closely aligned himself with Borah. The senior and junior senators shared a common political agenda and voted similarly in support and opposition to all New Deal legislation. By 1934, the two men had become so closely aligned that the *New York Times* suggested that Cutting had taken on the role of 'Whip' for the elderly senator, bringing together supportive colleagues from across the political spectrum behind Borah's anti-New Deal campaign.¹⁰⁷

Cutting had supported Roosevelt's candidacy in 1932, but the administration grew quickly frustrated by his subsequent opposition. In March 1934, with Cutting seeking re-election, Farley informed the senator that the president would only support his candidacy if he ran as a Democrat. 'Otherwise,' Cutting wrote, 'all the administrative strength' would be used to beat him. Refusing Roosevelt's demand, Cutting found himself facing the direct opposition of the administration. For the Democrats, attacking Cutting was a proxy for attacking Borah. It was a direct warning that when the older senator faced re-election in 1936, he would find little support from the Democratic Party.¹⁰⁸ Roosevelt found an unlikely ally in his campaign against Cutting in the old-guard-controlled Republican National Committee (RNC). In July 1934, seeking revenge for Cutting's support for Roosevelt's election campaign, it was surprisingly announced that the RNC would join the administration in their campaign to elect his Democratic opponent, Dennis Chavez.

With both the Roosevelt administration and the RNC against him, Cutting mobilised the support of the insurgent bloc behind his campaign, receiving endorsements from Borah and seven more Republican senators.¹⁰⁹ Senator Hiram Johnson from California pleaded with Jim Farley to end the campaign against Cutting. 'I really think it unjust and unfair to endeavor to smash a man,' he wrote, 'who rendered such invaluable services and displayed such a magnificent courage in thirty two.'¹¹⁰ Despite these interventions, Roosevelt and the RNC refused to back down. 'This is a fine statesmanlike attitude for a New Deal to take,' Cutting observed bitterly.¹¹¹ The effect of the insurgents' alienation from both the Democratic and Republican Party leadership was clear. Without recourse to the support of either of the national parties, and lacking their own independent political movements to provide them an alternative base for support at the grassroots, they were potentially easily defeated.

As the Cutting and Lemke incidents suggest, Roosevelt was clearly prepared to confront his opponents in Congress directly, but the president also attempted to use his political authority against Townsend and Coughlin outside of the traditional political system. Coughlin's rise in public notoriety and the support of his radio audience proved particularly problematic for the White House. In late 1933, the priest continued to advocate the president's inflationary gold plan. By early November, with the plan faltering, Coughlin backed a proposal to advocate both the continuation of gold value manipulation and the compulsory purchase and re-monetisation of silver.¹¹² By January 1934, his plan of 'bymmetalism' was gaining public support. On January 14, he embarked upon a campaign to generate ten million letters to Congress advocating a new plan to 'make America a land of financial independence.'¹¹³

Coughlin's new monetary campaign provided Roosevelt with the perfect opportunity to assert his authority. Background research had been undertaken by the U.S. Treasury Department during the senatorial debate on the silver purchase plan to determine current purchasing activity and the largest holders of the metal. Clearly,

these individuals stood to profit significantly from any policy that might increase the metal's value. The investigation revealed that two individuals closely connected with Coughlin had made substantial recent silver purchases. Indeed, Amy Collins, the treasurer of the organisation the priest had established to manage donations from his radio supporters, had invested Coughlin's funds in a total of 600,000 ounces of silver, making him one of the nation's largest holders of the metal. It appeared that Coughlin was using his radio pulpit to promote a policy that, if adopted, would make his organisation extremely wealthy. Naturally, exposure of this information would be highly damaging to Coughlin's personal reputation and the effectiveness of his political campaign. On April 25, seeking to undermine support for the silver advocates in Senate and destroy Coughlin's reputation, Roosevelt personally authorised Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau to release the list of names of significant silver-holders to the press. Despite Ms Collins's claims that she had invested the League's funds in silver of her own volition, without Coughlin's knowledge, the coincidence of one of America's most public advocates of silver being one of the nation's largest speculators could not be ignored. Coughlin was subjected to widespread ridicule and gossip. The *New York Times* ran a caustic editorial on April 30, 1934, opening with Henry Morgenthau's observation that a part of the clamour for remonetising silver is 'not entirely disinterested' and ended by describing Ms Collins's explanation of her \$20,000 purchase as 'most innocent and touching.'¹¹⁴

In his next radio broadcast, Coughlin denounced Morgenthau for his actions. 'Mr Henry Morgenthau, Jr.,' he said, 'has completed his clumsy effort to protect the gold advocates, the Federal Reserve bankers, and the international bankers of ill repute.'¹¹⁵ Despite his protestations of innocence, Coughlin's treatment by the Roosevelt administration opened his eyes to the nature of his erstwhile alliance with the president. Interviewed in 1970, Coughlin bitterly explained the situation as he had realised it:

We were supposed to be partners. He said he would rely on me. That I would be an important advisor. But he was a liar. He never took my advice. He just used me and when he was through he double-crossed me on that silver business.¹¹⁶

The truth behind Coughlin's silver purchase is difficult to determine. He vehemently denied knowledge of the actions of his staff. Yet, it is difficult to believe that he was not aware of Ms Collins' actions. As with his treatment of Long, Roosevelt was unafraid of taking dramatic and, or, decisive action where he believed it necessary. His highly effective pre-emptive strike inflicted a significant blow upon Coughlin's credibility.

Roosevelt, Frances Perkins later wrote, 'believed in leadership from the office of the president.' This was a leadership informed by access to 'immense sources of information and analysis' that the Executive Department had and that were available to the president. His New Deal had been born not from parliamentary debate, but from the minds of intellectuals and academics. Challenged by the representatives of the people, sometimes this central belief in the power of the Executive led him to exhibit a certain frustration with the other arms of government. Perkins observed that, whilst he supported the congressional system, Roosevelt often 'wished at times that the people of the country would be more careful about whom they sent to Congress.'¹¹⁷ When this frustration boiled over into outright opposition as it had with Lemke, Cutting and Long, there was a real danger that in attempting to silence his opponents, in fact the president exacerbated discontent. This was also true for his opponents outside of Congress. When combined, this discontent led ultimately to the formation of the Union Party.

In the twelve months between the inauguration of the president and the spring of 1934, a series of significant shifts occurred amongst those cross-party radical reformers who would go on to form the Union Party leadership. Having first supported the political aims of the administration, each rose to directly challenge its authority. As a result, Long, Borah, Lemke and Coughlin found themselves directly opposed by the

president, with Townsend rejected out of hand. These initially unconnected rebellions revealed a great deal about the nature of radical opponents to the New Deal: not only the personal determination, zeal, political ambition and ability to hold on to power among the leaders, but also the deep-seated support for alternative radical reform agendas amongst their followers in each of their regional constituencies. The president had attempted to limit many of his opponents, but none had been dealt a knock-out blow. Each had reacted to being knocked down by going on to the offensive. Despite the many skirmishes that had occurred during the first two years of the Roosevelt administration, the mid-term elections of 1934 were the first true test of the New Deal's popularity with the electorate. It was the results of these elections that would determine the future course of the Roosevelt administration and ultimately lead to the formation of the Union Party in 1936.

Although a consistent proportion of Republican old-guard congressmen had supported the passage of First New Deal legislation, they believed that the faltering recovery afforded them the opportunity to achieve significant gains in the mid-term elections. Signalling this change of approach, in June 1934, the RNC issued a 'Declaration of Principles' attacking the New Deal 'dictatorship' and placing the Republican Party in a position of strong opposition to the administration's recovery plans.¹¹⁸ They were buoyed in this campaign by the formation of the American Liberty League in the autumn of 1934. Its leadership brought together a powerful alliance of conservative Democrats from the northeastern states who had originally opposed Roosevelt's nomination in 1932, including former presidential candidates John Davis and Al Smith, as well as former executives of the Democratic National Committee John Raskob and Jouett Shouse. Functioning as a pressure group within the Democratic Party, the American Liberty League was intended to act as a rallying point for its traditional conservative values. By the autumn of 1934, although the Liberty League was populated by Democrats, their criticism of Roosevelt mirrored that of the Republican old guard. Hardly any New Deal policy escaped the League's disapproval.

Amongst a long list of charges, the League accused the Roosevelt administration of 'endangering the Constitution,' of a tendency towards 'tyranny and dictatorship,' of 'dangerous and deceitful economic planning' and of 'ultimately retarding natural recovery.'¹¹⁹

Despite their optimism, the RNC and the Liberty League had misjudged the mood of the middle classes. Where radical opponents to Roosevelt such as Long and Townsend had been successful in galvanising middle-class support for their reform campaigns, it had not been because they opposed his drive for reform *per se*, but because they criticised the First New Deal for not going far enough in restoring the economy. In the only mid-term election in modern history in which the majority party increased their standing, the Republican Party was crushed. Winning 26 out of 35 Senate races, the Democrats increased their majority to 44. Now holding 74 per cent of the seats, the Democratic majority in the House increased to 219. The 1934 mid-term elections categorically demonstrated that the 1932 presidential election results had not been an anomaly. Americans demanded economic and social reform, and in November 1934, they backed candidates who promised to deliver them what they wanted.¹²⁰

The 1934 mid-terms were a clear endorsement of the demand for reform, but they cannot be considered a referendum on the success of the First New Deal. The truth was that the Democratic victory concealed a more complex message for the administration. Analysis reveals that where the election had been a straight fight between a pro-New-Deal Democrat and a conservative Republican, the New Dealer usually won. However, in those contests where an opponent was supportive of reform more radical than that advocated by the administration, that candidate often emerged victorious. The balance of the results demonstrated that a sizeable number of voters favoured political candidates more radical than the New Deal alliance.¹²¹

Evidence of this radicalisation of American politics was evident particularly in the western states, where local third parties rose to challenge traditional party

dominance. In Minnesota, reacting to mass protests on the streets of Minneapolis, the local Farmer-Labor Party adopted a radical social and economic reform platform for its mid-term campaign. In November, it retained the governorship, 3 of its 4 seats in the U.S. House and re-elected Henrik Shipstead to the U.S. Senate. In comparison, pro-New-Deal Democrats experienced no increase in their representation.¹²² Similarly, in Wisconsin, Governor Philip La Follette and insurgent Senator Robert La Follette, Jr., left the Republican Party in protest at their hardening anti-reform stance, but rather than join the Democrats, formed their own Wisconsin Progressive Party. On many points the new party aligned itself with the New Deal, but its platform, calling for the redistribution of wealth, aligned it with Roosevelt's other radical reformist opponents. In November, the new Progressive Party won 7 seats in the U.S. House and saw La Follette re-elected to the U.S. Senate. Wisconsin Democrats lost 3 of their seats in the House.¹²³

In addition, the election marked a significant moment in the development of the Townsend movement in California. Seeking to establish a spokesperson for the movement in Washington, Townsend mobilised the movement behind *Los Angeles Times* columnist John McGroarty in his campaign for the 11th Congressional District seat on behalf of the Democratic Party. McGroarty had been an early supporter of the Townsend movement. In a seat which the *New York Times* described as a 'Republican stronghold' (it had been held by the Republicans since 1918), the McGroarty defeated the sitting candidate with a 20 per cent swing of the vote.¹²⁴

In the west, Republican Party representation in the Senate dropped from 19 to 14, but the 4 insurgent reformist senators seeking re-election won – including, despite the opposition of the RNC, Bronson Cutting – on platforms advocating a need for more radical reform than that offered by the First New Deal. In the House, the Republican insurgent bloc increased their membership to 55. Despite their isolation from the Republican leadership and the Roosevelt administration, the loose insurgent bloc had increased its power within the Congress. Altogether, it is estimated that the new

Congress contained 35 senators who advocated reform more radical than that supported by the president.¹²⁵ The 1934 mid-term elections thus redefined the nature of opposition to the ruling Democratic party. The conservative Republican Party and Democrat-backed Liberty League had failed to generate electoral support. In contrast, radical reformers (whether Republican, Democrat or third parties) had taken a significant step forward in their representation. The administration could count on a significant majority in both the Senate and the House, but with the Congressional opposition now likely to call for more reform, the Democrats would be placed uncomfortably on the defensive, forced constantly to justify the reasons why they were not pursuing a more radical reform agenda. With the 1936 election two years away, the challenge for the Roosevelt administration was now not to convince the American public of the need for reform, but to stem calls for radical reform, particularly from the west, which went beyond the carefully balanced legislation that formed the First New Deal.

In the wake of the 1934 mid-term election results, the potential vulnerability of the Roosevelt administration to the public's demand for a more radical reform agenda was seized upon by Coughlin and Borah. With Long and Townsend already having taken positions of leadership with their national radical opposition movements, in the winter of 1934, Coughlin and Borah moved to establish their own independent powerbases.

In a radio address the Sunday following the mid-term elections, Coughlin announced that he had established a new organisation, the National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ).¹²⁶ 'Its purpose,' he explained, would be to tell elected officials 'what laws you want passed' with a view to 'breaking down the concentration of wealth' and 'eliminating the abuses identified with capitalism.'¹²⁷ The platform of the NUSJ contained 16 proposals linked directly to the theological guidelines set down in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadregesimo Anno*, and shared the general social and economic reform ideology advocated by Borah, Long, Lemke and Townsend. These ranged from

Coughlin's monetary reform proposals to nationalisation of public resources, and finally a promise, like Long's, that every citizen willing to work 'shall receive a just, living, annual wage.'¹²⁸

Upon its launch, Coughlin established an initial goal of 5 million NUSJ members for the NUSJ. In the two weeks following the initial broadcast, he claimed he received over 200,000 requests for membership. Like SoW, the NUSJ provided Coughlin with a national network of supporters.¹²⁹ The spread of NUSJ membership was impressive. Largely mirroring the strongest reach of his broadcasting audience, the NUSJ established powerful footholds in the western states (particularly Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and Missouri), where Coughlin's radical reform proposals met with great support, and the northeastern states (particularly New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania), where he attracted support from the desperately poor, largely Catholic immigrant workers. Importantly, this strengthened the foothold of anti-New-Deal opposition beyond the west and out nationally into the most populated areas of the country.¹³⁰

As the results of the mid-term elections had spurred Coughlin into formal political action, they represented the final straw for Borah. During his long career, the senator had frequently been a thorn in the side of the Republican Party. Borah previously had been content to limit his challenge to individual opposition; in December 1934, however, hardened against both the New Deal administration and the RNC, Borah proposed a complete reorganisation and rebuilding of the Republican Party along radical reforming lines.¹³¹ Borah wrote in November to a Republican candidate who had failed to win election, 'Yes, Simmons, I thought I had a program and you had a program. But it was not the Republican Party's program.' He concluded, 'Those who now hold the places of power and influence in the Republican organization did not, and do not, stand for the things you and I stood for.'¹³² Borah informed the press that it was his view that the party must re-establish itself if it hoped to win the presidency and regain control of Congress.¹³³ Borah's statement received support from both his

senatorial colleagues and, as reflected by the letters that poured into his Washington office, the wider public. 'The time has arrived for our leaders to stop attacking the opposition and preaching fear, under the guise of "saving our great country," wrote one supporter, 'and start saving the Republican Party.'¹³⁴

On December 13, 1934, in a speech broadcast live on national radio, Borah demanded that younger, more liberal elements be allowed to take over the Republican Party. The party could survive as a viable alternative to the Democrats, he declared, only if it stood for 'protection of the rights, liberties and economic privileges of the average man and woman' against monopoly and privilege. He presented no detailed campaign pledges, but his overall ambition for his new movement was clear. 'We must be prepared to adopt a system of economic and social justice,' he said. 'We must be prepared,' he concluded, 'to adopt a system for more equitable distribution of the wealth of this country.'¹³⁵ His use of language was precise and deliberate. Social justice and wealth redistribution, the core shared elements of the Long, Coughlin and Townsend ideologies were to be the focus of Borah's new political movement.

Without access to the financial resources required to establish alternative structures within the party to deliver his reform agenda, Borah attempted to drive his reforms from the grassroots. Following his national broadcast, he wrote to the leaders of Young Republican clubs across the nation, suggesting that they organise state conferences to debate his proposals for party reform. Having established support at state level, he then intended to call a national conference of Young Republicans to endorse his proposals formally. Under such pressure, he believed, the old guard would have little alternative but to accept his reform plans.¹³⁶ 'I sincerely hope,' he wrote to one student supporter, 'we may be able to arouse sufficient interest to bring about a real reorganization, an organization with a liberal outlook.'¹³⁷ *Chicago Daily News* publisher Frank Knox, who had taken leadership of Borah's reform campaign in the western states, wrote to the senator in December 1934 to report rapid progress. With the general opinion strongly behind Borah's proposals, 'there will be no difficulty, I

think, in securing a skeleton of an organization of the younger Republicans in substantially every state in this section.¹³⁸ Like Long, Townsend and Coughlin before him, Borah had set about building his own network of grassroots support outside of Congress from which to target the administration.

Against the background of economic stagnation, it is not surprising that Borah, Lemke, Long, Townsend and Coughlin, questioning the conservative and limited reforms contained within the First New Deal, had been quickly able to generate support amongst the electorate. The platforms of the SoW, NUSJ, OARP and Borah's skeletal Republican youth movement were different in their detailed reform proposals, but were united in a common belief that it was the abuses of the economic system that had triggered the Depression and, left unchecked, would perpetuate it. Their separate solutions to America's problems were intended to wrest power from the centre and return it to the people. They charged Roosevelt and his New Deal with neglecting to alter the structure of American society for the renewed good of the individual. They believed the New Deal had failed to curb the power of the super-rich, had not re-valued the currency and had refused to redistribute wealth. What the First New Deal had done, they concluded, was counterproductive, limiting the power of the individual by creating programmes of 'overbearing intrusiveness' and a huge bureaucracy that existed only to interfere in matters that were properly for the individual and his local community.¹³⁹ With millions of middle-class Americans having lost their jobs and homes in the Depression and having so far failed to see a restoration of their position from the agencies of the New Deal, the reformers offered individual messages of hope that fell on open and willing ears. To date, motivated by their individual goals, the men had not attempted to work together in a co-ordinated, strategic effort to achieve a common aim. It would ultimately be the actions of the administration that would bring them together.

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 - ² Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 88.
 - ³ Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-40* (London: MacMillan, 1989), 31.
 - ⁴ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 137-138.
 - ⁵ Badger, *The New Deal*, 38-39.
 - ⁶ *New York Times* (hereafter NYT), April 8, 1932.
 - ⁷ Democratic National Committee, 'Democratic Party Platform, 1932,' *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29595> (5 August 2010).
 - ⁸ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 108.
 - ⁹ Badger, *The New Deal*, 11-18.
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 - ¹³ WL to CH, March 7, 1934, WLP.
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 - ¹⁵ Holt, *Congressional Insurgents*, 29-33; Robert E. Jenner, *FDR's Republicans: Domestic Political Realignment and American Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), xii-xiii.
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- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 39.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, 45.
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- ²¹ *New Republic*, 16 December, 1931.
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- ²⁴ Williams, *Huey Long*, 559.
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- ²⁸ Glen Jeansonne, *Messiah of the Masses: Huey P. Long and the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 111-112.
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- ³⁰ *NYT*, June 8, 1933.
- ³¹ *Ibid*.
- ³² *NYT*, June 14, 1933.
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- ³⁴ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 71.

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- ³⁶ Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 117.
- ³⁷ *NYT*, April 12, 1933.
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- ⁴² Tobias Casey to WL, November 1932, WLP.
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- ⁴⁷ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 180-181.
- ⁴⁸ *NYT*, April 14, 1933.
- ⁴⁹ *NYT*, May 11, 1933.
- ⁵⁰ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 4 (March 1, 1934), 3452.
- ⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 2 (February 5, 1934), 1920-1921; *Ibid*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 4 (March 1, 1934), 3450-3453.

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- ⁵⁶ *NYT*, March 21, 1933.
- ⁵⁷ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 1st Session, Volume 77, Part 1 (March 10, 1933), 173.
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- ⁵⁹ *NYT*, April 11, 1934.
- ⁶⁰ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 10 (June 11, 1934), 11063.
- ⁶¹ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 11 (June 18, 1934), 12596-12597.
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- ⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 11 (June 18, 1934), 12356-12380.
- ⁶⁶ *NYT*, June 20, 1934.
- ⁶⁷ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 78, Part 11 (June 18, 1934), 12596.
- ⁶⁸ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 34.

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- ⁷⁴ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 43.
- ⁷⁵ Tull, *Father Coughlin*, 34-35.
- ⁷⁶ *NYT*, April 18, 1933.
- ⁷⁷ Young, 'Silver, Discontent, and Conspiracy,' 246-247.
- ⁷⁸ *NYT*, April 17, 18, 27, 29, 1933.
- ⁷⁹ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 173.
- ⁸⁰ *NYT*, October 23, 1933.
- ⁸¹ Leuchtenburg, *FDR Years*, 79.
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- ⁸⁴ *NYT*, November 27, 28, 1933.
- ⁸⁵ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 61.
- ⁸⁶ Democratic National Committee, 'Democratic Party Platform, 1932,' *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29595> (5 August 2010).
- ⁸⁷ Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 65.
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- ⁹² Francis E. Townsend (hereafter FET), *New Horizons: An Autobiography*, (Chicago: J.L. Stewart Publishing Company, 1943), 145-147.
- ⁹³ *Ibid*, 164.
- ⁹⁴ *Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating Old-Age Pension Organisations* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 166; Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 58.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid*.
- ⁹⁶ Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 54.
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- ⁹⁸ *NYT*, March 24 1934.
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- ¹⁰⁰ George Creel to FET, POF.
- ¹⁰¹ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, 265, 267.
- ¹⁰² Hair, *The Kingfish*, 289. Leuchtenburg, *FDR Years*, 79.
- ¹⁰³ John Robert Moore, 'The New Deal in Louisiana,' in *The New Deal: The State and Local Levels*, ed. John Braeman, *et al.* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 145-146.
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- ¹⁰⁶ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 49.
- ¹⁰⁷ *NYT*, November 15, 1934.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Bronson Murray Cutting (hereafter BMC) to H. Phelps Putnam, March 21, 1934, Bronson Murray Cutting Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC), Washington, D.C. (hereafter BMCP).
- ¹⁰⁹ BMC to William E. Borah (hereafter WEB), September 29, 1934, BMCP.
- ¹¹⁰ Hiram Johnson to James A. Farley (hereafter JAF), October 23, 1934, JAF Papers, LOC, Washington, D.C. (hereafter JAFP).
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- ¹¹³ *NYT*, January 4, 5, 14, 1934.
- ¹¹⁴ *NYT*, April 29, 30, 1934.
- ¹¹⁵ *NYT*, April 29, 1934.
- ¹¹⁶ Transcript of an interview between Sheldon Marcus and CC, SMP.
- ¹¹⁷ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, 267.
- ¹¹⁸ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 38.
- ¹¹⁹ George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 139.
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- ¹²¹ Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 229-236.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*
- ¹²³ *Ibid*; U.S. Congress, *Biographical Guide to the U.S. Congress, 1774-Present*.
- ¹²⁴ Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 74; FET, *New Horizons*, 164-165; *NYT*, November 18 1933; Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 44-45; Election data obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California's_11th_congressional_district.
- ¹²⁵ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 229, 236.

¹²⁶ *NYT*, November 12, 1934.

¹²⁷ *NYT*, November 19, 1934.

¹²⁸ The full sixteen points of the National Union for Social Justice reproduced in Warren, *Radio Priest*, 62-63 were:

1. Liberty and conscience and education;
2. A just, living annual wage for all labor;
3. Nationalization of resources too important to be held by individuals;
4. Private ownership of all other property;
5. The use of private property to be controlled for the public good;
6. The abolition of the privately owned Federal Reserve Board and the institution of a central government-owned bank;
7. The return to Congress of the right to coin and regulate money;
8. Control of the cost of living and the value of money by the central bank;
9. Cost of production plus a fair profit for the farmer;
10. The right of a laboring man to organize unions and the duty of the government to protect these organizations against the vested interests of wealth and intellect;
11. Recall of all non-productive bonds;
12. Abolition of tax-exempt bonds;
13. Broadening the base of taxation on the principle of ownership and ability to pay;
14. Simplification of government and lightening taxation on the laboring class;
15. In time of war, conscription of wealth as well as of men;
16. Human rights to be held above property rights; government's chief concern should be with the poor; the rich can take care of themselves.

¹²⁹ Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 81.

¹³⁰ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 206-207.

¹³¹ WEB to Alf Landon, November 12, 1934, William E. Borah Papers, Manuscript Division, LOC, Washington, D.C. (hereafter WEBP).

¹³² WEB to R. G. Simmons, November 12, 1934, WEBP.

¹³³ *NYT*, November 9, 1934.

¹³⁴ Ralph Yates to WEB, December 2, 1934, WEBP.

¹³⁵ *NYT*, December 14, 1934.

¹³⁶ WEB to Walter F. Selby, December 28, 1934, WEBP.

¹³⁷ WEB to Katherine Blyley, December 4, 1934, WEBP.

¹³⁸ Frank Knox to WEB, December 10, 1934, WEBP; Frank Knox to WEB, December 15, 1934, WEBP.

¹³⁹ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 154.

Chapter Two

Convergence

Wrong will find a voice. It is useless to try and hush the voice;
the wise thing is to right the wrong.

Archibald Stinson Coody, April 7, 1935.¹

Until November 1934, those men who would go on to influence the formation of the Union Party were working in isolation in their campaigns against the New Deal. However, from January 1935, in various combinations, Charles Coughlin, Francis Townsend, William Borah, William Lemke, Huey Long and Gerald Smith began collaborating or were regarded by the public as working together to achieve similar goals. This chapter will consider the factors that drove this convergence, looking particularly at how important the actions of the administration were in bringing its opponents together.

The convergence was set in motion during the January 1935 senatorial debate over a resolution of adherence for the United States to join the World Court. This debate brought Borah, Coughlin and Long into a loose coalition working for a single aim: to defeat the resolution. Although they had no pre-planned strategy, with Long and Borah leading the opposition within the Senate, Coughlin rallied his listeners to challenge their senators to defeat the administration. So effective was this political coalition that in May 1935, only months after Roosevelt had led the Democrats to an overwhelming victory in the mid-term elections, Democratic Party Chairman James Farley recorded in his private file notes his belief that 'a considerable change in sentiment has taken place in the last few weeks relative to the president's popularity. I think that right now, the president is weaker than at any time since inauguration.'²

The diverse radical reformers opposed to the New Deal had, to date, concerned themselves solely with domestic issues; however, there was an intimate connection between Borah, Coughlin and Long's core ideological beliefs and their opposition to U.S. membership of the World Court. The Depression, they believed, had been brought about not by American failings, but by the manipulation of the U.S. financial system by European banking families. Their proposed policy responses to this, particularly their currency manipulation plans, sought to free America from interference from international affairs and reassert traditional values of independence, isolation and self-determination. It was, therefore, consistent with their beliefs that they should oppose membership of a court that might require the U.S. to support collective judgements on the actions of other nations that might not be in the best interests of American citizens. Worse, membership of the World Court made the U.S. vulnerable to binding judgements on its own foreign policy actions by those very powers, particularly in Europe, whom the radical reformers blamed for the failure of the American economy.³

The initial resolution for the U.S. to join the World Court had been presented to the Senate in 1926 but with Borah leading the opposition it proved impossible to muster the two-thirds majority required for passage. In the autumn of 1934, faced with the growing threat to world peace from European fascist states, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson persuaded President Roosevelt that the time had come for American action to restore order to international security.⁴ Membership of the World Court, Robinson believed, would provide the first stepping-stone for greater American involvement in world affairs. The debate on membership of the World Court thus presented two alternative visions for the future involvement of the nation in global politics.

Despite minority opposition within the Senate, the Democrats' forty-four member majority suggested that passage was likely. An informal poll of senators published in the *New York Times* on January 12, 1935 found only twelve likely to

oppose the final resolution. “‘Bitter-end” opposition’ to the adherence resolution, they concluded, ‘had largely evaporated.’⁵ Two days later, when the resolution was presented to the Senate, the *New York Times* reported that Borah had ‘served notice that he will make a determined stand’ in opposition, but predicted the issue would be ‘answered soon and in the affirmative.’⁶ Considering the issue no more than a technicality, the *New York Times* and, more importantly, the Roosevelt administration underestimated the strength of feeling amongst insurgent senators against the resolution and their ability to rally uncertain Democrats to their side. For the leaders of the radical reform movements, the World Court debate offered a high-profile platform for their campaign against the failings of the Roosevelt presidency. Borah, Long and the other insurgent senators focused their opposition around a set of well-articulated arguments that clinically demonstrated the potential threat the court presented both to American independence and the nation’s economic recovery. This changed the entire tenor of the debate and surprised the administration.

On January 7, Long began his campaign against the World Court resolution in a speech delivered to a crowded Senate, but his words were directed not only to those present in the chamber, but to the wider American people too. He first attacked the president for his duplicity toward those reform-minded supporters of his election: ‘Were we fighting because of our personal love of Franklin Delano Roosevelt? Were we fighting because we wanted the Democratic emblem above the White House?’ No, he explained, they were fighting because Roosevelt had pledged that there must be a redistribution of wealth. However, rather than reward them, Roosevelt had turned on his erstwhile allies. ‘I have never yet been taught the line,’ Long challenged, ‘by which you allow your friend to pull you as far up the hill as he can and then stab him in the back so you can put somebody else in his place.’ To applause, the Louisiana senator concluded, ‘I will not be found in that kind of politics.’⁷ Following his Senate speech, Long delivered a series of national radio addresses elaborating on his themes and not hiding his intent: ‘We must now be awakened! We must know the truth and speak the

truth. There is no use to wait three more years. It is not Roosevelt or ruin, it is Roosevelt's ruin.'⁸ By fusing the president's deficiencies, and the perceived shortcomings of the First New Deal with the apparent folly of entry into the World Court, Long connected the concerns of his supporters, and those of the other independent radical reform movements, with the political question being set before the Senate. Having taken the debate to the nation through the power of the radio, Long had extended the debate beyond the constraints of Congress and challenged the American public to oppose entry into the court.

Long set out his formal opposition to the World Court resolution on the third day of debate; 'waving his arms and shouting at the top of his voice,' he condemned the administration's proposal in a three-hour attack promoting his values of American isolation and independence. The countries of Europe had spent the last one hundred years in the development of pacts and treaties that had resulted in the Great War, he said, but the American continent had largely remained at peace. 'America has to decide now,' he finished, 'how it will regard its rights. Will we say: "We remain here willing to be friendly, but without you to pass upon the question of whether or not we are maintaining the proper friendly attitude?"'⁹

The approach taken by Long was followed directly by other senatorial opponents to the resolution. Four days after Long's intervention, Borah presented his case. Most of his speech was devoted to a carefully presented review of the court opinion that had ruled against the 1931 Austro-German tariff treaty. This opinion, Borah warned, had not been reached because Austria or Germany had breached international law, but 'to accomplish a political end.' Borah concluded that 'political and economic questions and national feeling will inevitably intrude in the advisory opinions of the court,' because they were open to corruption caused by national political interests. Why should the U.S. be forced to back a court ruling upon the interests of another continent?¹⁰ Fellow Republican insurgent Senator Hiram Johnson of California backed Borah's argument in the simplest terms. 'The question is, shall we

go into foreign politics,' he said. 'Once we're in, we're in. Europe wants us on any pretext, and it will be hard to get out.'¹¹

These isolationist appeals to American nationalism unsettled the Senate. By the end of the first week of debate, the *New York Times* reported that the number of senators in favour was estimated to have fallen below the required two thirds to enable passage.¹² This marked a significant victory for Long, Borah and the other opponents to court membership. Well aware that the administration would use its influence to rally those senators who supported the World Court resolution, congressional opponents attempted to generate their own pressure against wavering colleagues through a direct appeal to the American public. Here Father Coughlin proved a significant ally. Taking to the air for his regular sermon on January 20, Coughlin expressed outright opposition to American membership of the World Court. Presenting the administration proposal as 'crude internationalism,' he challenged the Senate to think of the common man: it is 'neither the farmer nor the laborer,' he said, 'who is anxious that we go international.' Membership of the World Court was merely a distraction. To the minds of the common man, 'our struggle is to preserve the American standard of living, or rather to restore it,' he concluded, 'rather than to enmesh ourselves with the debasements of the standardized poverty of Europe.'¹³ By connecting the 'new' unemployed lower middle-class voters' discontent with the perceived failing of the First New Deal directly to the World Court debate, Coughlin touched a raw nerve. To the priest's radio audience, the administration's push for membership of the World Court became symbolic of Roosevelt's alleged distance and detachment from the will of the electorate. Defeat of the resolution thus took on a broader political significance.

The escalation of the World Court opponents' campaign against the resolution outside of Congress had not been anticipated by the administration. With Roosevelt criticising the 'devious ways' of his opponents, the administration found it difficult to present an argument that countered these direct appeals for American self-determination and economic self-interest.¹⁴ Following a further week of debate, with

the final vote scheduled for January 29, over the weekend of 26-27 January, the administration sought to regain the upper hand in the debate and it made a series of direct radio appeals to the electorate. To demonstrate its commitment to the court, the administration aired radio talks from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson, Democratic Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina, Monsignor John Ryan of Catholic University in Washington, D.C., U.S. Army General John F. O’Ryan and former Democratic Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Each sought to persuade the nation that the World Court was needed to ensure global peace and security. ‘The World Court,’ concluded General O’Ryan, is ‘simply the legal machinery for the settlement of international disputes by reason and justice, instead of war and homicide.’¹⁵

To Coughlin and the opponents of the court, however, the threat of war was not a primary concern. They believed that the World Court debate was a distraction from the administration’s primary goal of solving the economic crisis and easing the everyday national problems caused by mass unemployment and poverty. In response, seeking to exploit this alleged disconnection between the administration and the electorate, Coughlin, in his sermon broadcast on January 27, dismissed all arguments in favour of the court and appealed directly to ‘every solid American who loves democracy, who loves the United States, who loves the truth,’ to support the ‘tried and true’ senators in their ‘fight to keep America safe for Americans and not the hunting ground of international plutocrats.’ In a show of strength, he rallied his audience against the supposed destruction of the American way of life: ‘Today – tomorrow may be too late – today, whether you can afford it or not, send your senators telegrams telling them to vote “No” on our entrance into the World Court.’¹⁶ The response was overwhelming. Western Union reported an immediate overnight increase in the number of telegrams directed to the Capitol Building; by Tuesday, over 40,000 telegrams had been received in Washington, D.C.¹⁷ Attempts by the administration to generate public support for the resolution appeared to have failed.

Coughlin's speech delivered Long the mandate he needed, and he entered the Senate on Monday morning with a strict agenda. The *New York Times* described him hurrying 'around the Senate floor, exhorting senators on the doubtful list.'¹⁸ Long took every opportunity over the next two days to detail his objections. Accepting likely defeat, Joe Robinson's final statement to the Senate directly attributed the influence of Coughlin and Long on the outcome of the debate. 'There has been unfair, unjust, unreasonable propaganda,' he said. 'Appeals have come through more than 40,000 telegrams, every one prompted by inflammatory statements.' There was no conspiracy to enter the World Court on behalf of the international bankers: 'That sounds like the senator from Louisiana, does it not?' he asked. 'If there be conspiracy at this hour,' he concluded, 'it is in the methods pursued by those who seek to mislead the judgement of the American people.' When the roll was called, 52 senators voted in favour and 36 against. The resolution had failed to achieve the required two-thirds majority. By appealing directly to the general public, Long, Coughlin and Borah brought about a substantial and embarrassing defeat. Voting in opposition, a hardcore of insurgent Republican senators and their allies had joined with a bloc of 20 Democrats (including Huey Long) to openly defy the will of the administration.¹⁹ According to the *New York Times*, Borah 'uttered a fervent "Thank God!" and declared it the most important decision since the U.S. entry into the First World War.'²⁰

The high profile senatorial debate established a political relationship between Long, Borah and the priest. Immediately after the Senate vote, Borah telegraphed Coughlin: 'How deeply indebted we are to you for this great victory. Thank you again and again.'²¹ Thereafter, Coughlin and Borah kept in close touch, corresponding in detail on issues relating to the increasing national debt and Coughlin's campaign to remonetise silver. In addition, Borah was made aware of developments within the NUSJ through meetings with Coughlin's Washington agent, Louis B. Ward.²² Immediately following the World Court vote, Long 'expressed satisfaction and pleasure' to the press and credited the joint attack he had developed with Coughlin for the

defeat.²³ Commentators reflecting upon the reasons for the administration's defeat directly attributed it to the strategy developed by Coughlin, Long and Borah.²⁴ By focusing their arguments on issues that broke through party lines and generating a national debate outside of the closed political cauldron of the Senate chamber, according to the *New York Times*, the individual leaders of the radical reform movements opposed to the New Deal successfully relieved Democratic senators 'of any obligations of loyalty to the president or to the party platform pledge on which the president based his call for adherence.'²⁵ Further, the telegrams generated by Coughlin's direct public appeal, Krock observed, 'played a significant part in swinging enough senators into the negative to muster more than the necessary one-third against the court.'²⁶ By connecting their opposition to the World Court resolution with dissatisfaction at the pace of reform under the First New Deal, Roosevelt's opponents successfully capitalised on the shift in public opinion revealed in the mid-term election results and inflicted a major defeat on the president. Senatorial opposition had been successfully allied to the priest's populist communication agenda with powerful effect. Coughlin recognised the power that his radio pulpit provided him and, in his next radio broadcast, set out this new agenda for the nation:

Your excursion into the affairs of the World Court politics has demonstrated to you a newer concept of democracy. Through the medium of radio and the telegraph, you possess the power to override the invisible government, to direct your representatives on individual matters of legislation.²⁷

Press commentators, directly attributing the defeat to the efforts of Coughlin and Long, enhanced their national political credibility. The president's attention to the World Court made him appear out of touch with the material causes of poverty. By contrast, appealing directly to the will of the voters, Long and Coughlin offered the nation a new form of more direct, relevant leadership. The success of Coughlin's communication campaign can be measured by the volume of letters reaching the White House in the wake of the defeat directly criticising the president for his pursuit of membership of the court. 'We might better be dead, than living as we are, you have

failed us so far,' wrote one. 'Go to Hell,' wrote another. 'Huey Long is the man we thought you were when we voted for you,' wrote a Long supporter. 'I hope you will support him for president in 1936.'²⁸

On March 3, 1935, Coughlin, riding on a wave of support, marked the second anniversary of Roosevelt's inauguration with an attack on the president's compromises with the 'money-changers' and 'monopolistic industry' that he alleged had corrupted the New Deal. The World Court defeat was just the beginning, he warned, of a larger struggle with the Roosevelt administration. 'In the past there was no compromise,' he concluded. 'In the present there can be no compromise, if a new liberty, a further freedom shall be born.'²⁹ Reflecting upon the impact of the World Court vote on the president, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman commented that the tide of public opinion was now running strongly against the administration and that 'unless the president did something to change the current mood during the next thirty days,' he would not be re-elected in 1936.³⁰ Roosevelt himself conceded: 'These are not normal times; people are jumpy and very ready to run after strange gods.'³¹ Decisively outmanoeuvred on the court agenda, the president needed to seize back the initiative.

On February 12, 1935, meeting for their national convention, the American Bankers' Association announced a series of steps to counter 'public hostility' towards them. 'Constructive articles about banking and sound financial policies' had been distributed to 6,000 newspapers, the association reported, banks had been encouraged to work more closely with local communities, and the association's advertising department had been expanded. James W. Anderson, Vice-President of the First and Merchants National Bank of Richmond, Virginia, explained to reporters that the purpose of this investment was to 'set up a defense against the various forms of interference or attack that from time to time assail our banks.' 'In recent months bankers have been widely misrepresented,' said G. M. Hubbard, President of Doremus & Co. These 'so-called experts,' commented Dr. Harold Stonier, Director of the American Bankers' Association Graduate School of Banking at Rutgers University,

New Jersey, exacerbated the continued economic problems of the country. In fact, Dr. Stonier concluded, unfounded 'money theories' were having a 'dangerous' impact, particularly in the capital markets, where investment was being undermined by the 'impact of fear' more than 'the outcome of economic theory.'³² Coughlin and Long could afford to scoff at the concerns of the banking community, but Roosevelt could not. Having been able to generate public and political force behind their individual campaigns, the leaders of the individual radical reform movements threatened the president's re-election, now less than two years away. In March 1935, Roosevelt, cognisant of the political threat posed by opponents advocating reform more radical than that contained within the First New Deal, sanctioned a series of actions intended to undermine their credibility and regain the centre ground. In turn, these actions helped bring the men together in the mind of the public, and increasingly, in reality.

In the wake of the comments made at the American Bankers' Association conference, former National Recovery Agency Director Hugh Johnson approached Roosevelt with a suggestion that he should respond to the criticisms from Long and Coughlin on behalf of the administration. With the president in agreement, Johnson's response came on March 4, 1935, in a speech broadcast over the NBC network. What the national radio audience heard was 'unheralded, unexpected but welcomed,' commented the *New York Times*.³³

Two years ago, Johnson began, the president had taken office with the nation under a gloom not experienced since Valley Forge. Roosevelt had shone a beam of light, and offered hope to the people. Now, he concluded, malicious figures motivated by selfishness and self-interest had cast their own shadow over the nation. 'It is my purpose here,' he explained, 'with what force God has given me to smash at two of them.' Driven only by their quest for power and self-aggrandisement, Long and Coughlin were, he said, exploiting a nation too emotionally weak to distinguish fact from fiction. Placing them in direct contrast to Roosevelt, Johnson painted a graphic picture for his listeners of two men who were 'raging up and down this land preaching

not construction, but destruction, not reform, but revolution, not peace but a sword.' If poverty could have been eradicated by such simple schemes as Long and Coughlin advocated, he said, it would have been done decades ago. The two radical reformers had become leaders of an 'emotional fringe' joined in an 'open alliance' to remove the president and place Long in the White House. 'You can laugh at Father Coughlin – you can snort at Huey Long,' he warned, 'but this country was never under a greater menace.'³⁴

The press response to the speech was astonishing. The *New York Times* commented that it was 'like the break-up of a long hard winter.'³⁵ The story featured prominently on the front page of all of the major national and regional newspapers. Most, including the *New York Times*, included the full text of Johnson's speech alongside their report. 'General Johnson Flays Father Coughlin and Huey Long,' declared the *Pittsburgh Press*. 'Hugh S. Johnson hits Coughlin, Long as Menace,' wrote the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Milwaukee Journal* described the speech as 'bitingly effective.' 'Whether one agrees with Gen. Johnson or not,' the *Milwaukee Journal* commented, 'his fearlessness, his clearness of statement, and his readiness to "take it" as well as "dish it out" arouses admiration.'³⁶

Placed surprisingly on the defensive by the actions of the administration (in the Senate the next day, Long declared the speech 'abusive and indecent'), the Louisiana senator and the priest sought an immediate opportunity to respond.³⁷ Recognising the potential of the story, NBC radio offered the two men slots in which to offer their rebuttals. Long's March 7 speech and Coughlin's of March 11, 1935, were similar in tone and message. Where Johnson had used the melodramatic to illustrate his address, Long and Coughlin responded with uncharacteristically reasoned and rational argument. To an audience of 25 million listeners, Long used his time for a full exposition of his Share-our-Wealth programme. He called upon the president to 'admit the facts' and confess that the present policies were making conditions 'worse and not better.' In his speech, Coughlin explained that Johnson was merely a pawn in a game

controlled by the international bankers. He appealed to his listeners to bear no ill will; Johnson, he concluded, was 'to be pitied and not condemned.'³⁸ By juxtaposing Johnson's rhetoric with reasoned argument, Long and Coughlin directly disproved his central message that they were dangerous extremists motivated only by their hatred of Roosevelt and a quest for personal power. With large sections of the electorate apparently willing to back Coughlin and Long, Johnson's speech only served to reinforce how apparently detached the administration was from a section of public opinion. Roosevelt had seriously misjudged Long and Coughlin's abilities. There was no doubt who had won this skirmish. 'The excommunication of Huey Long and Father Coughlin,' said the *Nation*, 'has turned into a demonstration of political feeble-mindedness.' A week ago, the *New York Times* explained, Long 'might have been written down as a bumptious clown seeking mainly personal attention.' Now 'there is a strong feeling, at least in Washington, that the "Kingfish" may have to be taken seriously.' Johnson's attack had provided Long and Coughlin with a national platform, raised their profiles and effectively designated them as leaders of those Americans seeking more radical reforms than those included in the First New Deal. 'Whether they willed it or not,' commented the *New York Times*, General Johnson 'then and there probably transformed Huey Long from a clown into a real political menace.' Nothing, *The Nation* concluded, could now stop Long, except 'the one likelihood he himself mentions on every possible occasion – that Roosevelt will keep his promises!'³⁹

In March 1935, Long and Coughlin were at the very height of their public fame. Yet whilst their use of the radio provided them with a national pulpit to preach their message, it was an ineffective medium of control and provided no basis from which to manage an active political organisation. Although Long and Coughlin shared their vocal skills with the populist rabble-rousers of the past age, if they were to turn their words into mass action, they needed to step out from behind the microphone and engage directly with their supporters. Thus throughout the spring of 1935, Coughlin and Long sought to capitalise upon their national media status by increasing their

public campaigning. In a series of large-scale public events, the two men individually toured the country spreading their messages. On March 14, Long, speaking before 16,000 people assembled in the convention hall in Philadelphia, denounced the Roosevelt administration, charging that the president had 'betrayed' the people. It was, the *New York Times* observed, one of the 'most adroit political moves [Long] has shown in the national arena.' Long followed the Philadelphia rally with a speech before the 10,000 delegates of the convention of the National Farmers' Holiday Association in Des Moines, Iowa, on April 27. 'The Lord has called America to barbecue,' he cried, 'and 50 million people are starving.'⁴⁰

On April 24, Father Coughlin similarly responded with a presentation before the Michigan Unit of the NUSJ in the Olympia Auditorium, Detroit. Fifteen thousand people filled the hall, whilst thousands more gathered outside to listen over loudspeakers. In his main address, Coughlin charged Roosevelt with failing the American people. 'Against this immorality,' Coughlin declared, 'the NUSJ raises its voice and stands prepared to throw its unlimited force.'⁴¹ On May 8, Coughlin followed the Michigan event with a speech before 25,000 people, the largest crowd ever assembled in the Cleveland Public Auditorium. Another 3,000 listened outside over loudspeakers. Finally, on May 22 Coughlin ended his tour in front of 23,000 paying attendees packed into Madison Square Garden, New York City. Having built himself up to a fever pitch, Coughlin concluded by declaring that 'this plutocratic capitalistic system must be constitutionally voted out of existence.' As the *New York Times* reported, there was a moment's silence while these words sank into the consciousness of the crowd. Then a roar broke out and lasted with almost deafening intensity for one full minute. Coughlin finished his tour before a capacity audience of 18,000 in St Louis, Missouri.⁴²

Johnson's speech was a grave political misjudgement. Linking together the names of Long and Coughlin in the public consciousness, the Roosevelt administration singled them out from amongst a number of the New Deal critics and ironically justified their credentials as protest leaders of America. Rather than diminishing their standing,

it enhanced both their coverage in the national press, and provided a platform for the men to launch a public campaign against the failures and excesses of the administration. Most significantly, however, by criticising Long and Coughlin together, the administration helped to further a strategic union between them that had not clearly existed before Johnson's speech. Having stated it as a fact, however, the existence of the 'open alliance' was reinforced by the nation's press. Where the detail of every Long and Coughlin speech filled the pages of the nation's newspapers, articles on one of the men increasingly referenced the other. 'You are bound to compare Father Coughlin with Huey Long,' wrote Walter Davenport in *Collier's Magazine*.⁴³ The most significant example of the press linking the independent radical reform movements and their leaders, however, was published by the *New York Times* on March 17, 1935. In a full-page article run under the headline 'Three 'Pied Pipers' of the Depression,' the *Times* analysed the appeal of Coughlin and Long but, significantly, also the 'shadowy' Doctor Townsend, who had been excluded from Johnson's criticism but whom the *Times* considered potentially the most powerful of the three. By doing so, the *New York Times* helped to extend and enhance the coherence of the president's radical reforming opponents – explicitly linking the three movements, political ideologies and their motivations. 'Call them spellbinders, rabble-rousers, demagogues, or what you will,' the article concluded, 'they cannot be dismissed in the present temper of the country.'⁴⁴

Most importantly, the 'open alliance' started to take on a genuine form. Thereafter, Coughlin visited Washington regularly and would meet Long in his hotel suite for many hours of discussions. One Long bodyguard revealed in an interview with historian T. Harry Williams that Coughlin would talk to Long every week before he would go on the air for his Sunday talk.⁴⁵ Furthermore, supporters of the distinct protest organisations established by Long and Coughlin began to merge the two leaders into one. 'I am just home from a trip out over parts of this state,' a Wisconsin man wrote to Harold Ickes, 'and I was surprised to find life-long Democrats and

Republicans saying bluntly, we are all done with both of the old parties, and we are for Senator Huey Long, and for Father Charles E. Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice.' At an organisational level, the loose confederation of clubs began to work together. A local SoW society in Chicago joined together with the NUSJ to lobby for permission to use Soldier's Field, Chicago, for an additional stop on Coughlin's tour.⁴⁶ On March 11, 1935, the *New York Times*, reflecting on the rise of Roosevelt's radical reformist opponents both nationally and at state level in the west, reported a bold projection from one Republican Party strategist. Long and Coughlin, the source concluded, 'were the centre of a movement around which it is hoped to combine all dissatisfied into a new party next year.'⁴⁷

Observing the growth of Long and Coughlin's power from Mississippi, former Secretary of the State Tax Board, Archibald Stinson Coody despaired at the botched action taken by the administration to confront the men. 'Those who oppose Huey only make him stronger,' he explained in a letter to Mississippi Democratic Senator Theodore Bilbo. 'The trouble is not with Huey but with the conditions. If we were in good shape, Huey would not get a listener.' The solution that Stinson Coody offered was simple but prophetic. 'Wrong will find a voice,' he concluded. 'It is useless to try and hush the voice; the wise thing is to right the wrong.'⁴⁸

In the spring of 1935, President Roosevelt began to evaluate the progress that had been made in dealing with the fundamental problems of the Depression during his administration. He also began to map out a course towards the 1936 presidential election. However, with men like Long, Coughlin and Townsend making inroads into his political support and the progress of his reforms challenged by the Republican reformist insurgent bloc in the Senate led by Borah, Roosevelt made what the *New York Times* called 'a definite and highly important shift in [his] technique.' If Roosevelt was to win re-election, he needed to get a grasp on the political situation and drain the support of his opponents.⁴⁹

The time for academic assessment and detailed planning had passed. As the *New York Times* headlined on March 24, 1935, there was to be a 'Dramatic Fade-out of the Brain Trust.' ('The mental giants had never been schooled in the ungentle art of practical, cut-throat politics,' the newspaper commented in reference to Rexford Tugwell and Arthur Moley). Instead of relying on an eclectic group of intellectuals, the president turned, as the *Times* concluded, to the 'old-fashioned practice of relying on the judgement principally of practical politicians.' During the early months of 1935, Roosevelt distanced himself from the more academic members of the Brain Trust, favouring the advice of his more practical and seasoned advisors such as Felix Frankfurter, Harry Hopkins, Henry Morgenthau and Henry Wallace. Together, between January and August 1935, Roosevelt and his new team of advisors developed a Second New Deal that incorporated elements of the platforms of the radical reform movements within his own agenda. In this way, Roosevelt responded directly to the unresolved issues of former middle-class voters who remained impoverished by the Depression and diminished his opponent's appeal.⁵⁰

Even as late as November 1934, Roosevelt's approach to resolving the Depression had been typified by the First New Deal's focus on appeals for what historian James Holt called 'national unity, cooperation and social solidarity.' In the spring of 1935, however, as the administration backed legislation that would form the Second New Deal passed through Congress – the Social Security and the National Labor Relation Acts, redistributive tax proposals, and the Works Progress and National Youth Administrations – such appeals diminished and were replaced by what Holt called 'assaults on privilege and social injustice.' Many of these proposals had in fact been presented within the Democratic platform in 1932, but had been largely absent from the First New Deal. The Second New Deal did not therefore mark a rejection of the philosophy that underpinned the first, for a fundamental belief in the need to rehabilitate the existing capitalist structure remained. What emerged, however, was a new legislative framework that accommodated elements drawn from the radical

reformers' independent policy platforms including old-age pensions and wealth redistribution, within the structure of the Brain Trust's original plans. The more socially inclusive shift in the New Deal's focus was a gamble worth taking if Roosevelt could secure the support of a much wider range of voters who had been wooed by the political appeal of his opponents.⁵¹

The first plank of the Second New Deal was the Social Security Bill presented to Congress by the president's Committee on Economic Security in January 1935. Designed to replace the temporary Federal Emergency Relief Act, the bill included proposals for the introduction of unemployment and old-age insurance. The intention of the bill was to provide workers with basic insurance against the unpredictable effects of the economic cycle that might leave them temporarily unemployed, as well as a pension entitlement to enable aged workers to remove themselves entirely from the workforce. Designed to be sustainable, the provisions of the bill were not huge: for example, the old-age pension entitlement was pegged at \$30 a month rather than Townsend's proposed \$200. It furthermore excluded medical insurance and certain categories of workers, including some of the poorest. Funded through a combination of new income and sales taxes rather than a federal grant, the legislation was complicated and deflationary, but despite its potential limitations, it found general support in the nation.⁵²

Representatives of all political parties hailed the president for his bold move in bringing forward social security legislation: 'First rate,' commented Republican Senator George Norris of Nebraska. Some insurgent senators, however, criticised the proposed pension provision for not going far enough and for its regressive and deflationary tendencies: 'Inadequate,' commented Republican Senator Charles McNary of Oregon. 'Wholly inadequate,' declared Borah, predictably.⁵³ Like his radical reform minded colleagues in the Senate, Townsend rejected the moderate Social Security Bill and sought to use the congressional debate to seek the incorporation of his alternative plan within the final act. On January 24, 1935 Borah, commenting upon the Townsend

Plan's 'widespread support,' demanded a 'full and open' debate on the proposal.⁵⁴ Later that month, in response to Borah's political pressure and the general success of Townsend's movement, the elderly doctor was called to appear before a congressional committee considering the administration's Social Security plans. These hearings provided a congressional forum for Townsend, but they also exposed his limited abilities on the political stage.

Townsend had never claimed to be a politician. Indeed, a considerable amount of his appeal had been generated by his very distance from the political machine. His key advisor, Robert Clements, was a supreme and efficient salesman, but was no political advisor. Neither Townsend nor Clements was prepared for exposure to congressional politics. Ill-advised and unaware of the protocol of Washington, the doctor performed poorly. Called in front of the committee, spokespersons for the administration repeatedly characterised the Townsend Plan as 'a fantastic dole' (Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins), a 'cock-eyed' proposal depending on miracles (Federal Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins), and 'not within the structure of our present economic or governmental system' (Dr E. E. Witte, Executive Director of the Committee on Economic Security).⁵⁵ Asked whether billionaires John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford would be eligible for the pension, Townsend replied: 'Certainly, if they want it.' Asked whether use of the pension would be restricted, he replied: 'We won't limit it at all. The pensioner can buy whisky with it if he chooses. Let him kill himself off if he likes.' When questioned whether his tax proposal would raise the necessary funds to pay the pension, he replied, 'I'm not in the least interested in the cost of the plan.'⁵⁶ Reporting on events, the *New York Times* focused its comments on Townsend's inexperienced and politically naive performance. Summing up the session, the *Times* observed that the committee had 'literally laughed the Townsend Plan out of Congress.'⁵⁷

When administration supporters on the House Ways and Means Committee issued strong criticisms of the Townsend Plan's viability, Borah met with the doctor to

discuss possible amendments that might satisfy the committee's concerns. Thereafter, Borah worked privately on Townsend's behalf to rally representatives behind the Townsend's pension proposal.⁵⁸ His efforts, and those of representatives such as Republican James Mott of Oregon who issued a plea that when 20 million have said that they wanted something more drastic than the administration's proposals, 'you cannot ridicule or laugh this thing out of existence,' achieved little. On a division vote (a simple counting of hands) an amendment to the Social Security Bill embodying the Townsend Plan failed by 206 votes to 56.⁵⁹ With the radical pension plan discredited, the overwhelming majority of U.S. Representatives supported Roosevelt's moderate Social Security Bill and in April 1935 it passed by 372 votes to 32.⁶⁰ 'For months,' reflected the *New York Times*, 'the nation has been hearing about the threat of the Townsend Plan,' but that threat simply had not translated into genuine political pressure in Washington. By responding quickly and with 'perfect party discipline,' the administration had 'swamp[ed] the advocates of the Townsend Plan.'⁶¹ In the absence of a formally recorded roll-call vote, it is not possible to undertake a detailed analysis of those supporting the amendment, but it is notable that all 6 representatives speaking in favour of the OARP plan in the debate were from western states, including 3 from Townsend's native California. Despite the doctor's claims of far-reaching support for his movement (Townsend told the *New York Times* on April 21st that he had 1,000 clubs located outside of the western states), his political power in Washington seemed to be limited largely to his most loyal, local representatives.⁶²

Upon its passage Robert Doughton, Democratic Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, declared the Social Security Act 'probably the most far-reaching piece of legislation ever considered by the American Congress.' By contrast, a bitter Townsend attempted to rally his supporters. 'Nothing,' he said, 'will so crystallize sentiment and be such a tremendous aid to the Townsend Plan as the passage of the administration's social-security pauper pension bill.'⁶³ Outmanoeuvred by politically experienced congressmen, Townsend – ridiculed and found wanting –

was plunged into open opposition to the legislation he had led a national movement to see enacted. But although it had been relatively easy for Townsend to generate mass public support behind a national pension entitlement, it would prove far more difficult to sustain and enhance his movement now that the pension goal had been largely achieved. Borah's public and private actions in support of the movement, however, found great favour with Townsend's supporters. Borah's private correspondence included a report of one mass meeting of the OARP in California where, upon the reading of a number of the senator's letters in support of Townsend's pension plan, the 'determined,' 'conscientious' and 'sincere' crowd had risen and 'cheered.'⁶⁴ Townsend himself offered sincere personal appreciation for Borah's commitment to the organisation.⁶⁵ In defeat, the collaboration between Roosevelt's opponents had once again been strengthened with Townsend and Borah publicly allied over the shortcomings of the Social Security Act and the progress of Townsend's programme.

The passage of the Social Security Act was followed by two significant measures intended to reduce unemployment and improve the conditions of workers. These measures were introduced as a result of evidence that Coughlin's and Long's criticisms of the administration's apparent lack of economic progress was broadening their appeal beyond disenchanted former middle-class voters and out into the unionised workforce. In January 1935 Daniel Tobin, leader of the Teamsters Union, wrote to Roosevelt's close advisor Louis Howe expressing concern that he had received dozens of letters from members 'inquiring about and asking me if they should proceed to organise [SoW and NUSJ] clubs, etc., and forward donations.' Long and Coughlin's broadening appeal was a great concern to Howe and he warned the president that 'it is symptoms like this I think we should watch very carefully.'⁶⁶

Responding directly to concerns expressed by Tobin and Howe, in his first fireside chat of 1935, delivered on April 28, Roosevelt backed the passage of legislation proposed by Democratic Senator Robert Wagner of New York that would form the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Roosevelt's adoption of labour relations

legislation was designed to reverse the effects of the employer produced industrial codes previously given legal protection under the administration's National Recovery Administration. Under these codes, the president explained, workers without control over their hours or conditions, had overproduced for their employers at very low wages. By doing so they had created a glut of products which they, as consumers, could not afford to buy. Roosevelt concluded that, counter to his industrial policy of the First New Deal, he now believed that providing workers with the right to organise closed shops and the ability to bargain effectively would place the economy on a more stable footing, thus protecting the interests of both producers and consumers.⁶⁷

The passage of the NLRA was accompanied by two new programmes, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and National Youth Administration (NYA), designed to reduce unemployment. These were not wholly new innovations, however. Roosevelt had established the Civil Works Administration (CWA) in the spring of 1932, but had dismantled it in autumn 1934, concerned that mass federal employment created a culture of dependency that held back normal economic recovery. The closure of the CWA had not led to a boost in economic growth. Thus, in a reversal of his position, in April 1935 Roosevelt proposed the passage of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act (ERAA) with the intention of providing \$5 billion of funding for the WPA and NYA to fund federal employment projects. Lacking confidence, and without funds, consumers were not making purchases; without demand, industry was not creating jobs. If confidence could be improved by increasing the numbers of workers on the federal payroll, it was believed, the growth in consumer demand would itself lead to the recovery of industry. By the summer of 1935, six million Americans were employed on the federal payroll as workers for the new administration agencies or the publicly funded work projects.⁶⁸

Like Social Security, the passage of the NLRA and the ERAA was designed in the first case to deliver recovery and at the same time weaken electoral support for critics such as Coughlin and Long calling for more radical solutions. Intended to

provide a temporary injection of purchasing power into the economy, WPA salary levels were set high enough to be attractive to unemployed workers, but low enough to encourage the pursuit of private sector employment once the economy had recovered sufficiently to generate new jobs. These 'poverty'-level wages provided the rallying point for Coughlin and Long. The Louisiana senator accused Roosevelt in the chamber of being a 'scrooch owl' (an owl that seduced its partner before eating it), and succeeded in pushing through an amendment by a margin of one vote (though removed in the final bill) raising wage levels above those acceptable to the administration. Outside of Congress, Charles Coughlin, speaking before 23,000 supporters at Madison Square Garden, accused the WPA of being nothing less than a 'breeder of communism.' Coughlin's emerging anti-communist rhetoric was not directed particularly in opposition to the socially oriented policy outcome of the president's new initiatives. Indeed, many of these policies were shared in some form with planks of the radical reform movements' diverse platforms. Rather, these accusations of 'communism' reflected a significant difference between the radical reformers' social policies, which were rooted in self-determination and individualism and which they contrasted to the centralised state control of the New Deal which diminished personal social responsibility. Moreover, in his public comments, Coughlin became increasingly critical of what he saw as the president's mistrust in democracy. Coughlin accused the 'Dictator' president of the creation of a cult of personality governing not through Congress but via agencies answerable only to him and exempt from the checks and balances central to the American political system.⁶⁹ Despite this shrill criticism, the reality was that Roosevelt had positioned himself squarely in the centre ground. He had been able to outmanoeuvre Long, Coughlin and Townsend by delivering legislation that found widespread appeal, robbing them of their support. In the process he pushed his recalcitrant opponents into increasingly extreme appeals that moved them towards the fringes of the political spectrum.

The final piece of the jigsaw of legislation that formed the Second New Deal was a programme of tax reforms. In place of the voluntary industrial codes instituted in the First New Deal overseen by the National Recovery Agency, Roosevelt moved to use the federal tax system to restrain corporations through the redistribution of wealth. By doing so, the president removed the basis of his critics' strongest and most consistent attacks upon him. On June 19, 1935, in a surprise announcement designed to wrong-foot his opponents, Roosevelt presented his new taxation programme to Congress. Despite the potentially radical nature of his proposals, in contrast to the rabble-rousing of Coughlin and Long, Roosevelt sought to pacify his audience through the use of moderate language and a calm tone. 'Our revenue laws,' he explained, 'have operated in many ways to the unfair advantage of the few and have done little to prevent an unjust concentration of wealth and economic power.'⁷⁰ To address this, he called for a package of new wealth taxes including an inheritance tax, higher taxes on gifts, increased rates on very large incomes, and a graduated scale of corporation tax rates to replace the existing flat rate. 'It seems only equitable,' he concluded, 'to adjust our tax system in accordance with economic capacity, advantage and fact.'⁷¹

The president's proposals received the warm support of Congress – the House cheered the announcement – but the president's political motivation was not missed by newspapers across the nation. The *Hartford Courant* ran with the headline 'Tax Plan Aimed at Kingfish,' and the *New York Times* reported that, through his tax plan, Roosevelt had 'counteracted a host of "fantastic movements" headed by Huey Long, Father Coughlin and others.' 'It is clear,' the *Times* concluded, 'that [Roosevelt] is adroitly and effectively reasserting his leadership.'⁷²

As the press recognised, the decision to bring forward legislation to share wealth placed Long on the defensive. In response, he attempted to claim credit for Roosevelt's actions in bringing forward wealth redistribution proposals, and, at the same time, criticised the tax measures for being woefully inadequate. In a radio talk on July 8, 1935 Long accused Roosevelt of being 'a liar and a faker' and defying the

administration to 'indict him for that.' He finished, 'Why, he's copying my share-the-wealth speeches now I was writing when I was 14 years old. So he's just now getting as smart as I was when I was in knee breeches.'⁷³ On July 22, Long took once again to the airwaves to mark the third anniversary of the president's nomination. In his radio address, the senator listed the many failings of Roosevelt's presidency. Firstly, whereas the New Deal had been established to reduce unemployment, figures prepared by the American Federation of Labor demonstrated that unemployment rates currently ran at the highest-ever levels. In the previous year alone, 754,000 people had lost their jobs. The national income had fallen from around \$100 billion to \$42 billion under Roosevelt, but at the same time, Long alleged, more had been spent in 3 years than in the previous 124. With less income and more spending, the national debt had soared. The Roosevelt presidency had promised an end to the Depression, the Louisiana senator regaled his listeners, instead it had dragged the nation close to destruction. 'I have,' Long concluded, 'no faith whatever in the pledges of this administration.'⁷⁴ The truth was, however, that the president's positive, decisive and swift actions rendered his opponents largely impotent. A noted opponent of the First New Deal legislation, Long voted in favour of Social Security and the NLRA and abstained from the vote on the ERAA. On August 15, 1935, rather than be seen to vote in favour of the administration's tax plans, Long was forced once again to abstain.⁷⁵

Long's agenda had been effectively emptied of political material, while Coughlin's call for worker unionisation and Townsend's pension plans had been co-opted by Roosevelt. Nationally recognised leaders, however, were not alone in facing a more activist president. Long's senatorial colleagues in the insurgent bloc were also tested by a greater political challenge.

The Republican insurgent bloc had been notable for its opposition to the passage of the First New Deal legislation. In response to this opposition, the bloc was directly targeted, particularly through attacks upon the electoral legitimacy of one of its

brightest members, Senator Bronson Cutting of New Mexico. Although Cutting had successfully been re-elected in November 1934 despite the opposition of the administration and the RNC, his small majority of 1,200 was disputed on the grounds of potential electoral fraud. The administration, supporting his opponent, Democratic U.S. Representative Denis Chavez, contested the result in the New Mexico Supreme Court and then, having failed to overturn Cutting's victory, presented allegations of election irregularity to the Senate Privilege and Elections Committee. The senator's treatment by Roosevelt distressed him greatly. 'The dahm [sic] situation is getting no better fast,' he wrote. 'Meanwhile F. D. calls me up personally (and most effectonally [sic] – "Dear Bron" or "Brons") and asks me why I never come to see him.' 'Yet I know that all the time he is urging on my colleagues to unseat me.'⁷⁶ Seeking to resolve the issue, the committee called Cutting to present evidence in his defence. Cutting began an arduous series of aeroplane journeys from Washington to New Mexico ferrying the required evidence. Tragically, on May 6, 1935, returning from an evidence-gathering trip, Cutting's plane crashed and he was killed.⁷⁷

Shocked by the news, the insurgent bloc united in blaming Cutting's death on the Roosevelt administration. In his private correspondence, Lemke observed: 'Farley went out there with his money bag and corroded patronage system, and did his best to defeat Cutting, for a spineless, knock-kneed, cringing individual, whom Farley was assured he could control, and who would carry out his dictates.'⁷⁸ When Chavez was sworn in as Cutting's successor in the Senate, the insurgents walked out of the chamber in protest. Insurgent George Norris of Nebraska called the 'disgraceful and unwarranted' campaign to unseat Cutting 'the greatest case of ingratitude in history.'⁷⁹ For Borah, Roosevelt's and the RNC's treatment of Cutting was the final straw that broke his links with the administration and with his party's leadership. The senior and junior senators were close friends and had shared a common political agenda. At the news of Cutting's death, Borah openly wept on the floor of the Senate.⁸⁰ But the impact was political as well as personal. By replacing Cutting with Chavez, Roosevelt

increased the Democratic majority in the Senate, but he also fired a warning shot to incumbents. Of the nine remaining insurgent senators, one third faced re-election in 1936, including Borah. The Cutting affair left them in little doubt of the lengths that the RNC and the Democratic administration would go to ensure their defeat.

If the death of Cutting had placed the insurgent senators on the defensive, the passage of the Second New Deal questioned their continued relevance as a political bloc. Its members sought amendments to various aspects of the key pieces of legislation that made up the Second New Deal, but only in one instance did a member vote in opposition.⁸¹ Borah voted in favour on each occasion. Indeed, if the First New Deal had been notable for the support of the old-guard Republicans, the passage of the Second was notable for their opposition. Whereas Roosevelt had sought through the First New Deal to balance the interests of big business and the wealthy with the wider social and economic needs of the American population, the Second New Deal's extension of the reach of government through the introduction of federal unemployment benefit and pension provisions, the substantially increased federal workforce, recognition of unions and worker rights, and new tax measures reduced the appeal of Roosevelt's administration amongst more conservative senators representing the large, wealthy urban areas located mainly in the northeast. It is notable that of the 53 votes cast against the Second New Deal, 62 per cent were from northeastern senators (28 Republicans and 8 Democrats). Over half of the votes raised in opposition to the central Second New Deal legislation came from Virginia, Vermont, Rhode Island, Maine and Delaware.⁸²

The Second New Deal was a political master stroke. Driven to respond to pressure from his radical reformist opponents, Roosevelt had taken their proposals and transformed them to make them relevant to his agenda of industrial recovery. He had thus accommodated demands for liberal social reform within the New Deal not by radicalising it, but by strengthening its central mission to restore and rehabilitate the economic cycle. Consequently, by August 1935, steps had been taken to restore

employment and place the economy on a stronger footing. These measures brought about quick, sustained and dramatic results. Consumer confidence was boosted by a fall in unemployment (down 2 per cent between November 1934 and July 1935) as a result of the investment in federal employment and the attempts to retain the young in education (which alone accounted for the removal of over 2 million people from the unemployment register). The general improvement in consumer confidence and the huge injection of federal funds into the economy (for the first year in peacetime, federal spending exceeded total spending by the states) was reflected by the Dow Jones Industrial Average rallying in July 1935 to a new Depression high of 119 points.⁸³ Townsend, Long, Coughlin and Borah remained resolute in their opposition to the administration, but Roosevelt had established a connection with a large proportion of his discontented electorate who had been enticed by the promises of his opponents. Should he retain this support through the election, his challengers' continued actions would be largely irrelevant.

On September 10, 1935, Long's opposition was swiftly and finally removed, not by the actions of the administration, but by an assassin's bullet. Coughlin called the senator's murder 'the most regrettable thing in modern history.'⁸⁴ Borah spoke to journalists of his sincere regret at Long's passing. 'Those who knew him best,' he explained, 'entertained the strong belief he was sincere in his desire to accomplish worth-while things for the poorer classes.'⁸⁵ Long's death removed the most significant political challenger of the New Deal and handed the initiative back to the president and his advisors. Any pessimism that remained as to Roosevelt's electoral strength dissolved overnight. 'I am convinced that within the last month or so there has been a decided swing back to President Roosevelt,' wrote Jim Farley in his private diary on September 24. Long's death had 'changed the political picture materially' and had 'definitely' removed the likelihood of serious third-party opposition to the president's re-election in 1936.⁸⁶ Farley's confidence in the recovery of Roosevelt's popularity was boosted by the results of the first Gallup poll of the president's appeal to voters

undertaken in the immediate aftermath of Long's death. The poll revealed that Roosevelt had the support of 55 per cent of the population – down only 2 percentage points from his share of the popular vote in 1932. Roosevelt looked on course for re-election in 1936.⁸⁷ However, despite such evidence, Roosevelt's continued determination to undermine the activities of Coughlin and Townsend increased in turn their resolve that the president be defeated in 1936. They were joined in this continued anti-Roosevelt campaign by Long's protégé, Gerald L.K. Smith. From the ashes of Long's death, Smith was ultimately the key to convergence.

Long's state funeral was unlike anything seen before in Louisiana. A crowd of more than 150,000 gathered on the front lawn of the capitol building in Baton Rouge as Smith delivered an emotional eulogy for his fallen leader. He concluded with a challenge to the assembled multitudes: 'This blood which dropped upon this soil shall seal our hearts together. Take up the torch, complete the task, subdue selfish ambition, sacrifice for the sake of victory.'⁸⁸ Days later, in a circular issued to members of the SoW movement titled 'The Spirit and Purpose of Huey Long Shall Never Die,' Smith announced he had assumed leadership of the organisation.⁸⁹ Smith's fiery passion grasped the imagination of the national newspapers. In a feature article, the *New York Times* revealed that in high political circles Smith was being spoken of as Long's replacement in the Senate. 'If he can get a foothold with the leaderless Long machine,' the article concluded, 'he may become as important a factor in national politics as Father Charles E. Coughlin or even Long himself.'⁹⁰

Born in 1898 in Pardeeville, a small farming community in Wisconsin, Smith had come to Long's attention when he was appointed pastor of King's Highway Disciples of Christ Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. His impact on the state's largest church of that denomination was immediate. When Long announced the creation of the SoW organisation, Long capitalised on Smith's success and appointed him national organiser.⁹¹ At first Smith was used mainly as a substitute when Long was unavailable to speak at a meeting, but the senator soon discovered that Smith was a far more

talented speaker than even he. Journalist H.L. Mencken described Smith as ‘the greatest orator of them all, not the greatest by an inch or a foot or a yard or a mile, but by at least two light years.’⁹²

As national organiser of SoW, Smith had established himself as a shrewd political operator, sitting in the shadows whilst Long commanded attention. In this position, Smith had acted as an important go-between in discussions between Long and Coughlin in the early months of 1935.⁹³ In the wake of the senator’s death, Smith’s claim to leadership of the SoW movement did not go unchallenged. The Long organisation split into two camps: the SoW forces coalescing around Smith and the state machine falling under the control of Long’s long-time, trusted advisor Seymour Weiss. Smith’s rise to prominence caused concern at the highest levels of the Roosevelt administration. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote to Jim Farley on September 25, 1935, alerting him that confidential advice had been passed to her that the Republicans were ‘planning to stir up another gentleman who is a better rabble-raiser than even Huey Long.’ ‘His name,’ she concluded, ‘is General [sic] Smith.’⁹⁴ There is little evidence that Smith had the backing of the Republican Party, but the administration treated Smith’s potential threat seriously, and Farley involved himself in directly shaping Louisiana’s post-Long future. In his private diary for September, Farley recorded in detail the various meetings and exchanges he had with the rival leadership factions. In the course of these private meetings, he made clear that in return for federal assistance, the state must be normalised and all traces of the Long era removed. Furthermore, state support for the SoW movement must end and, most importantly, Smith must be isolated and removed permanently from a position of power. ‘I feel that he is talking too much,’ Farley explained, ‘and that he would not help the situation.’⁹⁵

Smith’s position of leadership of SoW was additionally undermined by his inability to access the organisation’s membership list, for the holder of the list, Earle Christenberry, had sided with the Weiss camp. Further, the funds the organisation had

used to operate were now controlled by Weiss. With the powerful federal administration allied to those loyal to Weiss, Smith's candidate was heavily defeated in the January 1936 gubernatorial primary election. With the support of the administration, newly elected Governor Richard W. Leche proceeded to implement a process of normalisation that removed all Smith supporters from the state machine. Federal money began to flow once again toward Baton Rouge, and patronage returned to the control of the governor.⁹⁶ Smith was left a leader without a movement. As the Roosevelt administration had sought to control Long now they had turned upon Smith. He described the deal to sell him out as the 'second Louisiana purchase.'⁹⁷ In May 1936, Smith heard a rumour, (eventually proved unfounded) that Christenberry had sold the SoW membership lists to the co-founder of the Townsend movement, Robert Clements. Desperate to establish direct contact with SoW members, Smith immediately sought to establish contact with the OARP.⁹⁸

In the months following the passage of the Social Security Act, Townsend strengthened the organisation of the OARP. In October 1935, the first convention of the organisation was held in Chicago. The 6,000 delegates present represented the 4,552 chartered clubs from the 48 states and Alaska. Recognising that they now lacked direct influence in Washington following the passage of the pension provision of the Social Security Act, the convention authorised Townsend to use the power of the movement wherever and however he wished in the upcoming elections.⁹⁹ The aim was, Townsend declared, for the OARP to 'become an avalanche of political power than no derision, no ridicule, or no conspiracy of silence can stem.'¹⁰⁰

Townsend's attempts to politicise his organisation were tested in a special election held in Michigan's Third Congressional District in November 1935. One of the candidates for the Republican nomination, Vernor W. Main, campaigned on the Townsend platform. Despite the opposition of the regular Republican Party organisation, Main captured the primary by a huge majority with the support of local OARP clubs and the national leadership. In the final election Main defeated the

Democratic candidate, Howard W. Cavanagh, who centred his campaign upon an attack on the pension plan, by a 37 per cent margin (a 26 per cent increase on the 1934 election result).¹⁰¹ With increasing frequency, letters warning of the strength of the Townsend movement arrived at the White House. 'In my humble opinion the Townsendites are gathering strength,' wrote Ben H. Schwartz to Roosevelt in December 1935. 'They might become a very dangerous and serious menace in the next Election.'¹⁰² The passage of the Social Security Act had clearly benefited a large proportion of elderly Americans, but the hopes of many desperate citizens continued to favour Townsend's proposed \$200 per month pension over the \$30 assured by the administration. Townsend's core agenda, securing pensions, had been addressed, but the president nevertheless recognised that the issue of old-age poverty had not been entirely resolved by his moderate plan. The OARP thus remained a potential thorn in his side.

In the end, it was the pension movement itself that provided the impetus for the establishment of a formal working agreement between Townsend and Smith. In the autumn of 1935, stirrings from within the membership against Robert Clements' rigid centralisation of the movement began to worry Townsend. As co-founder of the OARP, Clements was largely responsible for its spread and strength. Ever the salesman, however, he remained only truly interested in the income potential of the Townsend movement and had little interest in the doctor's new found political ambitions. To re-exert his control, in early 1936, the doctor approached Clements with a set of proposals to reform the organisation and, by doing so, dilute his partner's power. Clements refused to see his position undermined and on March 30, 1936, tendered his resignation.¹⁰³

The departure of Clements marked a turning point in the history of the movement. With his key professional organiser gone, it was questionable whether Townsend alone could keep the OARP together. In May 1936, Townsend's political abilities were once again found wanting. Two months after convening the 74th

Congress, congressional representatives approved the establishment of a special investigating committee to probe the OARP. The inquiry was directed 'with special reference' to promoters of the Townsend pension plan, their records and their methods of collecting and spending money. The emphasis placed on the internal organisation of the movement, rather than its plan, revealed the inquiry's true purpose – to discredit the OARP and humiliate its leader. By undermining the confidence of the membership in the leadership, the efficacy of the movement might be destroyed.

When Townsend was called to speak before Congress in May 1936, the inadequately advised political novice found himself betrayed and outwitted. By forcing Clements to resign from the movement, Townsend had made a bitter enemy. Determined to humiliate the doctor, Clements opened up the internal workings of the OARP to the committee. The financial arrangement under which Clements and Townsend had received apparently lavish salaries and expenses from the movement were revealed, as was the commission-based payment structure underpinning the activities of the regional and local organisers. Exposed to the public glare, the highly-profitable commercial arrangements that Clements had used to spread the movement seemed 'dirty.' The elderly doctor, who had willingly accepted Clements' guidance and the substantial financial payments provided by his impoverished supporters, appeared detached and, most damagingly, financially corrupt.¹⁰⁴

In his Congressional hearing, Townsend was challenged to refute Clements' damning evidence. Had he sanctioned editorials that compared him to Christ, the committee asked? Did he really believe he was the Messiah? Exasperated and unprepared, the doctor struggled to distance himself from the accusations. Most damagingly, he denied amassing a personal fortune from his part ownership of the OARP. Until his resignation, he explained, Clements had taken complete responsibility for the organisational and financial affairs of the movement. Townsend's role had been solely to present the plan to the nation. With Clements gone, Townsend explained, he had reformed the organisation, and strict financial control had been introduced. The

committee, uninterested in Townsend's explanations, focused their final line of enquiry upon a series of 'Townsendgrams' distributed to local groups in March 1936. Had he called for his poor followers to send their 'nickels and dimes' to provide for his own personal enrichment, the committee asked? Reading from dozens of letters made available to the committee from Clements, Townsend was forced to listen to hours of evidence detailing how desperate OARP members had struggled to respond to his calls for donations. Townsend, denying any knowledge of the letters sent out in Clements' name ('I know nothing about it,' he said), was simply unable, despite repeated requests, to say what had happened to the majority of the \$23,000 dollars raised during the fundraising campaign. 'Flushed,' 'fretful,' and 'angry,' Townsend demanded to know how the congressmen had access to the evidence presented to him. 'We happen to have the records from your office,' replied committee member Democratic Representative Christopher Sullivan from New York. Knowing that the congressmen cared little for Clements' own activities, he had provided the evidence to discredit the doctor.¹⁰⁵

Townsend, missing a political advisor on whom he might rely to construct a counter case, was unable to respond positively to the overwhelmingly evidence presented against him. On May 22, after three days of hearings, Townsend informed the committee he would not answer any more questions. Lacking the temperament to simply ride out the storm, in contempt of Congress, Townsend stood up and walked away. In the official explanation for his walkout, Townsend linked the congressional investigation to the Roosevelt administration. It was, he said, a political move undertaken by 'the present political leadership of this nation to intimidate any who dare to oppose the "New Deal."'¹⁰⁶ As Townsend understood it, the administration had laid siege to his honesty and integrity, had exploited the weakness and political naivety of the movement, and were successfully destabilising the OARP by discrediting his authority as its national leader. 'Evidently he told us more than he wanted us to know,'

commented the committee chairman, Democratic Representative Charles Bell of Missouri.¹⁰⁷

Having been pushed to the edge, Townsend's radicalisation was completed when he formed a personal alliance with Gerald Smith. In his autobiography, Townsend described how, as he exited the congressional committee room, a man he had not previously seen grabbed his arm and started hustling him through the crowd towards a waiting taxicab. The man was, 'I later learned, the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith.'¹⁰⁸ In the taxicab, and in the meetings that followed, Smith explained his role in establishing and spreading the SoW movement, and his position as key political advisor to Long. Townsend's experience at the hands of the committee had proven to him that he needed to replace Clements as the central point of control within the OARP and that he needed an experienced political advisor if he was to mobilise the movement effectively against the president. In Smith he saw the perfect candidate. Smith was equally keen to harness Townsend's considerable influence. Desperate to impress the pension leader, and aware that the weak and vulnerable doctor would find the proposition of working with him too tempting to refuse, Smith moved swiftly to consolidate his newfound position of power. The week following the walkout, at Townsend's insistence, Smith became a member of the OARP Board of Directors with responsibility for co-ordination of political activities. In this position, Smith assumed Clements' role as Townsend's most intimate advisor, travelling with the doctor as he toured the country in an attempt to repair the damage wrought by the congressional investigation.¹⁰⁹

Isolated from the machinations of congressional insiders and the administration's experienced political advisors, Townsend and Smith had been found wanting. The administration had exploited their weaknesses, leaving their organisations damaged and their leadership positions diminished. Yet, in reflection of Smith's grander political ambitions, the preacher was not content to be viewed as Townsend's employee. In his mind, his status as the titular leader of the SoW

movement made him and the doctor equals. Their arrangement stipulated that Smith's leadership of SoW would be publicly recognised. To this end, on May 30, 1936, Townsend announced that a formal agreement had been struck between the OARP and SoW in a 'common front against the dictatorship in Washington.'¹¹⁰ Despite their strong rhetoric, by May 1936 it was by no means clear whether Townsend and Smith could ever genuinely generate the political influence they claimed. Moreover, their parity established, it proved difficult for Townsend to control Smith's ambitions for greater power. Yet, on this rather weak and unstable basis, an alliance between two of the leaders of the diverse radical reform movements had been formed.

As Townsend and Smith established their formal partnership in May 1936, so did Coughlin and Lemke. The passage of the Second New Deal had seized the initiative from the president's diverse radical reformist opponents. Coughlin recognised that if he was to regain the advantage, he needed an issue, like the World Court debate, around which he could rally his supporters against the administration. One significant policy area that had not been reconsidered in the Second New Deal was agricultural reform. By backing Lemke's renewed campaign for the passage of his Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill, Coughlin identified both a new popular cause to push forward his movement and formed a strategic alliance with the representative.

Upon Lemke's return to Congress for the new session in January 1935, his plan to bring his Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill to the floor of the House by circulating a new discharge petition met an immediate obstacle. To avoid the embarrassment caused by Lemke's successful discharge petition in the previous session, Congress, with the administration's support, adopted new rules increasing the number of signatures required on a petition from 145 to 220. Rising to the challenge, Lemke began the process of gathering the signatures in support of his proposal, but found congressional leaders once again actively opposed to his campaign.¹¹¹ From the Senate, Borah expressed opposition to the administration's strong-arm tactics and, in a private letter, promised Lemke, 'I shall do everything possible that I can to bring the Frazier-Lemke

Bill to a hearing.¹¹² Using his position of congressional seniority, Borah worked with Lemke to persuade representatives to sign the discharge petition to bring the bill to the House.¹¹³ Their campaign received a serious boost when, on January 6, 1936, the Supreme Court ruled that the processing tax and production controls at the heart of the AAA were unconstitutional. General discontent regarding the limitations of the AAA among farmers and politicians ensured that alternative policy was openly discussed, and by the end of January 1936 Lemke had received the support of thirty-two state legislatures for the passage of his Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill.¹¹⁴

While Lemke continued his campaign against the administration in 1935, Coughlin significantly enhanced his operations. Coughlin had marked the beginning of his broadcast season in October 1935 with a scathing attack upon the failures of the New Deal. 'Today,' he said, 'I humbly stand before the American public to admit that I have been in error. Despite all promises, the moneychanger has not been driven from the temple.' The principles of the New Deal and those of the NUSJ, he concluded, were 'unalterably opposed.'¹¹⁵ He followed this speech with an announcement in early December that local units should be formed in each congressional district to prepare for action in the federal elections. 'Long enough,' he said, 'have you been satisfied to listen to the words of a radio orator who was content to teach. The hour has struck when you must be willing to act in solidified groups to break the chains of your financial bondage. You have challenged me to lead the way. In turn, I challenge you to follow through.'¹¹⁶ To assist Coughlin in communicating with his supporters, in March 1936, he launched a weekly newspaper, *Social Justice*. Whatever the topic, Coughlin retained complete editorial control of what was published. Recalling the operation of the newspaper years later, one employee, Jean Donohue, detailed how Coughlin oversaw the writing of all articles and 'not one line got into that paper that Father didn't want there.'¹¹⁷

In January 1936 Coughlin, having formalised his network of control over the NUSJ, capitalised on the uncertainty over the administration's agricultural policy. The

priest sent his Washington representative, Louis Ward, to inform the president's private secretary, Marvin McIntyre, that Coughlin favoured the urgent passage of Lemke's Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill. If Roosevelt refused, Ward informed McIntyre, the priest would step up his attacks on the administration. An angry McIntyre replied that the president would not be blackmailed.¹¹⁸ Having failed to influence the president privately, Coughlin followed through with his threat. In his weekly sermon of February 2, 1936, 'Shall the Sham Battle Go On?' the priest announced his formal backing for Lemke and confirmed the NUSJ would campaign for the passage of the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill. Enactment of Lemke's bill would, Coughlin explained, liberate 'our population from economic slavery' and set the nation on the road to full recovery.¹¹⁹ In a further sermon delivered two weeks later, the priest asserted that Roosevelt had agreed in a conference with farm leaders in 1932 to support the bill, but now was engaged in assassinating the bill through 'gag-rule.' 'Not once have you intervened for the bill which you promised to sustain,' he said. 'Meantime, 32 million [farmers], defrauded of their time, raise their voices to highest Heaven calling for vengeance which God will not deny.'¹²⁰

The benefit of Coughlin's backing was apparent when on April 28, following a local campaign focused on support for Lemke's bill, 12 congressional candidates endorsed by the NUSJ were victorious in the Pennsylvania primary election. Those candidates targeted by Coughlin included William Berlin, who had removed his name from Lemke's petition in the summer of 1935 under pressure from the administration. Defeated in his primary election, Berlin promptly re-signed Lemke's discharge petition, thus providing the North Dakotan with the 220 signatures he required.¹²¹ Embarrassingly, despite pressure placed upon them by the party leadership, the vast majority (72 per cent) of signatures on Lemke's petition were from Democratic representatives. Half of the Democratic signers were from western states. In all, including Republicans and the small reform-minded parties in Wisconsin and Minnesota, 54 per cent of signatories were representatives of western states. Clearly,

the administration's agricultural plan remained a significant bone of contention for a substantial number of western representatives for the largest agricultural districts of the nation. If Coughlin and Lemke could consolidate this vote and build support amongst northeastern representatives (which made up a third of signatories to the petition), there was a strong likelihood they could force passage of Lemke's bill.¹²²

The first two weeks of May presented Coughlin with an ideal opportunity to rally his supporters and place pressure upon their congressional representatives. On May 11 the House was scheduled formally to receive the discharge petition, starting the process that enabled a vote on the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill. On May 12 Ohioans voted in primary elections in which, if the Pennsylvania election was an example, the NUSJ would have considerable success. Coughlin and Lemke were determined to use the Ohio elections to pressure congressmen to vote for the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill, and on May 1 *Social Justice* announced that the men would undertake a state-wide speaking campaign on its behalf.¹²³

Coughlin's hopes that support for Lemke's Bill would rally his movement proved well founded and having addressed an enthusiastic crowd of 10,000 in Toledo on May 8, the priest culminated his campaign in Cleveland on Sunday, May 10, with a gathering of 25,000 supporters. In a speech broadcast over his national radio network, Coughlin offered them a choice between the 'road to apathy,' which included the hand-picked candidates of political machines, or the militant 'road to action,' which would put on the ballot candidates 'definitely nominated by the people and obligated to no political machines or bosses.'¹²⁴ Ohio voters apparently backed his cause and in the final count, 15 NUSJ-endorsed congressional candidates emerged victorious in 13 of the 18 districts that Coughlin's organisation had targeted. In 2 congressional districts, NUSJ candidates were victorious in both of the party primaries. The *New York Times* reported that the NUSJ's strength was one of the biggest surprises of the election: 'Democrat and Republican leaders had an inkling that the organisation's influence would be felt,' they explained, 'but never suspected its actual strength.'¹²⁵

When on May 11, 1936, Congress formally discharged the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill, Lemke predicted to the *New York Times* that a majority of 100 would pass the measure.¹²⁶ Yet Coughlin's support was beneficial only up to a point. Like Townsend, Coughlin was not a Washington politician. As he operated outside of the formal party system, the sharp limitations of his control over Congress were apparent when the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill came to the House for final consideration on May 12. In fact, the success of the discharge petition strengthened the determination of the administration leaders in the House to defeat Lemke's bill. On the direction of the Democratic Majority Leader, William Bankhead of Alabama, and the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Democrat John Jones of Texas, the Farm Credit Administration (FCA) issued a hostile summary to all members, concluding that fewer than 15 per cent of farmers would benefit from the passage of the legislation, at the expense of the other 85 per cent. The Democratic Whip sent out a call for every absentee to be present in the House on the afternoon of May 13 for the final vote.¹²⁷

The debate on the bill revealed the sharp divide between Lemke's supporters and the administration. Democratic Representative Harold Cooley of North Carolina condemned the bill as a 'fantastic monetary scheme.' Democrat David Lewis of Maryland declared that the bill would 'destroy all we have done in the last three years' and bring about 'financial anarchy.'¹²⁸ Pronouncing the FCA summary 'erroneous and false' and 'unjust, unfair propaganda', Lemke assailed opponents of his legislation. 'Remember,' he stated, 'we are not doing anything that the Government has not already done, nothing that the Federal Reserve banks have not been authorised to do, and that this Congress and the Government had not already authorised the Federal Reserve banks to do.' The aim of his legislation was simply, he concluded, to 'liberalize' existing legislation so that funding could go 'direct to the people without the limitation and red tape so that we can save two million homes in these United States.'¹²⁹

The turning point in the debate came in the early hours of the second day. Lemke and his supporters, under pressure to demonstrate widespread support for his agricultural reform proposal, had contended on numerous occasions during the debate that 'no objection' had been received for the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill from the trades unions. 'You will find no record from the American Federation of Labor,' commented Democrat William Connery from Massachusetts, a Lemke supporter, 'placing it on record against' the bill.¹³⁰ This point of challenge, however, revealed a potential weakness which, using its influence, the Democratic administration exploited.

In early April 1936, labour representatives had joined together to form Labor's Non-Partisan League with the immediate aim of re-electing President Roosevelt – 'the greatest statesman of modern times,' according to labour leader John L. Lewis. Although the President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), William Green, remained outside the League, he strongly supported Roosevelt's actions to enhance the power of labour and did not want to see economic progress halted by a turn towards radicalism.¹³¹ On May 13, as the debate on the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill reached its final stages, Democratic Speaker Joseph Byrns from Tennessee interrupted proceedings to read a letter from Green received that morning by courier.

Green's letter revealed, counter to Lemke's claims, that the executive council of the AFL opposed passage of the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill. Green presented a destructive argument against the bill. Inflation, he argued, would increase prices, thus benefiting farmers, but employers, seeking to keep costs down, would not necessarily increase workers' wages. Calling upon the friends of labour to vote against the legislation, Green concluded, 'we are confident that the best interests of the wage earners of the Nation would suffer very greatly if by any chance the Frazier-Lemke Bill would be enacted into law.'¹³² Faced with the determined and effective political machines of the AFL and the Democratic administration, the limitations of Coughlin's political power were immediately evident. Pressure for Lemke's bill in Congress evaporated. By splitting the potential for unified support for the bill across the farming

and urban communities, the administration's allies in the labour movement destroyed Lemke's coalition and ensured the bill's defeat. Speaker Byrnes summed up the choice facing the House in his final statement:

As a representative...pledged not only to the farmers but to all classes, I cannot vote for a bill which makes a clear discrimination in favor of one class as against other classes of our people in this country, and the people whom I represent neither expect nor want me to do so.¹³³

To those representatives who had signed the bill from the large northeastern industrial districts, the Green letter challenged their continued support. The success of the administration's strategy was demonstrated in the final vote when the bill failed by 235 votes to 142. Although support for the Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill remained resolute amongst Minnesota Farmer-Labor and Wisconsin Progressive representatives, between the presentation of the discharge petition and the final vote on the bill, Democratic and Republican support fell by over a third. The largest single group of representatives deserting the bill were those from the northeastern states. Support from southern and western states fell by 24 and 30 per cent respectively, but support from northeastern representatives fell by 59 per cent.¹³⁴

The extent of, and cause for, the defeat was best summed up by Lemke supporter, Minnesota Farmer-Labor Representative Richard Buckler. 'You big shots will get credit for killing this bill,' he commented, 'but you little fellows will just get hell. You will find someone else warming your seats here next year, while you run around begging a ticket to get in.' In public Lemke expressed only 'disappointment,' at his defeat, but, in private he also directed his anger squarely at the administration. They had, he wrote, 'become frightened and got in touch with the reactionary Republicans and the reactionary Democrats and the two of them ganged up on us including an unholy alliance with Bill Green.'¹³⁵ Overestimating his influence within Congress, without access to the extensive resources and influence afforded to the administration, Coughlin, the Washington outsider – like Townsend and Smith before him – had been exposed and defeated. His attempt to utilise the power of his movement to bring about

a change in administration policy had failed. However, rather than sit back and reflect rationally upon the reasons for his defeat, the ego-damaged priest responded immediately with a shrill attack upon the president. In his May 29 *Social Justice* editorial 'The Last Straw,' Coughlin in plainly militaristic language, called for the NUSJ to overthrow the government: 'More recruits! More reserves! More battalions! More units in every congressional district! We must be able to do our part doubly by next November.'¹³⁶ In the face of this new determination, the question was where Coughlin saw his next move. How would he turn his challenging words into political action?

Coughlin and Lemke had been defeated by the actions of the resurgent administration. Almost concurrently, on May 30, 1936, Townsend and Smith had announced a symbolic alliance of the OARP and the SoW movements to oppose the re-election of President Roosevelt. The two pairs of dissidents had been brought together by political expediency. There were weak ideological links between all four men, but the strongest connection was their resolute, outspoken opposition to the president. It was this common bond that brought the men into a loose convergence of forces opposed to Roosevelt's re-election in 1936.

For the malcontents, including Townsend and Coughlin, the political tide appeared to be ebbing away. Between March and May 1935, President Roosevelt significantly realigned the Second New Deal to embrace many aspects of the reform proposals developed and advocated by his opponents. By doing so, Roosevelt ensured that his erstwhile rivals grudgingly supported his reform proposals. Some, such as Borah, who had consistently voted against First New Deal legislation, remained critical of the administration but voted in favour of all Second New Deal legislation. Long and Cutting's deaths reduced the number of challengers to the administration's left in Congress. Townsend and Coughlin, who continued to oppose from outside Congress, were subjected to significant, concentrated and effective attacks by the administration that reduced their political reach. With positive signs of consumer recovery (stock market rises, increases in consumer confidence and growing

employment), the insurgent political agenda appeared to be waning quickly. Although the NUSJ's successes in the Ohio and Pennsylvania primary elections were impressive, in reality, they were the result of local political anomalies. Nevertheless, relying on results such as these as evidence of their national support, Townsend and Coughlin significantly overestimated their appeal and influence.

In Ohio, which Roosevelt had won by only 3 per cent of the vote in 1932, local politics provided an exceptional opportunity for the NUSJ. In the 1934 mid-term elections, Ohio had elected a Democratic governor, Martin L. Davey. Unlike his Democratic gubernatorial colleagues, however, Davey supported the state legislature in its opposition to the allocation of state funding to match federal funds as required under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. He believed that unemployment would soon decline and that the federal government would solve the problem at little cost to the state. As a result, in 1935, Ohio's expenditures on relief totalled only \$8 million, leaving the federal government with responsibility for providing relief to a monthly average of 1.2 million men and women. By the spring of 1936, despite the introduction of the WPA, only 190,000 Ohioans had been moved onto work relief, and a large number of the state's residents remained dependent on the federal government for support. With their elected representatives, both Democratic and Republican, providing little tangible aid, voters turned against the traditional parties in search of political representation that reflected their needs. In the 1936 primary elections, local NUSJ units backed candidates in 18 electoral districts, each deemed by the organisation to uphold the principles of the organisation. These reform-minded, NUSJ-backed candidates won primary victories in 13 electoral districts. The reality was, however, that the voters of Ohio were so desperate for reform, they were likely to vote for any candidate that offered it, even without the NUSJ's backing.

The unusual political situation in Ohio was mirrored in Pennsylvania, a strongly traditional, Republican state that had voted for Hoover in 1932. In 1934, the Democrats had gained the governorship and the lower house of the state legislature,

but were unable to take control of the Republican-dominated state Senate. In 1936, the state Senate rejected Governor George Earle's request for \$71 million to fund relief payments. Even when a jobless army descended upon the state capital, the Senate refused to compromise. To capitalise on the Republicans' intransigence, Earle whipped up popular discontent by embarking on a speaking tour of the opposing senators' constituencies. Building upon the wave of local discontent, the NUSJ backed candidates running in the Democratic primary who aligned themselves with Earle's reform campaign. In Pennsylvania, like Ohio, with the jobless radicalised and alienated by the shortcomings of locally elected officials, it was no surprise that candidates endorsed by the NUSJ were able to build support. It was easy for both Coughlin and Townsend to endorse and back local candidates whom they considered sympathetic to their overall objectives. It was questionable, however, how much influence the OARP or NUSJ had in these candidates' eventual victories or, indeed, how indebted these successful candidates felt to the individual radical reformist movements. In this circumstance, their hold over individual representatives in Congress was severely limited.

The second challenge that Coughlin and Townsend faced was that working outside of the political mainstream, their personal inexperience was compounded by an absence from their organisations of a network of high quality political strategists required to drive forward the development a national political movement. When placed onto the defensive by the administration, Townsend and Coughlin responded to political pressure (either externally imposed or internally generated) not by deploying a carefully calculated counter-move, but in knee-jerk appeals to their core supporters in violent, incendiary language. By contrast, the Roosevelt administration used their political influence and knowledge of the system to their distinct advantage, isolating and attempting to eliminate the support of their opponents both by absorbing key opposition demands into their own political plans (thus rendering opposition somewhat irrelevant) and by exploiting the personal weaknesses of the temperaments of the

leaders of the radical reform movements, in turn presenting the president as the people's champion fighting to defend the nation from poverty and the excesses of his opponents.

In his January 1936 State of the Union address, Roosevelt sought to challenge the dire warnings issued by his conservative opponents and the coalition of radical reformists for his direct electoral advantage. Carefully avoiding Hugh Johnson's mistake in 1935, the president did not name any names in his speech, but instead established the enemy of the New Deal as a dark and sinister scapegoat – an all-purpose threat to economic recovery – against which he provided the sole defence. Battling on behalf of the electorate, he warned, 'we have earned the hatred of entrenched greed.' The nature of the problem that faced America 'made it necessary to drive some people from power and strictly to regulate others,' he continued, 'but with recovery, these same men sought 'the restoration of their selfish power.' Roosevelt presented the electorate with a choice between backing him, the New Deal and governance in the interest of the people, or opposing him and passing power to the sinister opposition. 'Give them their way,' he concluded, 'and they will take the course of every autocracy of the past – power for themselves, enslavement for the public.'¹³⁷ In the days prior to the passage of the Second New Deal, Coughlin and Townsend had been safe in the knowledge that in the absence of action from the administration, their calls for reform connected with the desires of a significant part of the electorate. Following the passage of the Second New Deal, however, it was not clear that the NUSJ and OARP could sustain such mass appeal. Townsend's and Coughlin's increasingly violent outbursts only served to weaken their charm.

Townsend's appointment of Smith – a fellow 'rabble-rouser' – as his personal political advisor was indicative of his political naivety. Townsend was significantly influenced by Smith's connection to the enigmatic Long, and by the promises of the younger man's abilities, rather than a true understanding of the nature of political assistance the OARP required. 'At that particular moment,' Smith later explained, 'I

had more influence on the decisions of Dr. Townsend than any other man in America.¹³⁸ Encouraged by Smith, Townsend would seek to counter the administration's attacks not by calm political action, but by increasing the volume and intensity of the OARP's public challenge to the president.

Following his installation as Political Director of the OARP, Smith attempted to enhance the success of Townsend's campaign against the re-election of the president by building alliances between the pension movement and NUSJ. Here Smith held a particular advantage for, in his role as Long's political lieutenant, he had been responsible for maintaining formal links between the Louisiana senator and Coughlin in the discussions following the World Court debate. 'It must be remembered that Coughlin and Huey Long had colluded with each other prior to the Senator's assassination,' Smith later recalled. 'My contact with Father Coughlin was a natural follow-up.' When Coughlin's campaign for the passage of Lemke's Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill was defeated, Smith moved immediately to establish a partnership with the priest.¹³⁹ In late May 1936, Coughlin sent his emissary, Robert Harriss (an influential member of the New York Cotton Exchange and owner of vast tracts of southern farmland), to meet with Smith in New York. A few days later, Smith sealed arrangements in a personal visit with the priest in his church at Royal Oak, Michigan. 'Coughlin wanted me to be in on all the strategy with him and Lemke,' Smith later explained, 'because they felt I was the only one that could persuade Dr. Townsend to join with them.'¹⁴⁰ On June 1, Smith revealed to the *New York Times* that an agreement had been reached for representatives of the OARP, NUSJ and SoW movements to meet together at the pension movement's convention in Cleveland in July 1936. Poorly advised, politically outmanoeuvred and easily manipulated, Roosevelt's individual radical reformist opponents came together to defend their interests in a loose collaborative arrangement of mutual convenience.¹⁴¹

On June 1, 1936, Roosevelt's diverse radical reforming opponents reached the point of convergence. In the early summer of 1936, crushed by their treatment at the

hands of Congress and the Democratic administration, Townsend and Coughlin found themselves cornered. Unused to, and uncomfortable with, being placed on the defensive, both men were increasingly forced to justify the continued relevance of their reform campaigns. Having failed to achieve passage of the OARP pension plan and the Lemke Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill, both movements and their leaders looked vulnerable. Despite their strong words in defeat, both movements lacked a clearly articulated political strategy and the highly-skilled political advisors necessary to mobilise their supporters into coordinated, sustained, successful action to achieve the passage of their individual reform plans. A new direction was needed if they were to regain the initiative against the president. Here the ambitious, well-connected Smith seemed to provide the boost that both Townsend and Coughlin thought they needed. The primary purpose of the joint OARP, SoW and NUSJ convention that was the outcome of Smith's negotiations was not, the preacher was clear, to promote a joint reform agenda, but to achieve a single negative outcome. The slogan of the joint convention, Smith announced, would be: 'Anybody but Roosevelt.'¹⁴²

¹ Archibald Stinson Coody to Theodore Bilbo, April 7, 1935, Archibald Stinson Coody Papers, Louisiana State University Special Collections, HML, Louisiana State University (hereafter ASCP).

² JAF private file note, May 15, 1935, JAFP.

³ Michael Dunne, *The United States and the World Court, 1920-1935* (London: Pinter Publications, 1988), 238.

⁴ Geoffrey S. Smith, *To Save a Nation: American Counter-subversives, the New Deal, and the Coming of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 30.

⁵ *NYT*, January 12, 1935; Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 162.

⁶ *NYT*, January 14, 1935.

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- ⁷ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 1 (January 7, 1935), 150-159.
- ⁸ *NYT*, January 10, 12, 20, 1935.
- ⁹ *NYT*, January 18, 1935; *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 1 (January 7, 1935), 150-159.
- ¹⁰ *NYT*, January 22, 1935.
- ¹¹ *NYT*, January 29, 1935.
- ¹² Dunne, *World Court*, 242.
- ¹³ *NYT*, January 21, 1935.
- ¹⁴ *NYT*, January 27, 1935.
- ¹⁵ *NYT*, January 29, 1935.
- ¹⁶ *NYT*, January 28, 1935.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*; *NYT* January 30, 1935; Smith, *To Save a Nation*, 31.
- ¹⁸ *NYT*, February 3, 1935.
- ¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 1 (January 28, 1935), 1045-1049, 1055, 1144-1147. Six of the nine members of the Republican insurgent bloc voted against the resolution as did their allies from the Farm-Labor and Progressive parties.
- ²⁰ *NYT*, January 30, 1935.
- ²¹ WEB to CC, January 30, 1935, WEBP.
- ²² See correspondence WEB, General Office File, Personal/Presidency, August 1935 and WEB, General Office File, February-December 1935, WEBP.
- ²³ *NYT*, January 31, 1935.
- ²⁴ See *NYT*, January 30, 31 and February 3, 5, 1935.
- ²⁵ *NYT*, January 30, 1935.
- ²⁶ *NYT*, February 12, 1935.

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- ²⁷ CC, *A Series of Lectures on Social Justice: 1934-1935* (Royal Oak: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1935), 137-138.
- ²⁸ Claude L. Hagan to FDR, March 3, 1935, POF; William Montague to FDR, March 3, 1935, POF; W. E. Warren to FDR, February 14, 1935, POF.
- ²⁹ *NYT*, February 3, 1935; *NYT*, March 4, 1935.
- ³⁰ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 7.
- ³¹ FDR, *The Roosevelt Letters, 1928-1945*, Vol. 3, ed. Elliot Roosevelt (London: George G. Harrup & Company, 1952), 139.
- ³² *NYT*, February 13, 1935.
- ³³ *NYT*, March 10, 1935.
- ³⁴ *NYT*, March 5, 1935; Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 4-5.
- ³⁵ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 6.
- ³⁶ *NYT*, March 5, 1935; *Pittsburgh Press*, March 5 1935; *Chicago Tribune*, March 5 1935; *Milwaukee Journal*, March 5 1935.
- ³⁷ *NYT*, March 6, 1935.
- ³⁸ *NYT*, March 8, 12, 1935.
- ³⁹ *NYT*, March 10, 1935; *The Nation*, March 30, 1935.
- ⁴⁰ *NYT*, March 10, 15, 1935; *NYT*, April 28, 1935.
- ⁴¹ *NYT*, April 25, 1935.
- ⁴² *NYT*, May 23, 1935.
- ⁴³ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 213.
- ⁴⁴ *NYT*, March 17, 1935.
- ⁴⁵ T. Harry Williams oral interview with Theophile Landry, THWP.
- ⁴⁶ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 213.
- ⁴⁷ *NYT*, March 11, 1935.
- ⁴⁸ Archibald Stinson Coody to Theodore Bilbo, April 7, 1935, ASCP.
- ⁴⁹ *NYT*, March 24, 1935.

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- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ James Holt, 'The New Deal and the American Anti-Statist Tradition' in *The New Deal: The National Level*, ed. John Braeman *et al.* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 46.
- ⁵² Black, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, 362; McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 256-257.
- ⁵³ *NYT*, January 18, 1935.
- ⁵⁴ *NYT*, January 24, 1935.
- ⁵⁵ *NYT*, January 24, 1935.
- ⁵⁶ *Time*, February 18, 1935.
- ⁵⁷ *NYT*, February 5, 1935.
- ⁵⁸ WEB to W. C. Nolte, December 17, 1934, WEBP; WEB to John Hancock, December 19, 1934, WEBP.
- ⁵⁹ *NYT*, April 19, 1935; *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 6 (April 18, 1935), 5948-5958.
- ⁶⁰ *NYT*, April 20, 1935.
- ⁶¹ *NYT*, April 21, 1935.
- ⁶² *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 6 (April 18, 1935), 5948-5958; *NYT*, April 21, 1935.
- ⁶³ *NYT*, April 21, 1935; *NYT*, April 19, 1935.
- ⁶⁴ Ray McKaig to WEB, February 20, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁶⁵ FET to WEB, January 24, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁶⁶ Daniel J. Tobin to Louis Howe, January 17, 1935, POF; Louis Howe to FDR, February 21, 1935, POF.
- ⁶⁷ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 73; Mulder, *The Insurgent Progressives*, 95-96; Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 253.
- ⁶⁸ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 265.

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- ⁶⁹ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 91; Black, *Roosevelt*, 348; *NYT*, May 23, 1935.
- ⁷⁰ *NYT*, June 20, 1935.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷² *Hartford Courant*, June 24, 1935; *NYT*, June 23, 1935.
- ⁷³ *NYT*, July 9, 1935.
- ⁷⁴ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 11 (July 22, 1935), 11517-11519.
- ⁷⁵ *NYT*, April 6, June 20 and May 17, 1935; *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 12 (August 15, 1935), 13254.
- ⁷⁶ BMC to H. Phelps Putnam, February 7, 1935, BMCP.
- ⁷⁷ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 88-89.
- ⁷⁸ WL to Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr., June 8, 1936, WLP.
- ⁷⁹ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 90.
- ⁸⁰ Johnson, *Borah*, 484.
- ⁸¹ Republican Senator Charles McNary of Oregon voted against the Revenue Bill, *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 12 (August 15, 1935), 13254.
- ⁸² *NYT*, April 6, May 17 and 20 June, 1935; *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 79, Part 12 (August 15, 1935), 13254.
- ⁸³ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 246, 266.
- ⁸⁴ *NYT*, September 11, 1935.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ JAF private file note, September 24, 1935, JAFP.
- ⁸⁷ George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Volume One: 1935-1948* (New York: Random House, 1972), 2.

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- ⁸⁸ Document titled 'Funeral oration delivered over the grave of Huey P. Long by Gerald L.K. Smith' (hereafter GLKS), Russell B. Long Papers, Louisiana State University Special Collections, HML, Louisiana State University (hereafter RBLP).
- ⁸⁹ 'Share-our-Wealth' circular from GLKS, RBLP.
- ⁹⁰ *NYT*, September 22, 1935.
- ⁹¹ Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 27-28.
- ⁹² *Ibid*, 2.
- ⁹³ *Ibid*, 51.
- ⁹⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt to JAF, September 25, 1935, JAFP.
- ⁹⁵ JAF private file note, September 14, 1935, JAFP.
- ⁹⁶ GLKS to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP; JAF private file notes, 26 March, 2 April, 1935, JAFP.
- ⁹⁷ Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 43.
- ⁹⁸ FET, *New Horizons*, 203.
- ⁹⁹ David O. Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936' (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1962), 37.
- ¹⁰⁰ *NYT*, October 25, 27, 1935.
- ¹⁰¹ Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement*, 157; State of Michigan, 'MI – District 03 Special Election Race – December 17, 1935,' *Our Campaigns*, <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=617661> (7 January 2010).
- ¹⁰² For example see Ben H. Schwartz to FDR, December 20, 1935, POF.
- ¹⁰³ *National Townsend Weekly* (hereafter *NTW*), March 30, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating Old-Age Pension Organisations*. *NYT*, May 22, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁵ *NYT*, May 22, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁶ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936,' 44.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

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- ¹⁰⁸ FET, *New Horizons*, 203.
- ¹⁰⁹ Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement*, 171.
- ¹¹⁰ *NYT*, May 31, 1936.
- ¹¹¹ WL to Cornelius Vanderbilt, July 2, 1935, WLP.
- ¹¹² WEB to H. F. Samuels, December 31, 1934, WEBP.
- ¹¹³ WEB to Edward E. Kennedy, July 25, 1935, WEBP.
- ¹¹⁴ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 208.
- ¹¹⁵ *NYT*, November 18, 1935.
- ¹¹⁶ CC, *A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, 1935-1936* (Royal Oak: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1936), 94-95.
- ¹¹⁷ Jean Donohue to Father Jerry Brown, September 6, 1969, SMP.
- ¹¹⁸ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, Volume 1: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1936* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1935), 536.
- ¹¹⁹ *NYT*, February 3, 1936.
- ¹²⁰ *NYT*, February 17, 1936.
- ¹²¹ *Social Justice* (hereafter *SJ*), May 8, 1936; *NYT*, May 1, 1936.
- ¹²² *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 80, Part 7 (May 11, 1936), 7026.
- ¹²³ *SJ*, May 1, 1936.
- ¹²⁴ *SJ*, May 15, 1936.
- ¹²⁵ *NYT*, May 14, 1936.
- ¹²⁶ *NYT*, May 12, 1936.
- ¹²⁷ *NYT*, May 13, 1936.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 80, Part 7 (May 12, 1936), 7099.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

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- ¹³¹ Schlesinger, *Roosevelt*, 593; Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, 197.
- ¹³² *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 80, Part 7 (May 13, 1936), 7167.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁴ *NYT*, May 14, 1936.
- ¹³⁵ WL to CH, June 10, 1936, WLP.
- ¹³⁶ *SJ*, May 29, 1936.
- ¹³⁷ FDR, 'State of the Union Address, January 1936,' *From Revolution to Reconstruction*, <http://odur.let.rug.nl/usa/P/fr32/speeches/su36fdr.htm> (8 August 2010).
- ¹³⁸ GLSK to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP.
- ¹³⁹ GLSK to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP; Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 103; Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 103.
- ¹⁴⁰ GLKS to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP; Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 103.
- ¹⁴¹ *NYT*, June 2, 1936.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

Union

Let us not continue to chase rainbows, but if we must start a new party, or take over one of the old, and I do not mean join the old, but take it over, let us get a candidate for president whom we know will go through with a program for the people.

William Lemke, February 1, 1935.¹

The actions taken by the Democratic administration between January 1935 and June 1936 to strengthen its support amongst the electorate had a dramatic effect upon the most prominent of its diverse collective of radical reform-minded opponents: Charles Coughlin, Francis Townsend, William Lemke and Gerald Smith. The passage of the legislation that made up the Second New Deal robbed the leaders of the radical reform movements of their individual political agendas, allowing President Roosevelt to seize the centre-left ground of popular opinion in which his opponents had thrived. Increasingly forced out of the mainstream political debate, the loose collective of radical reformers converged around the single theme that they shared, a common hatred of the president. It was questionable, however, whether such a negative principle was enough to form a solid platform for positive political action. Indeed, despite Smith's announcement on June 1, 1936, that the SoW, OARP and NUSJ would meet at a joint convention planned for July 1936, it remained unclear how the future backers of the Union Party intended to bring about Roosevelt's defeat.²

As late as June 1, 1936, three strategic options remained open to Townsend, Coughlin, Lemke and Smith in relation to the presidential election: to displace Roosevelt as the Democratic presidential nominee, to seek the confirmation of an acceptable candidate for the Republican nomination, or to launch a third party to fight against Roosevelt in the election. However, evidence such as the Gallup 'Presidential

Trial Heat' published on June 7, 1936, which found only 2.5 per cent support for a potential (unnamed) third-party candidate, suggests that such an option would be very much a last resort.³ In this circumstance, with the major party presidential nomination conventions not scheduled to take place until mid-July, Lemke, Smith, Coughlin and Townsend remained hopeful that they could endorse a candidate from one of major political parties. Furthermore, a preference for finding a Democrat or Republican they could support was entirely compatible with the radical reform movement leaders' individual tactics in the Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania primaries where, rather than field their own candidates, their organisations had simply endorsed existing candidates they considered sympathetic to the overall objectives of their movements. The use of such tactics enabled them to reap maximum public benefit from their election campaigns, whilst at the same time minimising the direct costs borne by their movements. With their organisational strength largely untested, the successes of the OARP and the NUSJ in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania revealed little about the individual radical reform movements' ability to mobilise their supporters to directly influence the outcome of an election in their favour.⁴ The reality of the weak organisation of the OARP and the NUSJ was exposed as Coughlin, Townsend, Smith and Lemke attempted to influence the outcome of the Democratic and Republican presidential nominations. It was only then, their tactics having failed and with no other alternative, a union was agreed and the Union Party established.

Coughlin and Lemke had supported the Democratic presidential candidate in 1932, but they were not natural ideological allies of the party. Indeed, their individual beliefs in American independence, isolation and economic self-determination (as evidenced by their reform plans and subsequent campaigns against the president from 1932-1936) placed them closer to the insurgent wing of the Republican Party. Nevertheless, given their outright opposition to the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936, it was natural that they would seek to displace him from the Democratic nomination. In the absence of a significant challenger, however, this proved an impossible task.

The most likely source of radical reformist opposition within the Democratic Party was Huey Long. In recognition of this, in the months immediately following the success of Coughlin and Long's combined campaign to defeat the World Court resolution in January 1935, the leaders of the divergent radical reform movements held private discussions regarding Long's potential bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1936. Townsend met with Coughlin in Washington in late January. This was followed by further contact between representatives of the NUSJ and the OARP in early April 1935.⁵ Concurrently, Coughlin engaged in detailed negotiations with Long regarding his intentions in the 1936 campaign.

In public, Long denied that he and the priest had a formal alliance, but admitted they were fighting for the 'same general objectives.'⁶ In private, however, their relationship was significantly more developed. In an interview with historian T. Harry Williams, James P. O'Connor, Louisiana Public Service Commissioner, recalled one important meeting between Coughlin and Long, which took place in early 1935. O'Connor explained that he had been staying with Long at the luxurious Broadmoor Hotel in Washington, D.C., when Coughlin and Democratic Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana came into Long's room discussing options for the 1936 presidential campaign. As O'Connor explained, 'They stayed there discussing until the early morning hours and I remember Coughlin said to Huey – after he capitulated to Huey's ideas – "Maybe you are the best man to carry them out."⁷

To prepare the SoW organisation for his campaign for the 1936 presidential nomination, Long developed a network of financial supporters. Associates of the senator revealed to T. Harry Williams that by the time of his death, Long had built up a campaign chest with pledges nearing \$10 million. Willing to take funding to achieve his ambitions whatever the source, Long accepted donations from, among others, Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller. These prominent Republican Party backers wanted Roosevelt out of the White House and did not care whom they had to support to

achieve it. Although they told Long, 'We're not for you.' Long responded, 'Just give me the money.'⁸

On May 27, 1935, having established both political and financial support for his presidential campaign, Long issued a letter of command to all SoW members to prepare the organisation for the next phase of action. The time had come, he instructed, for the movement to take on a more active form. 'I want you to take on new work,' Long wrote, 'and to renew your own Society's efforts in our Share-our-Weath cause.' The letter set out three immediate actions. Firstly, Long asked that all officers and members of societies begin preparation for the national elections in 1936. 'We must be ready,' he explained, 'to do and act in whatever manner may be necessary' to guarantee that SOW's plans be enacted. Secondly, he instructed each society to send out scouts across the country to organise new societies where there were none. Finally, he requested that all members subscribe to his newspaper *American Progress*, which he announced would shortly increase its publication from once to twice a month.⁹ In July 1935, Townsend followed Long's move to place the SoW on a pre-election footing by issuing similar instructions to the OARP to reorganise in preparation for the 1936 election. 'For a while we thought we could support President Roosevelt,' Townsend told the *New York Times*, 'but we have given up hope in him.'¹⁰ Finally, on August 13, 1935, the *New York Times* reported that Long had told his senatorial colleagues he intended to run for the presidency in 1936 – even if it meant he had to destroy the Democratic Party to do it. On August 15, he made a public statement of his intent to oppose Roosevelt for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Furthermore, in a ploy to ensure that Democratic Party leaders considered the seriousness of his opposition, he threatened to walk out of the convention and split the party. If the candidates of the major parties were President Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover, and the people of the country wanted him, 'his sense of duty would leave him no choice but to offer himself as a third party candidate.' He told the assembled press, 'All you would get for voting for Roosevelt or Hoover, would be a ticket to Hell.'¹¹ With

the leaders of the individual radical reform movements and their potentially powerful organisations united behind him, Long represented a significant threat to Roosevelt's re-nomination. This threat was never to be tested, however, as the challenge to Roosevelt from the radical wing of the Democratic Party was removed by Long's assassination in September 1935.

Long's death ended Townsend and Coughlin's influence within the Democratic Party and thus reduced the likelihood that the party would endorse a radical reformist candidate in 1936. Yet, powerful dissident conservative forces within the party that had coalesced around the Liberty League since its foundation in the autumn of 1934 represented a threat to the president's re-nomination. With Coughlin, Townsend and Smith's single stated political aim being to oppose Roosevelt's re-election, his displacement by a conservative candidate would still represent a victory. Ultimately, however, Roosevelt's grip over the party proved too strong.

By the summer of 1936, membership of the Liberty League had grown to 125,000, drawn from every state of the Union, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Alaska, the Philippine Islands, and Puerto Rico. Membership of the League proved attractive to those wealthy traditional Democratic Party contributors who felt Roosevelt's leadership had isolated them from the party. The strength of this support is demonstrated by the fact that in 1935, the League raised nearly as much money as each of the national parties. 30 per cent of the League's funding was from the DuPont family alone. In 1936, two-thirds of the funding for the organisation was derived from 30 men donating \$5,000 each.¹²

The gap between rich and poor, old and new inherent in the organisation was demonstrated at the Liberty League dinner held at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., on January 25, 1936. Here 2,000 guests, including 12 members of the DuPont family, attended to hear the former Democratic presidential nominee and prominent progressive mayor of New York, Al Smith, respond to Roosevelt's State of the Union address issued two weeks earlier. Rather than rising above the president's comments

about the dark, sinister forces that sought to undermine the New Deal, an angry Smith delivered a frenzied speech that served to sustain, not deflate, Roosevelt's argument. 'It is all right with me if they want to disguise themselves as Karl Marx or Lenin or any of the rest of that bunch,' Smith said, sharing the anti-communist rhetoric now regularly used by the president's opponents to reflect his allegedly authoritarian, centralised control of government and consequent reduction of the rights of individuals, 'but I won't stand for their allowing them to march under the banner of Jackson or Cleveland.'¹³ The time had come, he said, for loyal Democrats to make a choice. 'We can either take on the mantle of hypocrisy or we can take a walk,' he concluded, 'and we will probably do the latter.'¹⁴

The challenge set down by Al Smith effectively marked the end of the League as a force within the Democratic Party. In the four years between Roosevelt's nomination in 1932 and the 1936 convention, changes had taken place within the Democratic Party which had enhanced the president's hold. Party Chairman Jim Farley had proved an exceptional political operator, and through his ruthless leadership and generous patronage, he had reshaped the Democratic Party in Roosevelt's image. The effectiveness of Farley's control was demonstrated by presidential trial polls conducted by the Gallup Organisation between October 27, 1935, and the eve of the Democratic Party Convention in 1936, which showed Roosevelt with opinion ratings never lower than 50.3 per cent when compared to any Republican or third-party challenger. In these circumstances, the Gallup Organisation considered it so unlikely that Roosevelt would not be re-nominated that not a single polling question was asked in which another candidate for the Democratic nomination was suggested for possible consideration. The final pre-convention poll, published on June 7, indicated that Roosevelt had the support of 53.5 per cent of the electorate.¹⁵

By the time delegates convened in Philadelphia on June 23, 1936, both the Liberty League and Roosevelt's radical reformist opponents had given up hope of preventing the president's re-nomination. In one final, symbolic challenge to the party

they had once led, the League sent party chairman Jim Farley an open telegram addressed to the delegates of the convention, challenging the Democratic Party to return to the principles personified by Thomas Jefferson and Grover Cleveland and to nominate a 'genuine Democrat.' 'These are hard tasks. They would necessarily involve the putting aside of Franklin D. Roosevelt,' it concluded. 'But if you do not act, you should put aside the name of the party.'¹⁶ Although the telegram provided the delegates with the liveliest topic of conversation, it had little impact. Secure in the support of his delegates, Roosevelt received every vote cast in the first ballot. The rejection of the Liberty League signified the end of any influence that the old party leaders including former presidential candidates John Davis and Al Smith, as well as former executives of the Democratic National Committee John Raskob and Jouett Shouse had over the Democratic Party. The failure of the Liberty League removed any hopes that Townsend, Smith, Lemke or Coughlin might have had that the Democrats would oppose Roosevelt's re-nomination. In a statement issued to the press on June 13 by Gerald Smith, Townsend dismissed the importance of the Democratic nomination. Townsend was, Smith said, 'more concerned with who goes out than with who goes in' at the November presidential election.¹⁷ Following the convention, the American Liberty League formally severed its connections with the Democratic Party and aligned with the Republican opposition.¹⁸

Having failed to present their own candidate to the convention and aware that Roosevelt was unlikely to be displaced as the Democratic Party candidate from the Gallup opinion polls, the leaders of the radical reform movements had already shifted their attention to the Republican Party and William Borah's campaign for the presidential nomination. Roosevelt's re-nomination had revealed a fundamental ideological split between his New Deal and the former leadership of the Democratic Party now aligned with the Liberty League. Similarly, the campaign for the Republican nomination exposed ideological splits within the Grand Old Party. From the most conservative backers of the party emerged support for the re-nomination of former

President Herbert Hoover. On the other extreme, from the insurgent wing, Borah presented himself for consideration. Given their many long-standing connections with insurgent senator, Coughlin, Townsend and Lemke placed their backing squarely behind Borah's campaign.

Townsend, Coughlin, Smith and Lemke had reached the point of convergence on June 1, 1936 with the announcement they would mount a joint convention of their movements that July to oppose the continuation of Roosevelt's presidency, but their reformist partner in the Senate, Borah, thus far remained outside the loose coalition. Yet he was the key figure in determining the future shape of their union. In May 1936, despite Roosevelt's extensive appeal, 42 per cent of the electorate expressed support for the election of a Republican as the next president.¹⁹ It was the Republican Party, a well-financed machine, with its extensive national network of supporters and array of experienced political advisors, that Townsend, Lemke, Smith and Coughlin believed was their best option to defeat the president. Despite these hopes, Borah proved a weak candidate and incapable of delivery on the expectations of the leaders of the radical reform movements. The Republican senator's failure to win his party's presidential nomination was the final step required to force the formation of the Union Party.

Throughout Roosevelt's first administration, the president's opponents found greatest support for their anti-New-Deal reform movements from across the western region. Townsend, as evidenced by membership of the OARP, had developed particular strength in California, but also in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, North and South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming. Likewise, Coughlin's NUSJ had powerful footholds in Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and Missouri.²⁰ Seeking to reconcile his reform agenda with the support expressed for the radical reform movements, Roosevelt had incorporated some their reform proposals into his Second New Deal in 1935. The launch of the Second New Deal had a significant impact upon both the insurgent Republicans and the conservative leadership of the RNC. It was the

combined effect of this response that persuaded Borah to launch his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination.

Firstly, the launch of the Second New Deal significantly hardened the RNC against both the New Deal and the grassroots campaign launched by Borah following the 1934 mid-term defeat to reform the Republican Party along more liberal lines. The Second New Deal perceivably improved the economic outlook of the nation, but the passage of legislation designed to more actively regulate business, most notably the National Labor Relations Act and the wealth taxes, severely strained the link between Roosevelt and his business supporters. Responding to what they perceived to be a direct attack on Democratic values, the conservative Liberty League had broken with the administration. Despite the defeat of their conservative platform in the 1934 mid-terms, the RNC viewed this groundswell of conservative opposition as justification for the continuation of their anti-New-Deal stance.

The extent to which the RNC was able to rally the Republican Party in opposition to the Second New Deal is evident in congressional voting figures. The old guard's wavering support for the New Deal in the 73rd Congress evaporated in the 74th: only 6 per cent of old-guard Republicans in the House voted for New Deal legislation (down from 35 per cent in the 73rd Congress), and only 10 per cent of old-guard senators (down from 25 per cent).²¹ Spurred on, the RNC set about re-establishing its control over the party. In May 1935, RNC representatives from New England gathered in Boston and reconfirmed their support for a national platform along conservative lines.²² In June, the RNC organised a conference in Springfield, Illinois, attended by 13,000 delegates and observers.²³ Despite an attempt to reach out to reformers through support for farming interests, most of the conference speakers took a strongly anti-New Deal, anti-liberal position. The 'Declaration of Principles' adopted by the conference was highly critical of the administration attacking the New Deal as 'unsound, un-American,' 'unconstitutional' and 'prompted by demagogic methods.'²⁴ Unsurprisingly, the insurgents were unimpressed. 'I am fairly well satisfied that the

attempt to liberalize the Republican Party is going to be rather a sad bit of ersatz,' commented prominent insurgent newspaper editor William Allen White from Kansas.²⁵ It is 'useless,' observed Borah, 'to go into the campaign with the old organization dominating the situation. The people simply will not follow them even at a distance. I agree with the people, there is no reason why they should follow them.'²⁶ Despite these protestations, the Republican Party's increased cohesion along conservative lines apparently broadened its appeal amongst the electorate, as reflected in state and local elections. Having lost an overall majority in the New York State Assembly in 1934, by-election victories enabled the old guard to regain control in 1935. In addition, campaigning on a conservative platform, the party secured substantial election wins in municipal elections in Massachusetts and Ohio, as well as the re-election of the RNC-backed Republican mayor of Philadelphia.²⁷

Secondly, the passage of the Second New Deal increased the isolation of the insurgents from the Republican Party. Unwilling to oppose legislation presented by the Democratic administration that was intended to improve the overall economic and social condition of the nation, the insurgent bloc voted in favour of Second New Deal legislation. With the RNC strongly asserting its dominance, however, other western representatives and senators started to drift more into support for the RNC. In the 74th Congress, 54 per cent of western senators voted for New Deal legislation (down from 66 per cent in the 73rd Congress) and 27 per cent of western House members (down from 59 per cent).²⁸ The increased conservatism of the western bloc can be attributed partly to the withdrawal from the party of Senator Robert La Follette and the insurgent representatives from Wisconsin in 1934 to form the Progressive Party, as well as the death of Senator Bronson Cutting in May 1935, but nevertheless, the voting pattern exposed the increased segregation of the core insurgent bloc. Conversely, the insurgents' shift towards the New Deal weakened both their positions of independence and opposition in the eyes of the public. Receiving letters from angry supporters, Borah was forced to defend his support for Second New Deal legislation. 'I have no

apology to offer whatever,' he informed one correspondent.²⁹ However, such letters intensified Borah's concern that the increased polarisation of the political parties brought about by the Second New Deal risked making the insurgents entirely irrelevant. The *New York Times* speculated whether Borah, as the leading insurgent, would attempt to reassert the power of the bloc by seeking the party's presidential nomination.³⁰ Yet Borah believed he lacked the financial support necessary to mount a campaign. 'I haven't the money to make any fight for the presidency,' he explained to his friend Lucius G. McGuire in April 1935, 'and I haven't any means of honorably securing the money.'³¹ In this circumstance, his final decision to seek the nomination was heavily influenced by the personal encouragement he received from the leaders of the radical reform movements.

Borah's loose coalition with Coughlin and Long over the senatorial debate on adherence to the World Court resolution in January 1935 established a working relationship between the three men. Following the defeat of the resolution, Borah expressed gratitude to the priest for his support, and thereafter the two men corresponded frequently.³² Borah's private alignment with Coughlin was matched by his public friendship with Long. The two men frequently spoke alongside each other in the Senate in opposition to the administration. As a consequence, despite Long's own presidential ambitions in 1936, the senator endorsed a potential Borah campaign for the Republican Party nomination in April 1935: 'Borah, I think, is the strongest man in the country today,' he told the *New York Times*. 'With him on the Republican ticket, gathering the votes of the Progressives and the old-line Republicans, he would sweep the country. He would even carry a number of Southern states.'³³ The prospect of a Borah candidacy unifying reform-minded voters over traditional party boundaries highlighted the attraction and potential impact of his campaign. On August 15, 1935, two days after announcing his own campaign for the Democratic nomination, Long once again reasserted his belief in the potential power of Borah's candidacy. 'If the Republicans nominated Borah,' Long told the *New York Times*, 'they could carry each

of the forty-eight states.³⁴ Despite Long's supportive words, it is possible that the notion of two friendly candidates competing for the reformist vote across party lines contributed to Borah's uncertainty regarding the Republican nomination. Long's death in September 1935 thus opened up an opportunity to rally the support expressed for the radical reform movements behind Borah's potential candidacy. The drive towards Borah's campaign was evidenced by a series of positive public and private endorsements from prominent reform leaders. It was this which broke his initial reticence and cemented his decision to seek the presidential nomination.

The broad appeal that Long had suggested might exist for Borah's candidacy was confirmed on August 19, 1935, when the *New York Times* published an independent poll of county Republican chairmen revealing that the insurgent senator led the list of possible candidates by over 100 votes.³⁵ Borah's poll lead encouraged the leaders of the radical reform movements and, in late August 1935, Coughlin wrote to him seeking a meeting in Washington, D.C. In reply, Borah confirmed he wished to meet the priest. On September 18, days after Long's death, Coughlin replied via his Washington representative, Louis Ward, confirming a meeting with Borah, as early as the following week in Michigan if possible, or in October ('when it is convenient for you') in Detroit or New York.³⁶

Coughlin's interest in the senator's activities was matched by support from William Lemke. Prompted by the publication of the *New York Times* poll of local Republican chairmen, Lemke wrote to Borah in early October 1935 to express 'delight' that the insurgent senator was emerging as the leading candidate for the Republican nomination. Further, Lemke informed Borah of his analysis, based on his knowledge of contacts within various local and national farm organisations and the NUSJ, that Borah had wide support amongst delegates at the Republican Party national convention. With a simple majority needed for victory, Lemke believed the senator was on course for the nomination. Borah had, according to Lemke's analysis, already gained the support of 327 of the 1003 delegates and looked likely to gain 'an even break of the

rest.¹³⁷ When Borah replied seeking a meeting to discuss the results of his survey, Lemke set out his explicit and full support for the senator's candidacy. 'I feel that the Republican Party can be rejuvenated and put in the hands of people who represent the spirit and the ideals of this nation,' Lemke wrote on November 6, 1935. 'We are fast making a nation of tramps and beggars out of a once proud people.'³⁸ On November 22, Lemke announced to the press that should the senator declare, he would support Borah's campaign for the presidential nomination. Borah was, he explained, 'the only candidate so far prominently mentioned who could get the support of the farmers of the west for the Republican nomination.'³⁹

Alongside supportive statements received from Long and Lemke, Borah's decision to seek the Republican nomination was finally confirmed by support from Francis Townsend. On August 15, 1935, on the eve of the publication of the *New York Times* preferential poll for the Republican nomination, Townsend wrote to Borah expressing support for his potential run. 'The people are convinced that you are going to come out for us,' the doctor concluded, 'and when you do your campaign will be won before it starts.'⁴⁰ On September 18, Townsend once again wrote to Borah to make his intentions transparent: 'If you want the presidency we will give it to you.'⁴¹ On October 20, Townsend demonstrated the potential voting power of his organisation by introducing Borah to a mass rally of more than 10,000 supporters in Boise, Idaho.⁴² Following the rally, seeking to push the senator into declaring his intentions, the OARP released a series of bumper stickers promoting the senator's potential presidential nomination campaign, proclaiming 'Get the Townsend Plan with Borah,' 'Save the Constitution with Borah,' '16 to 1 with Borah,' 'Back to America with Borah,' and 'Back to Prosperity with Borah.'⁴³

The groundswell in public opinion behind Borah's undeclared candidacy reached its peak in December 1935, when a poll undertaken by the *New York Times* of the insurgent senator's support amongst Republican National Convention delegates found that he could already claim 203 votes, mainly from the west, but including states

as diverse as Maine and North Carolina.⁴⁴ The poll confirmed the widespread support that Long had foreseen back in the summer, and that Lemke and Townsend had confirmed to him in October. The following month Borah authorised Hamilton Fish, Republican congressman for Roosevelt's Hyde Park district of New York state, to open the drive for the official Borah for President National Committee, and appointed Carl Bachmann, a former Republican House Whip, to serve as his national campaign manager. Bachmann rented a suite in Washington, D.C.'s Willard Hotel and began the task of generating funds, spending the first few weeks of January 1936 writing to local Republican Party figures nationwide seeking funds to support the senator's campaign.⁴⁵ Despite Borah's reported strength, he was acutely aware of the potential limitations of his campaign. 'While I am proud to say I have very much greater support than I had any idea of among the people, he wrote pessimistically in November 1935, 'that support is largely among those who are not in conventions.'⁴⁶ In this circumstance, Borah's campaign strategy rested entirely on his ability to mobilise his fellow insurgent senators and his anti-Roosevelt colleagues formally behind his candidacy in the primary election campaign. If he arrived at the convention with a substantial minority of delegates pledged for him, he believed it would be possible to overcome the power of the RNC and, as he wrote to one correspondent, 'direct it along liberal and progressive lines.'⁴⁷ To win a substantial number of delegates during the primary election campaign required Borah to run a well-organised, well-financed campaign that maximised his support from reform-minded voters. However, Borah failed on both counts. Ultimately undermined by both his poorly-executed campaign strategy and the RNC, Borah could not turn his early poll lead to his advantage.

Borah's ability to mount a successful campaign was severely hampered by his lack of funds and organisational infrastructure. The support that Borah might have expected to receive from his insurgent colleagues within the Republican Party failed to materialise. The harsh treatment handed out by both the administration and the RNC to Bronson Cutting had highlighted the vulnerability of the independent insurgent

senators when they were unprotected by the leadership of either political party. Seeking to minimise their exposure, however, the insurgents' subsequent support for the Second New Deal had served to undermine their freedom. Unwilling to risk their positions of seniority within the Republican Party or the new-found favour of the Roosevelt administration, the majority of his colleagues refused to back Borah's independent campaign with only insurgent senators Gerald Nye of North Dakota and Peter Norbeck of South Dakota willing to formally endorse him. Most damagingly, Borah's longtime senatorial companion Hiram Johnson of California expressed an opinion that in seeking the nomination the Idaho senator was primarily seeking publicity, and that he was certain his 'vacillations, and apparent streak of laziness' would prevent him from gaining the nomination.⁴⁸

Borah's distance from both the RNC and his insurgent colleagues limited his appeal to the corporate backers and individual private contributors he needed to finance his campaign. Borah's lack of financial support forced him to make decisions that removed his control necessary to deliver his campaign strategy. In December 1935, Borah explained the difficulty of his financial situation. 'I haven't the means financially to go into this fight,' he explained to one Idaho supporter. 'I am simply, therefore, availing myself of what developments permit.' It quickly became apparent, however, that the other options available to Borah were extremely limited. The harsh reality was that Borah's natural supporters, the young, reform-minded Republicans and poor, unemployed, former middle-class voters discontented with the progress of the Democratic economic reform plans, had little money to donate his campaign. Despite Bachmann's best efforts, by March 1936, Borah had raised only \$3,000.⁴⁹ With such meagre resources, the senator was forced to seek the endorsement of the NUSJ and the OARP to sustain his campaign. Yet, despite their personal friendship, Townsend and Coughlin ultimately were unable to mobilise their supporters. Borah's naivety was largely to blame.

The truth behind Hiram Johnson's comments regarding Borah's unsuitability as a presidential candidate became apparent as soon as the insurgent senator hit the campaign trail. With so much of the campaign dependent on developing support amongst OARP and NUSJ supporters, it was essential it be launched in the correct tone with a message that would bring dissatisfied reform-minded voters to his side. In this respect, his campaign launch could not have been more disastrous. Borah formally announced his candidacy on January 28, 1936, in a national radio broadcast from the Kismet Temple in Brooklyn, New York. The *New York Times* reported on the buzz of expectation that the event had generated; however, the effects of Borah's limited organisational capacity were revealed when, instead of the anticipated crowd of 5,000, only 2,000 people attended.⁵⁰ In his address, Borah outlined his planned policy objectives in the driest of terms, setting out his opposition to the proposed anti-lynching bill, which he felt was unconstitutional, speaking for neutrality, attacking monopolies, and declaring his support for the Supreme Court's actions against the excesses of the New Deal. The main focus of his speech, however, was directed not at the president, but at the leadership of the Republican Party. The presidential nominee must not be determined, the senator declared, in secret with 'selfish and sordid interests pulling the strings.' This year, the public must refuse to accept uninstructed delegates at the convention susceptible to control by the party hierarchy, and extend their democratic right through the primary elections to choose their presidential candidate. He concluded by sending out a clear warning to the Republican Party: 'We cannot go back. We cannot compromise. We must move forward, and the political party which does not accept responsibility will drop out and some other party will take its place.'⁵¹

It was not the content of Borah's speech that attracted the attention of the press. The *Boston Globe*, for example, commented that it 'lacked fire.'⁵² The most significant part of the event came when Borah was questioned from the floor on his support for Townsend's pension plan. Rather than issue a bland response, Borah took the opportunity to articulate his support for the introduction of a substantial pension

provision. 'I believe in it,' he said, 'as a matter of social justice and a matter of economic sanity.' Labelling the \$30 pension provision entitlement under the 'so-called' Social Security bill 'a slow death,' he went on to advocate the adoption of an enhanced pension amount sufficient to protect the elderly. This was all relatively uncontroversial; it was his comment that he did 'not think that [it] is practicable' to force pensioners to spend their pension in one month that placed him in apparent outright opposition to Townsend's plan.⁵³ Borah did not intend his questioning of one of the central features of the plan to be taken as a signal of his opposition, but merely an indication of his belief that further work was required to make the proposal workable. Whatever his intentions, Borah's comments sparked a campaign amongst Townsend's supporters against his nomination.

Townsend himself was aware of the senator's concerns. Following much careful reflection, Borah had written to Townsend on October 1, 1935, expressing a fundamental concern over the constitutionality of the tax-raising element of the plan. 'Can the Federal government levy a tax for A,' he questioned, 'for the specific purpose of giving it to B, when A and B occupy the same position in the social structure, except as to the question of age?' Borah assured Townsend, however, that this concern did not amount to rejection. The senator retained 'a great desire to find a favorable solution,' but he would not express support 'purely as a matter of political expediency.'⁵⁴ On October 4, Townsend replied rapidly to Borah's concerns, assuring the senator of his belief in the constitutionality of the plan. Borah's attendance alongside Townsend at the OARP rally on October 20, 1935, and the subsequent launch of the pension plan's public campaign in support of the senator's nomination, suggests some form of compromise had been agreed in private between the two men. Indeed, further to these displays of public support, Townsend wrote to Borah on November 14 with a blank invitation to redraft the pension plan as required 'at once' to remove 'all objectionable features.'⁵⁵ It is unclear, beyond the doctor himself, how aware the leaders of the OARP were of Borah's exact position. Townsend was willing

to conduct negotiations around the details of his plan in private, but he was careful that questions regarding practicability did not surface in public. To Townsend's most fanatical supporters, willing to follow him, as Borah commented to the doctor in private, without any well-defined ideas as to how 'problems which are inherent in the proposal are to be solved,' anyone questioning any detail of the plan was marked out as an opponent.⁵⁶ Whatever the wishes of the OARP leadership, by expressing his private views on the detailed workability of the pension plan in public, Borah undermined his presidential aspirations.

Victory in the California primary, the home state of the OARP and of Hoover, was central to Borah's strategy to win over the support of convention delegates for his nomination. Borah's victory in the key battleground state would demonstrate the strength of support for a reform-minded candidate and strike a blow against the RNC, which retained close links with the former president. Borah was dependent on Townsend's supporters to deliver him the primary victory. 'I do not believe that any candidate could be successful without their support,' wrote one local organiser to Carl Bachmann. Prior to his January statement on the Townsend plan, Borah was informed that he was the clearly favoured candidate of the Californian OARP. The senator's perceived opposition to the Townsend plan, however, shifted them against his candidacy. He had, Borah was informed, 'lost [the] entire strength' of the organisation.⁵⁷

Borah's controversial comments on the Townsend plan also hit the senator closer to home. Borah had decided that he would campaign for re-election to his senate seat should he lose his bid for the party nomination. This ambition took a blow when, in response to his supposedly anti-Townsend comments, the OARP in Idaho placed their own candidate into the Republican senatorial primary. This local move against Borah hurt him deeply. 'I doubt very much,' he wrote to one friend, 'if anyone can be elected who is not in favor of the proposition.'⁵⁸ He concluded in a letter to

another Idaho correspondent, 'I realise fully that the situation in Idaho might be such as to cause the Republican Party to wish to select some other candidate.'⁵⁹

Borah attempted to retrieve his position in California and Idaho by re-engaging in discussions with the national OARP leadership. Townsend's subsequent attempt to assert his authority over his movement ended in failure. The spring of 1936 was difficult, as Townsend endured the congressional investigation into his activity ('I think the investigation has gone far beyond reason and justice,' commented Borah in private).⁶⁰ One of the immediate consequences of this investigation was a weakening of Townsend's central control of the OARP. The committee had revealed Townsend's leadership to be fallible. The campaigns waged by the California and Idaho groups against Borah were local decisions in which Townsend had played no part. In a direct attempt to reassert his leadership over the movement, in March 1936, Townsend announced his support for Borah's nomination. 'Senator Borah has not come right out for our plan,' the doctor explained in his statement, 'but he has moved a great deal further towards our ideals than any other candidate in sight in either party.'⁶¹ Townsend's formal endorsement of Borah's candidacy, however, angered the OARP's Board of Directors – constitutionally the President of the OARP was unable to endorse candidates for election without the Board's prior authority. With Borah refusing to express unqualified support for the Townsend plan, the OARP Board refused to back his candidacy. From Townsend headquarters in California came a warning from Edward J. Margett, state manager, that Townsendites should 'hold steady against unofficial onslaughts on the Townsend votes by those who by doing so use it for some goal other than enactment of the plan.' Reminded of his constitutional limitations by his Board, Townsend was forced to present a revised statement to the press explaining that 'he had not pledged his organisation to support Senator Borah for the nomination.' Anything he did in the campaign, he clarified, would 'be merely an expression of his personal attitude.'⁶² Although he tried to make light of it, there was no doubt that Townsend had suffered public humiliation at the hands of his organisation. Despite his

continued personal preference for Borah, there was now nothing that Townsend could do to mobilise the OARP behind the senator. Borah's political naivety had cost him dearly. On March 26, 1936, with the national OARP unwilling to support him and the movement's state organisation campaigning against him, the senator's name was withdrawn from the California primary.⁶³

Townsend's experience reduced the appeal of Borah's candidacy to Coughlin. In April 1936, Carl Bachmann expressed a personal view that 'many followers' of Father Coughlin would get behind Borah's nomination.⁶⁴ Yet, despite Coughlin's longstanding relationship with the senator, the formal endorsement of the NUSJ was not assured. From Detroit, Coughlin watched the development of Borah's nomination campaign closely, in particular, Townsend's difficulty when he unilaterally awarded the OARP's endorsement to the senator. Despite his more autocratic control, Coughlin too was bound by an agreement that the NUSJ would not back a presidential candidate. Not wishing to suffer a similar public humiliation, Coughlin attempted a more subtle approach to demonstrating his support for Borah. He would get the insurgent senator to endorse the NUSJ. Coughlin's supporters would then be able to make their own decision where to place their vote in the primary elections. In mid-April 1936, Borah was made aware of Coughlin's strategy in a letter from a mutual friend, Farmers' Union president Edward Kennedy. Informing Borah that Coughlin was 'in a very friendly attitude' to his campaign, Kennedy revealed that Borah would shortly receive a letter from the priest seeking confirmation that the senator would support the NUSJ's plan to re-monetise silver.⁶⁵ Borah's subsequent response, published on the front page of *Social Justice* in early May, confirmed that he was indeed in sympathy with the NUSJ's monetary plan. In an accompanying article, Coughlin offered support for Borah's campaign. 'Members of the National Union must obviously vote for somebody for president,' the priest wrote. For the NUSJ, the central issue by which all candidates must be judged was 'the 'money question' and both of the parties are dodging it as if by common consent.' In this circumstance, Coughlin concluded, the only candidate 'who

has approached the ticklish question is the leonine battler Borah.⁶⁶ Although this compromise delivered Coughlin's indirect endorsement, it did not mobilise the necessary resources of the NUSJ to address his campaign's fundamental weakness.

With the Republican insurgents largely indifferent to his campaign, with limited support from the NUSJ, and with the OARP against him at state level, Borah's slim chances of victory were entirely dependent on whom the RNC chose as their candidate. Should the RNC candidate prove unacceptable to the insurgent wing of the party, Borah might still provide an acceptable alternative despite the weakness of his campaign. However, by endorsing the candidacy of Governor Alf Landon of Kansas, the RNC effectively neutralised Borah's appeal.

The RNC decision to endorse Landon's candidacy was the result of a simplistic assessment of the party's electoral appeal. The Republican Party's affirmation of its support in the northeastern states in regional elections during 1935, and the additional political and financial backing to the party obtained from the northeastern-dominated Liberty League following their break with the Democratic Party in January 1936, made the RNC assume that the region would be assured in the presidential election. Victory, it was thus assumed was dependent on winning back the western states, which they had largely dominated since the end of the Civil War. This, the RNC determined, could be achieved by selecting a western candidate acceptable to the northeastern party leadership. Borah was not this candidate. His long history of party insurrection, his outright opposition to the Hoover presidency, and his moves in late 1934 to undermine the power of the RNC through a revolt of Young Republicans, all rendered him unacceptable to the party leadership.⁶⁷ Alf Landon, however, the only Republican governor to hold on to his state in the Democratic landslide of 1934, had great appeal. Landon had left the party to support Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party campaign in 1912, but had since supported the RNC. He thus had the real benefit of not falling directly into either the conservative RNC or insurgent camps.⁶⁸ With Borah's campaign having faltered, the RNC's backing for Landon's candidacy effectively assured him the

nomination. As Landon's great political friend and supporter William Allen White, Kansas newspaper editor, explained bluntly to the Governor, 'New England will let us write the platform and let you have the nomination.'⁶⁹

Landon launched his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination on January 29, 1936, the day after Borah and four days after Al Smith's address to the Liberty League dinner. In a speech designed to demonstrate both his reformist credentials and his appeal to more conservative-minded voters, he pronounced himself willing to consider reform where it was demonstrably necessary, but condemned the New Deal in forceful terms: 'We need desperately a cheaper, simpler, and more responsible administration throughout the nation.' Comparing Landon's and Borah's performances, the press generally favoured the former. His speech was 'better balanced, more comprehensive, closer to the ground and generally more impressive,' concluded the *Boston Herald*. The *Literary Digest* observed that in many editorials, Landon emerged clearly as the 'common-sense' candidate.⁷⁰

The main source of information on the comparative strength of the Republican candidates is the Gallup opinion polls. The first poll to question Republican voters on their preference for the 1936 nomination, published on December 1, 1935, demonstrated that there were only two real candidates. Borah (at 26 per cent) and Landon (leading with 33 per cent) each had received more than double the support of their nearest opponent, Hoover, who stood only on 12 per cent. Borah and Landon at this stage each had every reason to believe that they had a chance of securing the nomination. Following the formal launch of the Republican presidential nomination campaign, however, Borah's reduction in electoral appeal was evident in the April 5 poll (with interviews undertaken in late February 1936). The poll found that whilst Borah retained second place at 20 per cent, he had experienced a rapid drop in support. Conversely, Hoover had slightly increased his poll rating to 14 per cent, but Landon, on 56 per cent, had moved decisively ahead by taking support from Borah and the other conservative candidates. Furthermore, an analysis of the data broken down on a

regional basis revealed that Landon had a decisive lead (ranging from 43 per cent in the Pacific region to 8 per cent in the Mountain states) in every region of the country. Landon's moderate conservatism had appeal across the spectrum of Republican voters and had overtaken Borah's insurgent campaign.⁷¹

With Landon established as the front-runner, the RNC systematically set about removing the potential for Borah to cause an upset at the nominating convention by undermining his primary election campaign. Primary elections were not the ubiquitous events they are today. Instead, as Borah had highlighted in his January address, state leaders preferred to choose their own 'uninstructed' delegates to send to the convention. The state leadership was then able to gain power within the national party by offering these blocs of votes to candidates who offered them the greatest rewards. Exploiting this system, the RNC encouraged state leaders not to conduct competitive primaries. As a result, in 1936 only 12 of the 48 states staged primaries, the vast majority in the western states. In a second move, the RNC met in New York in January 1936 to agree a list of 'favorite son' candidates to compete against Borah in the primaries that did go ahead.⁷² Favorite sons were popular local political figures who were likely to achieve victory. Those delegates pledged to the favorite sons were bound to vote for them in the first round of voting at convention, but were then free to act as uninstructed delegates able, in return for a reward, to back the RNC's preferred candidate. To ensure victory, the RNC directed substantial funds behind its anti-Borah primary election candidates.⁷³ Finally, the RNC minimised Landon's exposure to the electorate and engagement in direct debate. In February 1936, William Allen White informed Borah that the RNC had agreed Landon should only enter the Massachusetts and New Jersey primaries, both northeastern states where support from the Republican leadership assured him of victory.⁷⁴

The RNC strategy severely weakened Borah's chances of victory. With the votes of the delegates loyal to the RNC assured, Landon remained aloof, whilst Borah was forced with extremely limited resources to campaign nationally against an array of

well-funded candidates. Borah reacted bitterly in private to news of the strategy that was being used to defeat him. The RNC, he wrote to one correspondent, felt that they could 'elect any man they nominate upon any platform which they choose to write.'⁷⁵ Borah fumed to another correspondent, 'I have never known a more determined effort to control a convention through the sheer use of money than is now being revealed.'⁷⁶ As the primary results began to come in, the weakness of Borah's campaign was clear – he was able to win only those primaries in Pennsylvania, Nebraska, and Oregon where he ran unopposed and in Wisconsin where he ran only against a slate of 'uninstructed delegates' and West Virginia where he was opposed by a minor politician from Milwaukee running without RNC support. He was heavily defeated by Landon in Massachusetts and New Jersey and by RNC-backed favorite son candidates in the remaining three states in which he entered.⁷⁷

Following his failure in the primary elections, the press wrote off Borah's campaign. His candidacy, the *Dayton Herald* concluded in May, had 'lost whatever significance it may once have possessed.'⁷⁸ Despite this, Landon's campaign team understood the difficulty that any show of support for Borah at the convention might cause for their candidate's nomination. Landon therefore set about making a deal with the senator. The principal link between the two candidates was their mutual friend William Allen White. In repeated meetings throughout the months of April and May, White and fellow Landon supporters placed sustained pressure upon Borah to withdraw from the campaign and endorse the governor, emphasising that a convention-floor battle between the two might result in the selection of a conservative candidate.⁷⁹ 'For some weird reason Borah has got Alf classified as a reactionary,' concluded White. 'I suppose he is hard to move once his opinion is set.' Unwilling to accept Landon's liberal credentials, Borah, thus, refused to budge.⁸⁰

Borah, though, had good reason not to withdraw from the nominating campaign. As late as May 21, his campaign team remained convinced that the senator retained the support of at least 200 delegates. Despite the weakness of his campaign, this core

support, Carl Bachmann commented, 'surprise[d]' the senator.⁸¹ Aware of the continued support for Borah's candidacy, the RNC had no desire to weaken Landon's appeal to reform-minded voters with an insurgent walkout from the convention. They thus informed Borah they were willing to consider the incorporation of the senator's views into the Republican platform. As William Allen White articulated in a letter to Landon written before the convention: 'Even the threat of Borah's walkout will construct for us a platform that you could run on faster and further than you could run if Borah did not help us liberate the platform.'⁸² Borah did not trust the RNC; he feared that ending his campaign in advance of the convention might enhance rather than reduce the likelihood that a candidate more conservative than Landon might receive the nomination. With the support of his bloc of loyal delegates behind him, however, Borah retained a significant bargaining chip that might affect the outcome of the nomination process. 'I do not propose to be satisfied with the platform,' he wrote to one Landon campaign advisor in April 1936. 'Platforms are not worth a damn if you do not know who is going to stand upon them.'⁸³ Maximising his opportunity to shape the eventual outcome, Borah arrived in Cleveland on June 7, two days before the opening of the convention. Working from the Idaho delegate room, he engaged in a period of intense negotiation which assured him that, even if backing for a conservative candidate emerged on the convention floor, the RNC would ensure Landon's nomination on the first roll call vote. On the evening of June 8, Borah announced to the delegates from Idaho that Landon's victory was inevitable and formally withdrew from the race.⁸⁴ On June 11, the RNC called upon their favorite son candidates to withdraw, and Landon won the nomination on the first roll-call, receiving 934 votes to Borah's 19 (1 from West Virginia – Carl Bachmann – and 18 from Wisconsin).⁸⁵

Although Borah refused to serve formally on the Committee on Resolutions, he offered suggestions on the wording of the party platform. However, the nomination of a moderate presidential candidate masked strong conservative voices within the RNC and the delegates at large. Hoover in particular had previously chosen to remain

largely aloof from the nomination process, but with the RNC having asserted control of the party he stepped once more to the fore. Hoover's reassertion of his authority undermined Landon's candidacy and placed immediate questions over his ability to run a moderate campaign. In a blistering address, the former president described the New Deal as 'a muddle,' a 'reckless adventure' and overall a calamitous and expensive failure. 'After three years,' he pointed out, 'we still have the same number of unemployed that we had at the election of November 1932.' The time had come, he said, for the nation to repudiate the New Deal and to restore sacred 'human freedom.' 'Today,' he concluded, 'the stern task is before the Republican Party to restore the Ark of that Covenant to the temple in Washington.'⁸⁶ The speech, which was interrupted repeatedly by prolonged applause, ended with a mass demonstration of support by delegates holding up their banners and marching around the convention floor, calling his name. Hoover's speech radicalised the convention and altered the final party platform.⁸⁷ Much of Borah's wording was ignored. Although the final version incorporated support for social security and unemployment relief administered at state rather than federal level, its overall tone was resolutely opposed to a drive towards reform. 'We were lucky to get what we did,' commented William Allen White later. The RNC had secured a moderate western candidate, but burdened him with a largely conservative platform.⁸⁸ The position of the RNC was set out in the preamble in the starkest terms: 'for three long years the New Deal administration has dishonored American traditions for partisan political purposes.'⁸⁹ Borah's private concerns regarding Landon's ability to overcome the determination of the RNC to reassert conservative values were thus ultimately proven true.

Reflecting later in life upon his campaign for the Republican nomination, Borah expressed no regrets. 'I suppose some thought I was really seeking to gratify a great ambition,' the senator explained to his friend Frank Brice, Jr. 'But I was seeking to be of some service to what I consider a real crisis in this country.'⁹⁰ Borah's campaign had ended in failure, but a number of lessons should have been learned from the

experience. Although he had made efforts to establish a grassroots movement to reform the Republican Party, without resources, he had been unable to galvanise enough support behind his campaign to bring state leaders over to his cause. The RNC's endorsement of a western candidate, coupled with the power they wielded through their overwhelming financial support for the national party, easily suppressed Borah's ineffectual and amateurish campaign. Borah might have been able to overcome the power and reach of the RNC if he had been able to successfully tap into alternative quasi-political networks operated by sympathetic organisations such as the OARP and NUSJ. Borah recognised the potential power such networks might have afforded his campaign (he wrote to Townsend in early October 1935, 'I realize fully the strength of your movement and the great support it has'), but although Townsend and Coughlin expressed public support for the senator, they were unable to mobilise their movements behind his campaign.⁹¹ More problematically, in the case of the OARP, Borah's perceived negative comments about Townsend's plan led directly to damaging local campaigns against his presidential nomination in California and his re-nomination for his senate seat in Idaho. This was entirely counter to the radical reform leaders' individual intentions. They had turned to the Republican Party seeking to endorse a candidate sympathetic to their reform agenda. Borah's failure thus represented another setback in their campaign against the re-election of the president. Whatever his good intentions, poorly financed and politically naïve, faced with certain defeat, Borah had found himself outmaneuvered by the powerful RNC. In contrast, Landon's nomination represented a victory for the conservative party leadership (and President Hoover) over the threat from their insurgent wing.

For Coughlin, Townsend, Lemke and Smith, the nomination process for the major parties' presidential candidates had proved deeply unsatisfactory. There was no natural place for them to vent their frustration within the Democratic Party, where, following the assassination of Huey Long, opposition to Roosevelt had unsuccessfully solidified around the conservative Liberty League. Borah's failure to win the

Republican nomination placed the leaders of the radical reform movements in an impossible position. With the 1936 presidential election now very clearly on the horizon, what should have been their moment of triumph as they campaigned against Roosevelt's re-election appeared to have been snatched away from them. Coughlin, in a statement published in *Social Justice* on June 22, summed up his opinion of the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in damning terms: 'To ask the National Union of Social Justice to support either Roosevelt or Landon is to invite this organization to choose between carbolic acid and rat poison.'⁹³ Having failed to exert their influence over the major parties, the leaders of the radical reform movements could have chosen to remain silent, but they believed that a section of the American electorate stood ready to be mobilised behind a pro-reform, anti-Roosevelt crusade. Without a presidential candidate, however, this campaign lacked focus and political expediency. With no other choice open to them, the time had come for the independent leaders of the diverse radical reform movements to enter into a formal union to back a candidate to defeat the president. Gerald Smith had acted as the bridge between the NUSJ and the OARP. His personal ambition for power had been the final driving force behind the convergence of the diverse group of independent radical reformers. It was only right then that the nature of their new agreement was revealed by Smith himself in a press conference held in Chicago on June 15. There the preacher announced that a formal 'united front' had now been established between the NUSJ, OARP, SoW and supporters of Congressman William Lemke. The basis of this unification was a common belief that basic American rights and freedoms had been seriously undermined by the strict state control and central planning advocated by the administration. By working together, Smith announced, the leaders of the diverse radical reform movements would successfully oppose 'the communistic philosophy of Frankfurter, Ickes, Hopkins and Wallace.'⁹² In their editorial columns published in *Social Justice* on June 12 and the *National Townsend Weekly* on June 15, immediately

following Landon's victory at the Republican National Convention, Coughlin and Townsend set out the next stage in their campaign against the president.

Coughlin began his editorial, titled 'Stand By!,' by reminding his members that the NUSJ had been established not only to teach the principles of social justice, but to ensure these principles were put in place. Members were, Coughlin reminded them, 'expected to be doers of and not only listeners to the gospel of social justice.' With the presidential candidates of the two major parties confirmed, the priest set out his plan for action.⁹³ Ordering his members to 'rally to your principles and your leaders,' Coughlin announced that the activities of the NUSJ would 'increase tremendously' immediately following June 16 or 17. He would, he said, at this time 'lay down a plan for action which will thrill you and inspire you beyond anything that I have ever said or accomplished in the past.' Coughlin concluded his piece by presenting a clear case for the entry of the NUSJ directly into this new political arena. In the past, he explained, he had promised his members that 'as long as I remained your legal president it would be impossible for the National Union to become a political party.' Priests might be interested in politics, but they 'may not head a political party which has a candidate for president or for Congress.' In this circumstance, he had therefore focused the activities of the movement on the endorsement of 'good' Democrats and Republicans who would 'fight' the 'partisan machine' in Washington. Yet in the current political situation, he continued, he could not, in good faith, endorse either the 'promise-breaking' Democratic president in the White House nor the Republican nominee 'dominated not by the progressive Republicans west of Wall Street, but by the bankers themselves.' The lack of an acceptable presidential candidate presented the NUSJ with a significant challenge. Coughlin had conceived the NUSJ as a 'real union of farmer and laborer, of merchant and industrialist, of professional man and housewife, independent of party, creed or race,' because 'every one of us had been victimized by the errors which crept into our modern capitalism.' In these impossible circumstances, it was right that the

NUSJ step forward to defend the nation against the excesses and failings of the old 'moribund parties' who continued to 'play the bankers' game.'⁹⁴

Coughlin's mobilisation of the NUSJ represented a real threat to the balance of power within Congress and the outcome of the presidential election. This new action, however, exposed the priest as never before. Whatever news emerged over the next week, Coughlin concluded, he 'pledge[d]' and 'promise[d]' that 'I still remain your leader!'⁹⁵ Coughlin's pre-announcement of the date he would reveal his presidential candidate was intended to generate press, public and political interest, but also to allow a period of time to assess the reactions of his membership. With a week to confirm the final details, the priest allowed himself some flexibility to construct his final plan.

The nature of the third-party movement sketched out by Coughlin was further elaborated in Townsend's editorial of June 15. Townsend, having learned his lesson from his embarrassment at the hands of his board when he had unilaterally announced his support for Borah's presidential nomination campaign, also explicitly warned his members in advance of his intention to mobilise them behind a new third-party movement. The doctor's leadership of the OARP had been thrown into question by the evidence presented during the congressional hearings into the movement. It had been challenged further when the doctor had been blocked from endorsing Borah's campaign for the Republican nomination. His editorial of 15 June was intended to rally his supporters but also to explain his actions in the clearest of terms, set out the need for change of focus for the movement, and to end any potential challenge to his leadership. Like Coughlin, Townsend was clear that any future concerted political action by the OARP did not require a change in the organisation itself. 'I am asked many times a day,' he began, 'if there is to be a merger of the OARP with [the NUSJ] and similar movements.' 'My answer has always been "No merger of any kind is proposed."' But in the present political and economic circumstances, doing nothing was not an option. 'Do not mistake this!' warned Townsend, 'We are proposing to go places!' With the single aim of seeing the enactment of his pension plan, Townsend

set out ambitious plans for the OARP to be the driving force behind the formation of a new political party. This new party, he foresaw, would replace 'both of the gang-ridden political parties' with a 'new shining model.' However, this 'new alignment' was not something that the Townsend movement would take on alone. Instead, he announced his intention to form a 'new league of Farm and Labor' groups to 'blast Farleyism out of high places and again take possession of our rightful heritage.' To achieve this new plan, the OARP needed not to embark upon a 'bloody revolution' but to 'get together all we who are against the hidden forces which now plainly control our political destinies.' Thus, where he found 'Father Coughlin, or Gerald L.K. Smith, or a Lemcke [sic] who [were] in the spirit of fiery revolt against the present encroachments on our rights and liberties, then know that I will strike hands and will speak at mass meetings and will join or lead processions.' But 'once and for all,' Townsend assured his members, the launch of the new party would not affect the independence of the OARP: 'I am not adopting the platforms or teachings of other groups or parties.'⁹⁶

Both Townsend and Coughlin went to great lengths to assure their members of the independence of the new movement from their own organisations. There would be a new third party with its own platform, both men agreed, behind which both men would throw their backing, but the NUSJ and OARP would remain separate from it. By taking this dual approach, they believed they could mobilise the third party to defeat the president, but, at the same time, by maintaining their independence, protect their individual positions of power. Townsend wrote that he had 'no desire to gain political leadership of any new party.' 'Titles mean nothing,' Coughlin commented. 'Sometimes they are only embarrassing to him who holds them; sometimes they only obstruct activity.'⁹⁷ The publication of their two powerful editorials constituted a significant enhancement of the loose coalition of anti-Roosevelt groups announced on June 1, 1936. Having now made their plan public, criticism arising from amongst their membership would have represented a considerable embarrassment. The point of

union had now formally been reached. Significant challenges remained, however, in turning the new union into an active political movement.

As befits a political party born of negotiation between several headstrong leaders accused of dictatorial tendencies, the detailed circumstances surrounding the birth of the new party were not particularly democratic. From the point of the announcement of the union on June 15 and the formal launch of the Union Party on June 19, much detailed work remained to be undertaken. A flurry of private telephone conversations was held, and telegrams passed, between Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend and Smith to put in place arrangements for the new party.⁹⁸ In line with the position presented in Coughlin's and Townsend's editorials, rather than seeking to transform one of the existing movements, the men backed the creation of a new political party. In the last week of May, as it became apparent that Borah's candidacy for the Republican nomination was likely to fail, Townsend had visited the senator in Washington, D.C., along with a delegation of what the *New York Times* described as 'representatives of other dissident groups,' and had offered him the nomination of the new party. Borah thanked Townsend for his support, but offered no further encouragement. In this circumstance, William Lemke, the only established politician amongst them, agreed to take the presidential nomination.⁹⁹ It is possible to determine from a June 16 letter written by Lemke to Thomas O'Brien (a Massachusetts labour lawyer and NUSJ activist), thanking him for 'consenting at my request, to seek the office of Vice-President on The Union Party ballot,' that both the new party's name and Lemke's acceptance of the nomination had occurred prior to that date. Indeed, this would be consistent with Smith's confident announcement to the press on the previous day of the establishment of the new 'united front.'¹⁰⁰ Further evidence that Coughlin was working together with Townsend and Smith on the details surrounding the establishment of the new party can be derived from a comment provided to the press by Eastern Regional Director of the OARP, Dr. Clinton Wunder. 'Dr. Townsend and Father Coughlin,' Wunder announced on June 18, 'were keeping in touch by long distance telephone.'

Furthermore, a telegram received by Lemke from Smith on June 17, invited the new presidential nominee to speak alongside Townsend before a crowd of 20,000 OARP supporters meeting in Syracuse, New York, the following Saturday, June 20.¹⁰¹

Despite progress made in the week following Landon's nomination, the truth was that by the date of Coughlin's scheduled radio address on June 19, considerable work remained to be done to confirm the details of the radical reform leaders' support for Lemke's campaign. With the Democratic National Convention due to open on 23 June, Coughlin's timing was likely influenced by a desire for his announcement to dominate the news agenda and potentially mobilise opposition to Roosevelt's re-nomination. It is also possible that he was trying, by naming a specific date, to force Townsend to make a decision more quickly than the doctor might have found comfortable. The doctor had only been willing in his editorial to commit to the third-party launch taking place 'this summer or autumn.'¹⁰² Townsend's relative reluctance to name a specific date likely sprang from the recent challenges made against his leadership of the OARP, particularly given damaging evidence revealed by the congressional investigation. Thus, despite additional pressure from Smith that he should move quickly to formalise the third-party arrangement (as evidenced by the preacher's announcement in the press of the formation of the new 'united front' and the private invitation to Lemke to speak before at the mass OARP meeting on 20 June), Townsend retained a strong preference for delaying the formal announcement. 'We can't say what our strategy will be until after our convention in Cleveland, July 15-19,' Townsend announced to the press on June 18. 'If Father Coughlin wants to support us, all well and good. We're not endorsing anybody at this time. Why should we? We have the strength and it's growing everyday.' Coughlin, however, having made a commitment to his members and having raised the expectations of the press, set aside the concerns of his partner and on June 19 proceeded with his scheduled announcement. The conflict between Coughlin and Smith's desire to move quickly and

Townsend's preference to delay threatened to derail the new party before its campaign had even begun.¹⁰³

As Coughlin had promised, his June 19 address redefined the purpose of the NUSJ and permanently shifted his position as leader of the movement. The radio priest began his presentation by announcing to his massed listeners the surprising news that he had received notification from Washington, D.C., that afternoon of the establishment of a new 'Union Party,' with Lemke as its presidential nominee. In accordance with his statements in opposition to the nominations of Roosevelt and Landon, and in support of the Union Party's radical reform platform, Coughlin announced that he considered Lemke 'eligible for endorsement' by the NUSJ as its favoured presidential candidate. He likewise invited similar expressions of support from the members of the Townsend movement, farmers, workers and all other radical reform minded groups.¹⁰⁴ Coughlin went on to devote little of his speech to comments on Landon's nomination for the Republican Party, beyond stating that the nation 'had turned its back' upon the 'ragged individualism' that he said they represented. Instead, the priest focused the majority of his time criticising Roosevelt for the failures of his first administration. He attacked the AAA's destruction of farm produce as 'immoral' and expressed strong support for Lemke's Farm Mortgage Refinance Plan. He ended the speech with an outright attack upon the honesty of the president. Roosevelt had promised upon his inauguration, Coughlin said, to 'drive the money changers out of the temple,' yet in the course of his first administration, the president had repeatedly failed to live up to his vow. As a consequence, there existed only one political party in the nation today, 'the bankers' party.' Neither 'old dealer nor new dealer, it appears,' he challenged, 'has the courage to assail the international bankers, the Federal Bankers.' In 1936, Coughlin concluded, 'our disillusionment is complete.'

Concurrent with Coughlin's radio address, Lemke issued a statement to the national press confirming that he would 'run for President of the United States on the Union Party Platform.'¹⁰⁵ One reporter, commenting on the nature of the

announcement, acutely observed that the presidential convention must have been held in a telephone booth.¹⁰⁶ Although Lemke provided no further details at this stage on the origins, leadership or structure of the new Union Party, alongside his statement, he issued a fifteen-point platform of liberal reform policies (described by the *New York Times* as 'radical in nature' and 'remarkable for its brevity') which he claimed would counter Roosevelt's dictatorial tendencies and thus 'save democracy and put an end to the so-called Depression.'¹⁰⁷ Observers interested in the balance of power within the new 'Union' commented that Lemke's proposals read like a 're-hash' of the platform of Coughlin's National Union of Social Justice and observed, wryly, that Townsend's old-age pension proposal and the key elements of the Share-our-Wealth plan were missing.¹⁰⁸

If Coughlin and Lemke had hoped that an immediate statement backing Lemke's candidacy would be forthcoming from the OARP, they were proved wrong. A final agreement had not been achieved between the different parties, and Townsend refused to be pushed. Lemke had telegraphed Smith in the hours before Coughlin's announcement seeking an urgent telephone call. In a reply received by Lemke at 11.38 a.m. on June 19, Smith apologised that his 'train schedule and confusion in time made my call impossible.'¹⁰⁹ In the absence of this call, no formal backing for Lemke's announcement was possible. In its place, later that day, a rather embarrassed Smith was forced to announce to the press that Townsend and he had agreed to meet Lemke early the following week. Any formal announcement of their support would be withheld until that meeting had taken place. The likely outcome, at least from Smith's perspective, was clear. 'We believe,' he concluded his statement, 'that the combined strength of [the NUSJ, OARP and SoW] can elect the next President of the United States.'¹¹⁰ The inability of the union to agree such basic details as the timetable for the announcement of the new party and Coughlin's decision to proceed with the launch in its absence, did not bode well for the success of Lemke's candidacy. It appeared that

the lessons of Borah's uncoordinated, naïve nomination campaign had not been learned.

Despite the failure of his partners to co-ordinate their endorsement of his new party and candidacy, Lemke remained positive as to his chances. Speaking to reporters from the Associated Press on the day of Coughlin's announcement, Lemke identified Illinois as a state likely to fall to the Union Party. Roosevelt had achieved an 18 per cent swing to seize the state for the Democrats in 1932, but, Lemke explained, with blocks of businesses and residential property in receivership, dissatisfaction rife in the mining and agricultural sectors, and both traditional parties torn apart by infighting, 'the situation in the state is ideal for the success of our party.'¹¹¹ The situation described in Illinois was not unique. Thus, although the press hesitated to declare Lemke a significant contender for the presidency in November, there was a common belief that, if he was able to harness the popular discontent of the section of the electorate dissatisfied with the pace of reform under the New Deal, Lemke's candidacy might cut seriously into Roosevelt's share of the popular vote. Democratic Representative Martin Sweeney of Ohio expressed a widely reported view that Lemke would 'garner 20,000,000 popular votes and possibly put the election of the president to the House of Representatives.'¹¹²

The formation of the Union Party generated considerable interest in the press and the general public. Front pages across the nation from Oregon to New York to Iowa to Missouri ran with Lemke's surprising news. An editorial published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on June 22 declared the news 'a much more important development than in any other campaign in which third parties have appeared.'¹¹³ Such excitement seems vastly disproportionate, however, to the facts surrounding the establishment and launch of the Union Party. Forced into a corner by continued outright opposition to the re-election of Roosevelt, the leaders of the radical reform movements, Townsend, Smith, Lemke and Coughlin, had been unsuccessful in displacing the president from the 1936 Democratic presidential nomination and unable

to secure the nomination of an insurgent candidate for the Republican nomination. On June 15, 1936, with few other alternatives, the diverse collective of radical reformers reached the final point of union. Yet, with one week between Landon's nomination as Republican presidential candidate and the opening of the Democratic National Convention to turn their union into an effective political force, time pressures and Townsend's reluctance to be rushed meant that launch day was amateurish and muddled. The circumstances of its chaotic launch would ultimately define the public's attitude towards Lemke and the Union Party. Despite Townsend and Coughlin's attempts to establish distance between the new party and their movements, the strange circumstances of its birth and Lemke's nomination generated immediate and sustained speculation that Coughlin was the power behind the throne. Wishing to suppress these suggestions, the priest went to extreme lengths to preserve the pretence of the new party's independence. When asked during a press conference held at the close of his June 19 radio broadcast when he had received a copy of Lemke's new party platform, Coughlin abruptly ended questioning and stormed out of the room. In the priest's wake, a scuffle broke out between a number of Coughlin's aides and the journalist, J. A. Reichman of The United Press. When Reichman refused to provide his newspaper identification card, he was seized and his arm twisted behind his back.¹¹⁴ Whatever the eventual significance of Lemke's presidential candidacy, the Union Party campaign was clearly not going to be without incident.

¹ WL to CH, February 1, 1935, WLP.

² *NYT*, June 2, 1936.

³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 25.

⁴ For Michigan election results see Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement*, 157 and State of Michigan, 'MI – District 03 Special Election Race – December 17, 1935,' *Our Campaigns*, <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=617661>

(7 January 2010); for Ohio election results see *NYT*, May 14, 1936; for Pennsylvania election results see *SJ*, May 8, 1936. *NYT*, May 1, 1936.

- ⁵ See letters between Frank Peterson to Dr Frank Dyer, January 12, 1935, Frank Peterson to Earl Clements, 20 January 1935 and Dr Clinton Wunder to John B. Kiefer, April 5, 1935, *Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating Old-Age Pension Organisations*, 661.
- ⁶ Williams, *Huey Long*, 801.
- ⁷ Wheeler had temporarily broken with the Democratic Party in 1924 to become leading Republican insurgent Robert La Follette Snr's running mate in his presidential campaign for the Progressive Party of America. T. Harry Williams oral interview with James P. O'Connor, THWP.
- ⁸ T. Harry Williams oral interviews with Joe Cawthorne, Robert Brothers and Lucille Hunt (née Long), THWP.
- ⁹ Form letter from Huey Long to Joe Shuler, May 27, 1935, RBLP.
- ¹⁰ *NYT*, July 5, 1935.
- ¹¹ *NYT*, August 14, 16, 1935.
- ¹² In 1935, Irene DuPont contributed \$79,750, Lammot DuPont, \$10,000, Pierre DuPont, \$10,000, S. Halleck DuPont, \$10,000, and William DuPont, \$10,000, Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, 62 and 139; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 12.
- ¹³ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 519.
- ¹⁴ Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, 152.
- ¹⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 2-25.
- ¹⁶ Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, 183; *NYT*, June 22, 1936.
- ¹⁷ *NYT*, June 14, 1936.
- ¹⁸ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 19; Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, 183.
- ¹⁹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 25.

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- ²⁰ FET, *New Horizons*, 164; Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 206-207.
- ²¹ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 165.
- ²² *Ibid*, 69.
- ²³ Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 216.
- ²⁴ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 70.
- ²⁵ William Allen White (hereafter WAW) to George F. Milton, May 3, 1935, WAW Papers, LOC, Washington, D.C. (hereafter WAWP).
- ²⁶ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 70.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 92.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, 165.
- ²⁹ WEB to Charles R. Long, December 23, 1935, WEBP.
- ³⁰ *NYT*, June 16, 1935.
- ³¹ WEB to Lucius C. G. McGuire, April 29, 1935, WEBP.
- ³² See for example WEB to CC, January 30, 1935 and other correspondence in WEB, General Office File, Personal/Presidency, August 1935; WEB, General Office File, February-December 1935, WEBP.
- ³³ *NYT*, April 24, 1935.
- ³⁴ *NYT*, August 16, 1935.
- ³⁵ *NYT*, August 19, 1935.
- ³⁶ WEB to Louis Ward, August 28, 1935, WEBP; WEB to Louis Ward, September 9, 1935, WEBP; Louis Ward to WEB, September 18, 1935, WEBP.
- ³⁷ WL to WEB, October 1935, WLP.
- ³⁸ WL to WEB, November 6, 1935, WEBP.
- ³⁹ *NYT*, November 23, 1935.
- ⁴⁰ FET to WEB, August 15, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁴¹ FET to WEB, September 18, 1935, WEBP.

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- ⁴² *NYT*, October 20, 1935.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *NYT*, December 26, 1935.
- ⁴⁵ Hamilton Fish to J. P. Wood, January 28, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁴⁶ WEB to O. O. Haga, November 19, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁴⁷ WEB to Haven Sawyer, October 16, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁴⁸ Mulder, *The Insurgent Progressives*, 137; Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 100.
- ⁴⁹ McKenna, *Borah*, 327.
- ⁵⁰ *NYT*, January 27, 29, 1936.
- ⁵¹ *NYT*, January 29, 1936.
- ⁵² *Literary Digest*, February 8, 1936.
- ⁵³ *NYT*, January 29, 1936.
- ⁵⁴ WEB to FET, October 1, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁵⁵ FET to WEB, November 14, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁵⁶ WEB to FET, October 1, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁵⁷ J. M. Inman to Carl Bachmann, February 20, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁵⁸ WEB to J. H. Gipson, March 27, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁵⁹ WEB to John W. Hart, March 17, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶⁰ WEB to Claudine Perkins, June 15, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶¹ *NYT*, March 23, 1936.
- ⁶² *NYT*, March 24, 1936
- ⁶³ *NYT*, March 27, 1936.
- ⁶⁴ Carl Bachmann to C. A. Judd, April 1, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶⁵ Edward E. Kennedy to WEB, April 14, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶⁶ *SJ*, May 8, 1936.
- ⁶⁷ Jenner, *FDR's Republicans*, 71.
- ⁶⁸ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 89.

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- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ *Literary Digest*, February 8, 1936.
- ⁷¹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 4, 16-17.
- ⁷² McKenna, *Borah*, 326.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ WAW to WEB, February 12, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁷⁵ WEB to W. Kingsland Macy, January 30, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁷⁶ WEB to Russell, April 14, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁷⁷ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 95.
- ⁷⁸ *Literary Digest*, May 23, 1936.
- ⁷⁹ WAW to Arthur Capper, April 9, WAWP.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ Carl Bachmann to Ezra Whitla, May 21, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁸² WAW to Alf Landon, April 21, 1936, WAWP.
- ⁸³ WEB to William Hard, April 16, 1932, WEBP.
- ⁸⁴ McKenna, *Borah*, 332.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ Eugene Lyons, *Herbert Hoover: A Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 349.
- ⁸⁷ Jenner, *FDR's Republicans*, 72.
- ⁸⁸ WAW to N. M. Butler, September 9, 1936, WAWP.
- ⁸⁹ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 99.
- ⁹⁰ WEB to Frank Brice, Jr., May 28, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁹¹ WEB to FET, October 1, 1935, WEBP.
- ⁹² *NYT*, June 17, 1936.
- ⁹³ *SJ*, June 12, 1936.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ *NTW*, June 15, 1936.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid. SJ*, June 12, 1936.
- ⁹⁸ Tull, *Father Coughlin*, 124-126.
- ⁹⁹ *NYT*, May 28, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁰ WL to Thomas Charles O'Brien, June 16, 1936, WLP.
- ¹⁰¹ GLKS to WL, June 17, 1936, WLP.
- ¹⁰² *NTW*, June 15, 1936.
- ¹⁰³ *NYT*, June 18, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁴ *NYT*, June 20, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁵ WL to *Bismarck Tribune*, June 19, 1936, WLP.
- ¹⁰⁶ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 223.
- ¹⁰⁷ *NYT*, June 20, 1936; *Spartanburg Herald*, June 20, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁸ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936,' 138.
- ¹⁰⁹ GLKS to WL, June 19, 1936, WLP.
- ¹¹⁰ *NYT*, June 20, 1936.
- ¹¹¹ Dave Leip, '1932 Presidential Election Results,' *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*; *Spartanburg Herald*, June 21, 1936.
- ¹¹² *Washington Reporter*, June 20, 1936; *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, June 20, 1936.
- ¹¹³ *Bend Bulletin*, June 19, 1936; *NYT*, June 20, 1936; *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, June 21, 1936; *Southeast Missourian*, June 20, 1936; *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 22, 1936.
- ¹¹⁴ *NYT*, June 20, 1936.

Chapter Four

The Union Party as a Fiction

When the third party did come up, it was merely a protest.

Charles Coughlin, interview with Sheldon Marcus.¹

In June of 1936, a new political party was formed to fight for the presidential election: the Union Party. Born of protest at the perceived failures of the New Deal and the Democratic president, Franklin Roosevelt, it was backed by a union of the leaders of the Depression era's most successful mass movements: Charles Coughlin, Francis Townsend and Gerald Smith. Together, Smith estimated that together their groups would control 'more than 20,000,000 votes' in the November election.² The basis of this union was not stable, however. Its backers and its presidential candidate had limited practical experience of what was required to establish or run a national political party. They also had different ambitions for the long-term future of the party from their presidential candidate, William Lemke. It became apparent that the rivalry that had led to breakdown in their individual relations with the administration would also tinge their relationships with their colleagues within the new union. Still, the emergence of a third party candidate concerned the Democratic Party leadership.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) was well aware of the potential for a third party to disrupt the result of a presidential election. Only twenty-four years previously, a split within the Republican Party had led to Theodore Roosevelt campaigning under the third-party banner of the Progressive Party. His campaign divided the Republican vote and delivered Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic Party candidate, the victory. Likewise, a secret poll undertaken by the Emil Hurja, Deputy Chairman of the DNC in 1935 revealed that, should Huey Long split the Democratic

Party in 1936, he would take about six million votes from the president.³ With Long dead, these fears persisted amongst the Democratic leadership and morphed into a concern that the Union Party might mobilise the senator's supporters, along with those of Coughlin and Townsend, to disrupt the 1936 election. Indeed, further polling undertaken by Hurja in the run up to the presidential election suggested that Lemke's forecast vote, drawn overwhelmingly from the president, might affect the election outcome. This perceived threat of the Union Party, which could be sustained by historic voter trends, was accepted by the DNC and the president himself.

American history is littered with third parties, but the peculiarities of the U.S. governmental system ensure that they play only a specialised and limited role. American third parties have taken on one of two distinctive forms: the doctrinal party and the transient party. The doctrinal parties (for example, the Socialists or Libertarians) are typified by both their long life and their focus on a clear ideological standpoint missing from the traditional party platforms. Their failure to elect candidates to office does not mean that they have failed. Their existence offers a section of the electorate sympathetic with their views a means to express their political preference. In comparison, a transient party (for example the Progressive Party in 1912) usually originates either as a movement of economic protest or as a direct splinter from one of the major parties. These parties act as pressure valves, giving a section of the party membership the opportunity to express support for views outside of the political mainstream. Once the pressure has been released, these splinters tend to be reabsorbed by one of the established parties. Transient parties tend to burn fast, brightly and intensely, whilst the doctrinal parties offer a slow burn. The common thread between the doctrinal party and the transient party is that in each case their formation has been an act of choice against the major parties. In this context, there are questions as to whether the founders of the Union Party considered it to be a transient or doctrinal party.⁴

Lemke's private correspondence with his friend, socialist organiser and poet Covington Hall, provides evidence of the representative's evolving views and ultimate determination of the need to establish a doctrinal political party along radical reforming lines. Hall was born in Mississippi in 1871, but was brought up in rural Louisiana. Moving to New Orleans in the mid-1890s, Hall became a leading member of the state's Socialist Party. He was not dogmatic, however, and became disillusioned by what he saw as the party's prioritisation of its electoral success over the needs of its voters. Leaving the party, he embarked upon a series of endeavours to bring small farmers and rural labourers together into their own radical union. This shared passion to improve the lives of farmers brought Hall and Lemke together, their friendship dating over twenty years.⁵ A reading of the extensive correspondence between the two men establishes their close personal relationship: on one occasion, Lemke enclosed a cheque for \$5 in his letter for Hall to purchase cigarettes; on another, the representative agreed to facilitate a \$500 loan for his friend's sister.⁶ Within the boundaries of this close friendship, the two men exchanged their detailed views on the current financial crisis and the need for, as Lemke wrote in February 1934, a 'new alignment' in American politics. His initial view had been that Roosevelt might himself bring about the political change that he and Hall agreed necessary. 'I am inclined to believe,' Lemke informed his friend, 'he is far more progressive than the reactionary Democratic machine.'⁷ By February 1935, however, the president's personal opposition to the representative's agricultural reform proposals ended Lemke's relationship with the Democratic Party. He remained unconvinced at this stage, however, of the need to establish a new political party. 'I feel,' he concluded, 'we should take some good progressive Republican and take the Republican Party over.'⁸ Lemke would thereafter back William Borah's campaign for the Republican nomination. However, Borah's difficulty in overcoming the stranglehold the conservative Republican National Committee held over the party, prompted Lemke gradually to reappraise the

need for a new political party. Hall was likely a strong influence on shifting Lemke's opinion.

In an intense period of correspondence between May and August 1935, Hall challenged Lemke to take action to form a new political party ahead of the 1936 elections. Gradually the representative was persuaded of his friend's argument. On May 19, 1935, Hall wrote to Lemke to inform him of his latest round of meetings on behalf of the Socialist Party. He concluded the letter by setting out his vision for overcoming the failings of the Democrats and Republicans by establishing a new 'Party of the Undermen.'⁹ Hall elaborated upon his proposal in his subsequent letter of June 2, suggesting that Lemke force a coming together of the Socialist, Progressive and Farmer-Union movements (Hall's so-called 'chickenfeed parties') to form the new party. Everywhere he had been throughout the country, he explained, his proposal had 'brought cheers from the crowd and has done more than aught else to pep up our people.' He concluded, 'Why not us try it? What have WE to lose?'¹⁰ Mindful of the difficulty of bringing together competing leadership of these small parties into a single agreement, Hall suggested that Lemke should move quickly to establish a new party, and let the momentum this would generate bring the various elements together. 'Once that party is there, it will get leaders whom we can build up and make known to the people, for its very formation will do more than all else to solidify the Rebels and they will rapidly do the rest.'¹¹ Hall's words had a considerable impact on his friend. On June 8, Lemke replied to Hall affirming his desire to take action. 'When this session of Congress closes,' the representative confirmed, 'I shall devote my energies to an attempt to get together and organize such a movement as will bring the people of this nation together.'¹²

There was one significant point of difference between Hall and Lemke in their planning for the establishment of their new doctrinal party: the role of Coughlin and Long. 'As for the Longs and Coughlins,' Hall wrote in June 1935, 'they ARE potential Fascists.' 'The only possible economic base for a new party,' Hall concluded, 'is one

based four-square on the declaration that Capitalism has failed and then demanding its replacement by a system based on production for USE and not for private profit.¹³ Lemke, however, rejected Hall's advice and tapped Long's and Coughlin's political influence to pressure for passage of his agricultural reform proposals. To Hall, Lemke's move towards Long and Coughlin was a serious misjudgement. 'I saw by the papers that you seemed to be flirting with "Father" Coughlin,' Hall wrote in warning on July 16, 1935. 'DONT [sic] DO IT, mix up with him I mean. I have a strong hunch that you'll regret to your dying day if you do, and with Long as well.'¹⁴ In retrospect, Hall's words seem prescient, but in his reply, Lemke strongly defended his actions. 'The fact that I may speak at Coughlin's or Long's meetings does not mean that I accept all of their ideas or ideals. But you know me well enough to know that I am not afraid to speak with the devil, if necessary.'¹⁵ In reply, Hall set out an explanation for his opposition to Long and Coughlin. Apologising for the strong language contained in his previous letter, Hall explained, 'I have seen something of Louisiana under Long's "dictatorship" and, while I have still less use for his enemies than for him, I do not like it at all.' Most importantly, his direct experience of life in Louisiana had provided him with an insight into the realities behind Long's record of reform likely lost upon those that only heard the senator speak in the Senate or on the radio. 'The state,' Hall concluded, 'is one vast poorhouse, regardless of the senator's ballyhoo.'¹⁶ Despite Hall's explanation, Lemke remained unmoved and responded robustly. 'I do not know anything about the senator excepting as I have seen him in action in the U.S. Senate,' he wrote. 'There he has always been a hundred per cent for the people, and a thousand per cent against Wall Street.'¹⁷ Lemke had benefited from Long's support in the passage of his Farm Bankruptcy Bill and believed that alignment with the senator would benefit his campaign for passage of Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill. Most significantly, Lemke believed that a link with Long and Coughlin, with their powerful, national organisations behind them, would provide momentum for his plan to establish his new political party. Thus, having rejected Hall's comments, Lemke presented his

friend with a direct challenge in return. 'I think the time has arrived,' Lemke concluded, 'when we must get away from mere words that are meaningless, and get down to brass tacks, and let the public know just what we intend to do, and how it is to be done.'¹⁸ On June 10, 1936, Lemke wrote to Hall to confirm his plan of action had finally reached fruition. He was, he concluded, 'satisfied that there will be a new alignment of the liberal groups and that the American people will have an opportunity to vote on a real platform and real candidates.'¹⁹

Despite the influence of his powerful backers, from the moment of its conception, William Lemke maintained independent control over the Union Party. An experienced political organiser, in his early career he had with little resource been responsible for the establishment of the North Dakota Non-Partisan League (NPL), which through its exploitation of the primary system had swept aside traditional conservative Republican candidates and seized control of the state's political establishment. In power, the NPL had delivered a package of substantial, lasting social reforms to its supporters. The political model that Lemke had pioneered in North Dakota spread through the western farm states and, in the form of the Farmer-Labor Party, remained during the 1930s the major political force in Minnesota.²⁰ Lemke had not accepted Coughlin, Smith and Townsend's plan as a fool's errand, but because he genuinely believed that the New Deal was failing to offer solutions to the problems of the Depression and that, as in North Dakota, a new political movement was needed to force change. Once established, Lemke believed the electorate would, as with the NPL, flock to the Union Party.

The NPL, the *New York Times* concluded, had 'colored the Lemke political philosophy far more than any of the other movements with which he has been associated.'²¹ The NPL and the Union Party shared a central belief, reflected in their core values and articulated in their platforms, that the power of the federal government should be utilised to support the interests of the common people, the farmer, the worker, the shopkeeper, by establishing a framework in which freedom of competition

could be sustained and honest endeavour rewarded. Like his fellow insurgent Republicans and his backers from the independent radical reform movements, the *Times* argued, Lemke believed that 'governmental policies are in fact responsible for the economic well-being of the individual American.' Ultimately, this required the government to control 'the people's money' to remove private business from banking and natural resources. Government control, Lemke believed, was 'necessary to spare competitive business the ruinous effects of an endless series of inflations and deflations contrived in the interests of gamblers in specious values.'²²

The Union Party platform demonstrated the attempts by Lemke to unify the independent social agendas of his backers in a single, shared ideology, but also provides evidence of his ambition to establish it as a formal political party. The *Kansas City Star* dismissed Lemke's platform as 'a combination of New Deal, Father Coughlin and the late Huey Long,' but it is misleading to view the Union Party platform as simply an amalgam of his backers' plans.²³ Lemke himself countered such suggestions in a discussion with reporters on June 27. 'We don't accept each other's ideas in their entirety,' he concluded. 'That's why we call it the "Union" party.' His organisation, he explained, 'did not represent a merger of dissatisfied groups'; rather, it was a 'combination of distinct lines of endeavor.'²⁴ To Lemke the union within the new party's title was symbolic not only of the bringing together of his backers, but was also reflective of the three broad sections of the electorate he intended to form the party's core support. The Union Party's emblem was a triangle within a circle. 'The base for the triangle will represent agriculture,' Lemke said. 'With labor on one side and industry on the other, united by the encircling ring.'²⁵ The American nation had been built upon the efforts of these individuals. 'I appeal to you,' Lemke commented upon foundation of the new party, 'because this nation belongs to you and you are responsible for its destiny.'²⁶ The Democrats and Republicans, Lemke alleged, existing only to support the dominance of the wealthy, exploited their control of the federal government to suppress the individual freedom of the common man. 'Democracy,

when it works, places a premium on self-reliance,' explained an editorial published in *Social Justice*. It fosters and nourishes a sense of responsibility in the individual, in economic and political groups.' However, 'under the New Deal, the self-reliance of all – save the small banker and monopolist wealthy classifications – has suffered severe and continuing onslaughts.' In particular, the New Deal's establishment of a 'paternalistic' federal government had restricted the freedom of the people and 'undermined' self-reliance. 'When responsibility is removed from free citizens that is when their liberties are in grave jeopardy,' commented *Social Justice*.²⁷ 'Every policy of the administration,' Lemke explained, 'is leading us to greater and greater regimentation which means further loss of freedom on the part of our people.'²⁸ 'The truth is,' he concluded, 'that we have made beggars out of a once proud people.'²⁹ In comparison, the Union Party intended to re-energise American self-reliance and bring about a genuine economic recovery. 'Our people,' commented Union Party Chairman John Nystul, 'demand the right to be free in body, spirit and religion, with no man a "dictator" and no man a "subject." They demand the plain right to govern themselves without coercion or intimidation.'³⁰

In its language, message and tone, the Union Party platform repudiated the New Deal's attempts to rehabilitate the capitalist economic system. 'To correct the errors and abuses caused by avarice and greed,' explained *Social Justice*, 'and provide faith and inspiration for greater prosperity, greater security and greater accomplishments.'³¹ These aspirations were reflected in the key proposals set out in the platform. The first point of the platform established the thread of isolation and independence inherent throughout the remaining fourteen points: 'America shall be self-contained and self-sustained: no foreign entanglements, be they political, economic, financial or military.' The economic independence of the nation was re-emphasised in point seven: 'Congress shall legislate that American agricultural, industrial, and commercial markets will be protected from manipulation of foreign moneys,' and military independence in point eight. The nation's armed forces, it

proclaimed, should be utilised only to defend the nation from aggression but 'must not be used under any consideration in foreign fields or in foreign waters either alone or in conjunction with any foreign power.'³²

In addition to establishing the nation's economic and military independence, the Union Party platform proposed a series of measures intended to rebalance the interests of the nation back in the favour of the average American. It proposed to reduce the influence of international bankers (point two: 'Congress and Congress alone shall coin, issue and regulate all the money and credit in the United States through a central bank of issue'), big business (point twelve: 'Congress shall protect small industry and private enterprise by controlling and decentralizing the economic domination of monopolies'), corrupt political parties (point nine: 'Congress shall so legislate that all federal offices and positions of every nature shall be distributed through civil service qualifications and not through a system of party spoils and corrupt patronage'; point ten called for restoration of power to the people through 'the ruthless eradication of bureaucracies') and, the wealthy (point fourteen: 'Congress shall set a limitation upon the net income of any individual in any one year and a limitation on the amount that such an individual may receive as a gift or as an inheritance').³³

Finally, the Union Party proposed a series of social, economic and industrial reforms intended to utilise the power of the federal government to enhance the position of the common man. To improve the lives of the majority of average Americans, point three of the Union Party platform proposed that Congress would 'refinance all the present agricultural mortgage indebtedness for the farmer and all the home mortgage indebtedness for the city owner.' In addition, Congress would directly intervene in the operation of the economy to protect the interests of the common man, (point eleven) by establishing 'federal works for the conservation of public lands, waters and forests.' Furthermore, for the young, point fifteen assured that Congress would 're-establish conditions so that the youths of the nation as they emerge from schools and colleges may have the opportunity to earn a decent living.' For workers, their industrial policy

set out in point four assured Congress would legislate to deliver 'a living annual wage for all laborers capable of working and willing to work.' Their agricultural policy set out in point five assured Congress would legislate 'that there will be assurance of production at a profit for the farmer.' Finally, for the elderly, the Union Party proposed, in point six, 'an assurance of reasonable and decent security for the aged.'³⁴ 'Our platform,' Lemke concluded, 'is made for the common people of the country.' It was written, 'to free the working classes from the slavery of capitalism.'³⁵

It can be concluded that, based upon the Union Party's carefully crafted platform, Lemke did not establish the party on a whim; it was the culmination of a carefully calculated long-term political plan. He had a genuine belief that a new political party was necessary to deliver the reforms required to overcome the Depression. Lemke was not hurried or forced into support for the Union Party by his backers. He had thought out the options and seized what he thought was a real opportunity through the launch of the Union Party to offer a legitimate and ideologically coherent doctrinal third party. The Union Party's radical reform platform failed, however, to appeal to Lemke's press critics. 'It is infused with idealistic aims,' concluded the *Kansas City Star*, 'but with short cuts to reach them, which have been thoroughly considered and discarded because they would be ineffective or actually lead away from the purposes Mr. Lemke has in mind.'³⁶

Despite the long gestation of the Union Party concept in Lemke's mind, his efforts were not accompanied by similar preparations in establishing the organisational framework required to operate the party. 'It is easier to announce a new national party than achieve it,' commented the *New York Times*.³⁷ Responsibility for establishing party apparatus fell entirely to Lemke, but with only a few months until the election, this was a considerable challenge, particularly in the absence of any independent financial or organisational support. 'My candidacy,' Lemke explained rather naively to reporters on the day of his nomination, 'represents an honest and sincere desire to emancipate our people from economic slavery. In that case, finances aren't very important. If they

become necessary the people will know and contribute.'³⁸ No plans were articulated in Lemke's personal correspondence in advance of the launch of the Union Party as to how it might operate.³⁹ In the absence of an established party machine, Lemke was forced to depend upon favours from close friends and colleagues. Shortly after its launch, Lemke appointed North Dakota congressman Usher L. Burdick to the position of National Chairman. 'I've always wanted to run a presidential campaign,' Burdick naively remarked.⁴⁰ However, in early July, faced with the pressures of his personal re-election, Burdick resigned. In the hiatus between Burdick's departure and a new appointment, pressure fell on William Skeeles, Lemke's administrative assistant in his Washington, D.C., office, to provide support. 'I have been investing some personal money in postage in order that the mail would not lie here unanswered,' he wrote to Lemke on July 2. Five days later, he informed Lemke, 'We still need money for postage. \$20 to \$25 would bring us out of the present financial slump.'⁴¹ Following establishment of official Union Party headquarters in Chicago in mid-July, operations improved little. Skeeles informed Lemke's son, William Jr., in early August that 'if there is anything that we could hand out, we would appreciate having it here.' 'Many people drop into the office requesting information,' Skeeles concluded, 'and finding us with nothing places us in a rather negative position.'⁴² In response, the Union Party office provided a handful of campaign buttons – and requested that Skeeles forward them, in return, some congressional franked postage cards so that they could save on postal expenditure.⁴³

The situation did not improve with the appointment of another of Lemke's long-term associates, former NPL organiser John Nystul, as National Chairman. Having assessed progress made to date, Nystul wrote to Skeeles, 'we are desperately in need of funds.'⁴⁴ Seeking to address their financial weakness, Nystul issued a public call for 'dollars for the poor man's party.' One dollar, he explained, would purchase a chartered membership to contribute towards an extremely modest campaign fund total of \$500,000: \$100,000 to establish and operate proper offices; \$200,000 for newspaper

advertising, literature, postage and travelling expenses; and \$200,000 for broadcasting expenses.⁴⁵ In total the Union Party raised only \$92,033 over the course of the election campaign.⁴⁶ Only 11 individuals contributed \$500 or more to the campaign. In comparison, over the same period, Republican Party donations, including substantial contributions from the Liberty League, totalled \$13.2 million; and the Democrats, their business donations replaced by contributions from the Trades' Unions, \$8.9 million. Even the Communist Party campaign fund reached \$266,000. With Union Party national recorded expenditures exceeding income by \$2,800 and with an additional loan of \$3,500, Lemke was left with a personal debt of \$7,000 that took years to repay.⁴⁷ This was simply not enough to provide the Union Party with the capacity necessary to run the new organisation as a functional third party.

Lacking his own resources, supporters and organisational networks, Lemke might have been able to deliver his vision if Townsend and Coughlin had been willing to merge their successful independent radical reform movements into the Union Party. Funded by a steady stream of donations from their followers, both the OARP and the NUSJ had established functioning operational structures at local, state and national level. Access to these networks would have provided the Union Party with a readymade, relatively mature operational structure. Townsend and Coughlin, however, did not share Lemke's long-term ambitions for his new political party. Townsend and Coughlin had no desire to hand control of their personal movements over to a new party under the leadership of Lemke. This put even basic organisation of the new party in doubt. In fact, there is no evidence that formally or informally that Coughlin, Townsend and Smith donated a penny to the Union Party. Indeed, years later, Coughlin told Sheldon Marcus proudly, 'I never gave them a nickel. I never gave them a nickel.'⁴⁸ The reality was that the 'union' that had backed Lemke's creation of the Union Party was a fiction even in its making. There were, however, several factors tying the constituent movements together, even if several of the backers expressed mixed emotions to a point of disavowal. Most important was the common opposition to

Roosevelt expressed by Coughlin, Smith, Townsend, Long, Borah and Lemke. There was, however, no fundamental meeting of minds or a shared intellectual agenda beyond the common radical reforming thread which united them. The leaders were rarely supportive of each other's programmes and in the past, seeking to boost their individual egos, had been publicly critical of the others' individual shortcomings. Coughlin considered the OARP plan to be simplistic and believed that it did not account for the changes in the nation's currency system that he deemed necessary to ensure any financial scheme could work. In return, Townsend was unimpressed with the sixteen points of the NUSJ programme, feeling that they were overly complicated and unnecessary as Coughlin's aims were achievable through the implementation of his single-point plan.⁴⁹ Despite their recently formed loose political alliance, the truth nevertheless remained that the groups had been forced together by a common desire to defeat Roosevelt and not to unify into a new doctrinal political party. 'The political party,' Coughlin explained later in his life, 'was simply a political protest against the establishment of the day. I was never entertaining the hope that it would be victorious.'⁵⁰ For Townsend and Coughlin, seeking to rally opposition to the president from amongst a section of the electorate that deemed the pace of social reform under the current administration too slow, Lemke provided a legitimate alternative to the candidates of the traditional political parties. As a transient third party, the long-term viability of the Union Party was not, therefore, of concern to Townsend, Smith or Coughlin. The Union Party, as Coughlin later explained was, simply 'one of those things of increasing anger rather than prudence and wisdom.'⁵¹

The divergence in ambitions for the Union Party between its presidential candidate and its union of backers was illustrated by statements issued by both Coughlin and Townsend in the days following its establishment. Both leaders, wary of Lemke's ambitions to establish the Union Party as a doctrinal third party, moved quickly to protect their independent powerbases and position the party as merely a transient movement of protest against the re-election of Roosevelt.

Coughlin had promised his readers in his June 12 *Social Justice* editorial that his plan of action for the presidential election ‘would thrill you and inspire you beyond anything I have ever said or accomplished in the past,’ yet with that plan now revealed in his next editorial, published on July 6, Coughlin clearly established distance between the Union Party and the NUSJ.⁵² The opening statement of his editorial – ‘Rumor and false report travel speedily from garrulous tongues to credulous ears’ – established the priest’s newly defensive tone. Coughlin was not resigning, and would not be forced to resign, as president of the NUSJ as he was not ‘organising a new political party.’ The priest had not, he claimed, been responsible for the establishment of the Union Party or the selection of its candidate. Rather, in pursuit of its independent mission to see the passage of its legislative platform, the priest had been ‘approached by friends of William Lemke’ who had convinced him ‘if democracy was to be preserved, that the bureaucratic, dictatorial minded Roosevelt must be removed.’ Thus influenced by these external forces, Coughlin explained, he had announced his endorsement for Lemke and agreed to present him to the NUSJ for the consideration of its individual members. By doing so, Coughlin was not asking for the NUSJ to change its official stance as a non-aligned organisation – ‘It has been resolved by the officers of the National Union,’ he concluded, that ‘we will not participate in electing William Lemke or Thomas Charles O’Brien.’ Instead, Coughlin explained, he was merely suggesting that individual members might be ‘interested,’ as he was personally, ‘in helping to file for Union Party candidates and assisting to secure their election.’⁵³ Despite Lemke’s personal ambitions, Coughlin’s editorial established clearly that he had no goal for the Union Party to become a permanent rival to his own organisation. He had backed the formation of the Union Party and Lemke’s candidacy solely as a transient protest against the continuation of Roosevelt’s presidency and nothing more. Coughlin’s need to establish a distance between the political party that he had created and his own movement both undermined the future of the Union Party as a doctrinal party and impacted upon Lemke’s credibility as a candidate in the 1936 campaign.

The attempts made by Coughlin to establish the Union Party as a transient protest movement were replicated by Townsend and Smith. The pension leader had been unable in the few days between Alf Landon's nomination as the Republican candidate and the opening of the Democratic National Convention to agree the detailed terms of his formal partnership with Coughlin. This had meant that he had been unable to provide a formal endorsement for Lemke's candidacy upon the announcement of the formation of the Union Party. Instead, he announced that he would reopen discussions with Lemke and Coughlin that had concluded without resolution in the week before the Union Party's formation. The subsequent discussions did nothing to establish the Union Party as a viable third party. On June 21, Lemke and his vice-presidential nominee, Thomas O'Brien, met in New York with Townsend, Smith and representatives of the NUSJ to negotiate the doctor's backing for the new party. This was followed by a further meeting in Washington, D.C., on June 23. These discussions were not held in secret. Smith, seeking to maximise the benefit of the publicity he had created, delighted in holding regular press conferences to update on progress. Although this increased news coverage, it also exposed the vacillations of the various participants to constant, detailed public scrutiny, serving only to damage Lemke's credibility. 'Dr. Townsend and I hold the balance' in the presidential election, Smith insisted to reporters on June 21. 'Anybody who is elected president must have the support of our group.' Yet, when pushed to reveal the specific details of the OARP's plan for action, Smith instead diverted the question by launching into a tirade about the alleged abuses of the 'contemptible and damaging Farley dictatorship.' By doing so, Smith reinforced the view that the Union Party's sole purpose was to bait the Democrats. As the *New York Times* concluded, 'the possibilities [of Lemke's likely electoral chances], as Mr. Smith saw them, were not so glitteringly attractive as the subject of Roosevelt.'⁵⁴ To the press it was apparent that for Smith, at least, the Union Party had only short-term goals – to defeat or embarrass the president.

When news of Townsend's final position emerged on June 24, it confirmed the earlier impression given by Smith that both men viewed the Union Party solely as a transient protest movement. There was to be no formal union of the OARP with the Union Party. Following a meeting in Lemke's office to (as they described it) 'look the candidate over,' Smith announced the congressman had been invited to speak at the OARP's national convention on July 15. When reporters pushed for a further comment on the formal position of the OARP and SoW with regard to Lemke's candidacy, Smith explicitly ruled out the pension movement providing the capacity for the Union Party to establish itself as a doctrinal third party. 'We may consider,' he concluded, 'cooperation for the time being for a given end.' Standing meekly in the corridor outside his congressional office, the presidential candidate was treated with little of the respect normally extended to the leader of a national political party. Whilst Smith spoke, with the occasional interruption from Townsend, Lemke 'hung his head in becoming embarrassment' while his backers discussed him 'as if he were not present.'⁵⁵ Lemke's personal view of the apparent vacillations of his backers is absent from his personal correspondence, but with Townsend, Smith and Coughlin having made their ambitions for the Union Party clear, whatever the outcome of the OARP and NUSJ conventions later that summer, it looked entirely unlikely that their organisational machinery or their funds would be diverted to the Union Party.

With the NUSJ and OARP unwilling to provide the direct financial and organisational resources necessary to underpin the long-term viability of the Union Party, Lemke might have depended instead upon the coalition of the small, regional radical reform parties that had backed La Follette's campaign in 1924. However, in accordance with the advice received from Hall in June 1935 that rather than seek pre-agreement with the small radical reforming parties he should simply 'force the organisation' of the new party, Lemke had not undertaken any negotiations in advance of the Union Party's launch.⁵⁶ This lack of engagement with the regional radical reform groups was apparent in the reception for the Union Party amongst Lemke's

congressional colleagues. It was quickly apparent that Lemke had misjudged the strength of the potential appeal of his new party. An assessment of support for Lemke's candidacy included in Jim Farley's private file notes was not generous: 'William Lemke's appeal to liberals of all parties to support his newly organised Union Party,' Farley reported, 'has met with scattered support from Progressives and Farmer-Laborites, but only apathy from Republicans and Democrats.' Lemke's 'most ardent' congressional supporters, Farley noted, were the representative's close friends and fellow North Dakotans Republican Senator Lynn Frazier and Republican Representative Usher L. Burdick. In contrast, Frazier's senatorial colleague Gerald Nye had 'nothing to say.' Farley's conclusion was that Frazier's response was typical of most insurgent congressmen. Lemke's failure to mobilise the insurgents behind the Union Party was reflected in the most damning of the quotations, from Republican representative Vito Marcantonio of New York: 'I am not interested in the movement except in an academic way.' Although Lemke claimed the Union Party would generate the support of 'labor, farm, independent and progressive groups,' Marcantonio was less sanguine. 'A real Farm-Labor-Progressive coalition,' he concluded, 'would be a horse of a different color.'⁵⁷

Lemke's inability to draw established politicians to the Union Party limited the choices available for the vice-presidential candidate. A significant political figure joining his campaign as his running mate would have provided additional evidence of the genuine long-term ambitions of the Union Party. The highest-profile politician associated with the Union Party was William Borah. 'I have great respect for Congressman Lemke,' Borah commented to *Social Justice* in late June. 'The new party will have a decided effect on the coming election.'⁵⁸ Beyond this statement, however, Borah focused on winning his re-election to the Senate and offered Lemke only discreet support.⁵⁹ He provided advice on the establishment of party operations in Idaho and the procedure for accessing the ballot.⁶⁰ Borah provisionally accepted an invitation to deliver a keynote address at the NUSJ national convention, but a clash

with the Idaho primary forced him to decline. 'If I were free and had the time to prepare an address worthy of the occasion, I should certainly avail myself of the pleasure and the honor of being with you,' he wrote on August 2, 1936.⁶¹ Borah's most public support for Lemke came in late October, when the two men shared a platform in Boise, Idaho, where the senator officially accepted the endorsement of the Union Party for his candidacy for the Senate.⁶² Borah's limited support for Lemke, though useful, did not provide the Union Party with the credibility that it lacked in the eyes of the electorate.

With no significant established political figure willing to associate with his campaign, Lemke was forced to look further afield for his vice-presidential candidate. Upon Coughlin's recommendation, he accepted Thomas O'Brien of Boston, Massachusetts. O'Brien was an Irish-Catholic labour lawyer who had during his earlier career been both a Democratic and Republican office holder at county and state level. Beyond his position within state leadership of the NUSJ, O'Brien had restricted political experience and offered Lemke little assistance with either boosting the public profile of the Union Party or establishing its long-term viability.⁶³ The first time that Lemke and O'Brien met was on June 25, 1936, in a conference with Coughlin. After that, the two men met only sporadically.⁶⁴ O'Brien barely features in Lemke's personal correspondence, and the four letters or telegrams passed between them between June and November 1936 focus more on their inability to find a time to meet, than on any constructive discussion of politics or strategy. 'I will try to make arrangements so that I can meet you soon and discuss the campaign further,' Lemke wrote rather noncommittally on July 22, 1936. When O'Brien wrote seeking guidance on Lemke's position in support of labour legislation, William Skeeles, without any recognition or acknowledgement of his correspondent's position as Lemke's running mate, responded as he would to any enquiry, simply sending him a copy of two of Lemke's congressional speeches.⁶⁵ O'Brien provided some support for Lemke on the campaign trail, but his platform speeches were mostly intended to provide an introduction for Coughlin rather than promote Lemke's campaign. Providing, for example, the

introduction for Coughlin at a Chicago rally of the NUSJ on September 11, 1936, O'Brien 'drew polite applause and restrained cheering' when he mentioned Lemke's campaign, but the 'crowd whooped and howled' when he turned his speech to the subject of the priest.⁶⁶ Leaving Lemke to shoulder the burden of the national campaign, O'Brien focused most of his efforts in the months between June and November on a separate campaign to win the Senate seat for the Union Party in Massachusetts, eventually winning 7.4 per cent of the vote.⁶⁷

O'Brien's weakness as a running mate demonstrated the validity of Representative Marcantonio's earlier reaction as to the status of the Union Party. Despite Nystul's best efforts, the reality was that the new national party faced organisational challenges exceeding those experienced in North Dakota by the NPL, which simply could not be overcome without significant financial investment from the wealthy backers who bankrolled the major parties. Moreover, party organisers faced an additional difficulty: there was simply not enough time to put in place the structures necessary to run an effective campaign. In this circumstance, Nystul was forced to put together a small team to staff national party headquarters drawn entirely from his close circle of associates from within the NPL, none of whom had experience of running a national political party. In the absence of any existing regional or local party structures, Nystul sought to co-ordinate the disparate attempts of local amateur enthusiasts who formed 'Lemke for President' clubs.⁶⁸ Nystul and Lemke realised early in the campaign that the new party simply did not have the resources or professional expertise to mount a full slate of candidates at local level, and in July they issued an instruction that the Union Party would simply endorse candidates for Congress who they determined had articulated general support for elements of the party platform. A small number of local candidates would eventually stand in the party's name, but these were almost exclusively amateurs, like O'Brien, or disreputable figures who would not have been considered suitable by either of the traditional parties.⁶⁹ The most significant political figure to campaign under the Union Party banner was former mayor of Chicago William

'Big Bill' Hale Thompson, who sought election as governor of Illinois. Under Thompson, Chicago had become the national capital for organised crime, a status he actively encouraged. A close associate of Al Capone, Thompson's victory in the 1928 mayoral primary was attributed directly to financing received from the crime gangs, and the direct intimidation of voters at the polling stations. Despite generating press interest for his campaign, Thompson eventually received only 3.2 per cent of the vote in November 1936.⁷⁰ The most telling fact regarding the local weakness of the Union Party was that Lemke, lacking a local political network to support his campaign, chose to run for re-election for his congressional seat with the willing support of the NPL under the Republican banner. Lemke's decision only served to underline the weakness of the Union Party as a serious political force.⁷¹

With limited organisational capacity and without any demonstrable support for the party separate from that of the NUSJ and OARP, there was little that bound the party together. The Union Party was, in reality, two conflicting and contrasting things. On the one hand, to Lemke and his small, dedicated band of close friends, it was a genuine attempt to form a new doctrinal third party based upon support for radical alternatives to the package of reforms presented by the Democratic Party, as expressed by the establishment of the SoW, OARP and NUSJ movements. In accepting the leadership of the party, Lemke believed he would bring about real, positive change. The organisational failures of the Union Party should not detract from Lemke's desire to found and operate a doctrinal political party, but without funds, he lacked the capacity to develop more than a skeleton structure operating only at national level. In the absence of mature local, state and national organisation to underpin the new party's activities, Lemke was unable to generate the independent support the movement needed to be established on a permanent basis. In contrast, to Coughlin, Townsend and Smith, three powerful men who through their act of union had backed the creation of the party, it was a transient protest movement with a narrowly defined political aim to defeat and embarrass the incumbent president and advance their own

reputations. It was simply impossible, as much as Lemke tried, to balance these different aspirations. Beyond its platform and weak party organisation, the reality was that Lemke's claims the Union Party was a genuine political party were little more than fiction, a visionary concept formed in the minds of Lemke and Hall in its earliest guise that the representative struggled to turn into reality.

The conflicting vision for the long-term future of the Union Party of its backers and its candidate meant that the new party was unlikely to survive beyond the 1936 presidential election. Yet, as a protest movement, it still had the potential to disrupt the outcome of the election. In particular, the potential threat from the Union Party meant that the DNC needed to take the third-party challenge seriously. They were aware that similar protest candidates had disrupted three of the previous eleven presidential elections. In addition to the thirteen Electoral College votes and 16.6 per cent of the popular vote achieved by La Follette in 1924, in 1892, James Weaver, the candidate of the People's Party, had received 8.5 per cent of the popular vote and twenty-two votes in the Electoral College. Most significantly, in 1912, Theodore Roosevelt's campaign for the Progressive Party had split the Republican Party. Roosevelt's 27.4 per cent of the popular vote and eighty-eight votes in the Electoral College were directly responsible for delivering Democrat Woodrow Wilson the presidency.⁷² It was therefore natural in this circumstance for the DNC to take steps to determine the level of threat posed to Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 election by a significant third-party candidate. For this advice they turned to Emil Hurja, Deputy Chairman of the DNC.

Emil Hurja is widely considered to be the father of modern polling techniques. Until the early 1930s, opinion polling was limited to unscientific, non-representative 'straw' or 'street corner' polls. With an employment background in data analysis and public opinion gathering, in the late 1920s Hurja developed a new scientific method for opinion polling based on representative sampling of the population. 'In politics you take sections of voters,' Hurja explained, 'check new trends against past performances, establish the percentage shift among different voting strata, supplement this

information from competent observers in the field, and you can accurately predict an election result.'⁷³ Ensuring that his samples included all forty-eight states, this combination of 'quota' sampling (an assessment of trends amongst class, gender, ethnic and racial groups) and 'area' sampling (an assessment of differences in trends between urban and rural voters) proved a powerful forecasting mechanism.⁷⁴

Although Hurja's approaches to the DNC were rejected in 1928, the intervention of a party benefactor in 1932 saw him appointed to Jim Farley's office as part of the Democratic strategy team. Farley was initially sceptical of Hurja's scientific technique, preferring to rely on his own national network of party workers to report to him on voter opinion. Hurja drip-fed Farley evidence to demonstrate the validity of his new polling technique, and eventually he convinced his superior of its merits. By November 1932, the DNC was entirely reliant upon Hurja's polling predictions. In the final count, Hurja's technique proved accurate, providing an inaccurate forecast in only three states. His position in the Democratic hierarchy secured, in the 1934 mid-terms, Hurja forecast the vote with even more accuracy.⁷⁵ Considering Hurja's forecasts the 'most remarkable thing,' Roosevelt became a strong personal supporter of his work, and between 1935 and 1936 increasingly sought out his advice on the allocation of political resources and party patronage.⁷⁶ In 1935, under pressure by the press to reveal the source of his accurate polling forecasts, Farley unveiled Hurja, the 'crystal gazer from Crystal Falls.'⁷⁷ Hurja embraced the public celebrity his work brought him and in March 1936 was featured on the front page of *Time Magazine*.⁷⁸

In April 1935, in the course of his on-going work to identify voting trends, the DNC commissioned Hurja to undertake a project to determine the potential impact of a third-party campaign in the 1936 presidential election. Farley instructed Hurja to focus his polling upon the potential effects on Roosevelt's re-election chances of a split in the Democratic Party led by Huey Long. The results of the poll revealed Roosevelt to be favoured by 49 per cent of voters, an unnamed Republican candidate by 43 per cent, and Long by 8 per cent. With 1 per cent, Coughlin was the strongest write-in

candidate. On this basis, Hurja forecast that Roosevelt would win 33 states and 305 Electoral College votes in 1936, with his Republican opponent winning in 15 states and 226 College votes.⁷⁹

Hurja's poll appeared to be good news for the administration, but a deeper analysis presented a different view. Hurja extrapolated from the data that Long might receive as many as 6 million votes. As Figure 1 illustrates, votes drawn from Roosevelt to Long were forecast to deliver the Republican candidate victory in 5 states, including the president's home state of New York. Long would draw 122 Electoral College votes away from Roosevelt's total. In addition, there were 6 further states where Long was forecast to secure significant numbers of votes from the president. If this trend continued, Long would deliver a further 60 Electoral College votes to the Republicans. Should the momentum away from Roosevelt continue in just 3 of these states, Michigan, Iowa and Minnesota, Long would hand the election to the Republicans.⁸⁰ 'It was easy to conceive a situation,' Hurja later wrote, 'whereby Long might have the balance of power in the 1936 election.'⁸¹

Figure 1: Extract from the results of the DNC poll carried out by Emil Hurja in April 1935.

	Region	Forecast Roosevelt Vote	Forecast Republican Vote	Forecast Long Vote	Electoral College Votes 1936
Ohio	W	986,672	1,177,930	244,464	26
Illinois	W	1,426,172	1,572,641	220,574	29
New York	N	1,938,631	2,073,947	209,609	47
Indiana	W	686,207	700,273	86,568	14
Colorado	W	185,257	189,436	51,969	6
Iowa	W	445,676	410,279	116,156	11
Michigan	W	723,166	711,921	115,899	19
Minnesota	W	437,218	377,194	88,499	11
Washington	W	248,169	204,055	70,933	8
Maryland	N	220,135	193,135	47,978	8
Wyoming	W	46,854	36,743	10,353	3

Long had performed best in Louisiana and the southern states (where he polled 15 per cent), but the poll revealed that his support extended across large parts of the nation: he polled 14 per cent in the northwest, 12 per cent on the Pacific coast and 13

per cent in the Great Lakes. Only in New England and the mid-Atlantic states was his support weaker (8 per cent). Analysis of the small write-in vote for Coughlin revealed a further level of concern. His numbers were small, but the poll demonstrated that Coughlin held the greatest strength in those areas where Long was at his weakest. He received over 2 per cent of the votes in New England, over 1 per cent in the Great Lakes, and over 1 per cent in the mid-Atlantic states. It was possible to conclude from the poll that combined, the two men were tapping into support from voters across the entire nation, each compensating for his weakness in some regions with strength in others.⁸² When Secretary for the Interior Harold Ickes saw Hurja's poll, he recorded in his diary that the 'results were alarming.'⁸³

The passage of the Second New Deal in the spring of 1935 was intended to turn opinion back towards the president. Equally, Long's death in September 1935 reduced the likelihood that those proposing radical reform from within the Democratic Party would split in 1936. Despite this, the DNC remained concerned as to the potential impact of a third-party candidate in the forthcoming presidential election. These concerns were reinforced in February 1936, when a 'Presidential Trial Heat' undertaken by Hurja's friend George Gallup (whose American Institute of Public Opinion had been established in 1935 utilising a polling methodology similar to that established by Hurja), revealed that, since 1935, Roosevelt had climbed only 1 per cent to 50, whilst the appeal of an unnamed third-party candidate stood at 5 per cent.⁸⁴ When Long's protégé Gerald Smith brought Coughlin and Townsend together to form the Union Party, the fears of the DNC morphed naturally into concerns regarding Lemke's potential impact upon the presidential election.

Publicly, Democratic Chairman James Farley was dismissive of the Union Party threat. Asked whether the Lemke candidacy had caused any changes in Democratic Party plans, he simply inquired, 'Why should it?'⁸⁵ The initial assessment from *The New York Times* of the impact of the Union Party on the 1936 presidential campaign, however, was significantly less sanguine. 'It goes without saying that Lemke will poll a

large vote,' they commented. Despite the progress made under the Second New Deal to resolve the nation's economic problems, much remained to be done to bring the American economy back to pre-Depression levels of prosperity. In this continued economic crisis, the promises presented by the Union Party platform and its candidate potentially held great popular appeal amongst diverse groups in opposition to the president, including poor agricultural and industrial workers and those unemployed former middle-class voters most affected by the continued economic depression. 'An unknown who promises everything without being able to accomplish anything,' commented the *Times*, 'is a very dangerous factor in a period of economic and political flux such as this.' The paper presented a sombre warning to Chairman Farley: 'Though the Democrats may beat their breasts and proclaim that the election is "in the bag," they know very well that the bulk of Lemke's storm troops are somewhat more than likely to be recruited from disaffected New Dealers.'⁸⁶

In early July 1936, Farley, seeking to determine the potential threat posed by the Union Party to the president's re-election, wrote to dozens of local political figures across the nation. Some of the replies made extremely uncomfortable reading. J.R. Landy, Collector of Internal Revenue in St Paul, Minnesota, reported that the Union Party 'ticket may poll from 100,000 to 200,000 votes and I believe that fully 90 per cent of those will be taken from President Roosevelt.'⁸⁷ From Ohio, Representative Frank Kloebe was 'fearful that the president would lose the state at the present time with the Lemke followers drawing the heaviest from him.'⁸⁸ These responses were supported by an assessment of Roosevelt's electoral chances published by the *New York Times* in July 1936. 'Old-time Republican states were swept into the Democratic column by only nominal majorities [in 1932],' the *Times* commented. In this circumstance, defections from the Democratic Party to the 'radical group' and 'a return of some of the Progressive Republican votes to the Republican cause' would, they concluded, 'greatly weaken the chances of President Roosevelt's carrying states that until recently have been safely classified as holding to their 1932 allegiance.'⁸⁹ With

the Gallup polls showing the average split between Roosevelt and Landon at just 4 per cent, Lemke would apparently only need to generate minimal support to potentially disrupt the outcome of the election.⁹⁰

In addition to his unscientific information-gathering campaign, Farley commissioned Hurja to model the likely outcome of the 1936 election. In a report published on September 25, 1936, Hurja concluded that based on an assessment of all available polling data, 'the election would be won by the Republicans by only 6 Electoral Votes.' In the report, Hurja set out the 16 states considered to be most at risk of defeat (Figure 2) along with his assessment of their relative importance. Hurja himself termed these the 'doubtful' states.⁹¹ The report does not contain any detailed

Figure 2: Assessment of at-risk states in September 25 report to the DNC ranked by relative importance.

	Estimated Democratic Vote	Electoral College 1936
Most Important Doubtful States		
Michigan	48-52%	19
Minnesota	48-52%	11
Iowa	48-52%	11
West Virginia	48-52%	11
Nebraska	48-52%	7
Colorado	48-52%	6
South Dakota	48-52%	4
Next Most Important Doubtful States		
New York	47-53%	47
Ohio	47-53%	26
Indiana	47-53%	14
Least Important Doubtful States		
Illinois	45-55%	29
Kansas	45-55%	9
Maryland	45-55%	8
Idaho	45-55%	4
Rhode Island	45-55%	4
Wyoming	45-55%	3

breakdown of the forecast votes per candidate, but it is noticeable that there is a close correlation between those states Hurja identified to be 'most' or 'next most' doubtful in

the September 1936 report and those considered to be vulnerable to defeat in his April 1935 poll. Indeed, 9 of the 11 states identified by Hurja in April 1935 poll are also highlighted in his 1936 report. A follow-up report issued by Hurja on October 18, 1936, suggested that the earlier trends away from Roosevelt had hardened over the preceding weeks and, as a consequence, had increased Landon's lead to 17 Electoral College votes. Figure 3 sets out those states considered by Emil Hurja to be most vulnerable to defeat as of October 18, 1936. Once again, 9 of those 11 states

Figure 3: States determined to be most vulnerable to defeat, October 18 report to the DNC.

	Estimated Democratic Vote	Electoral College 1936
Colorado	51%	6
Delaware	50%	3
Nebraska	50%	7
Minnesota	50%	11
West Virginia	49%	8
Wyoming	48%	3
Indiana	48%	14
Michigan	48%	19
Iowa	48%	11
Ohio	47%	26
South Dakota	47%	4
New York	47%	47
Illinois	46%	29
New Jersey	46%	16

identified by Hurja in April 1935 to be susceptible to a third-party campaign appeared on the October 18 at-risk list. Hurja's polling seemed, therefore, to suggest that the efforts made by the administration to consolidate the support of radical reform-minded voters behind the president, had not eradicated the appeal of Roosevelt's opponents.⁹²

The final pre-election polling report issued to the DNC on October 25, 1936, sustained his earlier analysis. In addition, for the first time, the report set out in detail Hurja's view on the likely impact of the Union Party on the election. In Hurja's earlier reports he had set his own data alongside that of the other polling organisations to produce an overall average poll of polls. In this final report, however, he based his findings on the private Democratic polling alone. The effect in particular of removing the *Literary Digest* poll, which forecast a Landon victory by 173 Electoral College votes,

but which Hurja reported had in past elections ‘consistently underestimated’ Democratic support, produced a dramatic revision to Roosevelt’s overall position. On this more refined basis, Hurja forecast that Roosevelt would win ‘364 electoral votes, or winning five states more than required.’ The election remained closer, however, than this majority would suggest. The size of the Lemke vote would potentially determine the outcome of the election.⁹³

The October 25 report includes detailed polling data for 16 states that Hurja considered to be of particular importance to determining the outcome of the election. This polling data determined the perceived threat of the Union Party on the election outcome. On the basis of his ‘quota’ and ‘area’ trend analysis, Hurja forecast that the Union Party candidate would achieve an average of 8 per cent across these important states, including a forecast vote in excess of 10 per cent in 5 of them (Figure 4). Hurja considered that most of these votes would likely be drawn from Roosevelt. Furthermore, in Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania, Hurja forecast that this swing away from the president to Lemke would deliver Landon victories in these states. This would account for 69 of Landon’s forecast 167 Electoral College total. Hurja warned that in a number of further states Roosevelt’s forecast margin of victory

Figure 4: Forecast Union Party vote in 1936 Presidential Election, derived from DNC poll published October 25, 1936.

	Estimated Union Party Vote
Michigan	13.4%
Minnesota	11.8%
Idaho	10.1%
Maryland	10.0%
Rhode Island	10.0%
Ohio	9.5%
Iowa	9.4%
Arizona	9.2%
Wyoming	8.1%
Colorado	6.7%
Illinois	6.5%
Nebraska	6.2%
Indiana	5.9%
West Virginia	3.6%
Pennsylvania	3.1%
Kansas	3.0%

(as illustrated in Figure 5) was very small. A total swing toward Lemke of just 1.8 per cent in New York, Ohio, North Dakota, Iowa and Idaho would hand Landon the presidential election.⁹⁴

Figure 5: Extract from the results of the DNC poll, published October 25, 1936.

	Forecast % Roosevelt Vote	Electoral College Votes 1936
New York	50.1	47
Ohio	50.2	26
North Dakota	51.5	7
Iowa	51.8	11
Idaho	51.9	11

Given the potential significance of Hurja's forecast to the Democratic Party, it is useful to consider what historical evidence there was to back up the statistician's conclusions. It is possible via a historic-trend analysis of previous presidential election results to sustain the trends that Hurja suggested he had identified in 1936. The chances of the Republicans overturning Roosevelt's 1932 electoral majority would likely be assisted by the contribution of a significant third party drawing votes away from the president. Figure 6 ranks each state according to the average percentage of the vote received by significant third-party candidates in presidential elections between 1892 and 1924 (James Weaver, People's Party, 1892; Theodore Roosevelt, Progressive Party, 1912; Robert La Follette, Progressive Party, 1924). To model the potential impact of Lemke's campaign on Roosevelt's re-election chances, the average percentage vote for the average significant third-party candidate has been subtracted from the margin of victory achieved by the Democrats in 1932. On this basis, should Lemke achieve the average level of support received by past significant third-party candidates in that state, and should this support be taken only from Roosevelt, the president would lose 20 of the states he had won 1932. The effect of this potential shift

Figure 6: Average vote for significant third-party candidates, 1892-1924 compared to Democrats margin of victory in 1932.

State	Dem % margin 1932	Average % Significant 3rd Party Vote	Difference
Nevada	39	44	-5
South Dakota	29	42	-13
North Dakota	42	41	1
Idaho	20	38	-18
Colorado	13	35	-22
Alabama	71	35	36
Wyoming	15	33	-18
Kansas	9	33	-24
Nebraska	28	31	-3
Washington	24	31	-7
Minnesota	24	30	-6
Oregon	21	29	-8
California	21	28	-7
Montana	23	28	-5
Arizona	37	26	11
Wisconsin	32	24	8
Iowa	18	22	-4
Utah	15	21	-6
Illinois	13	18	-5
Michigan	8	18	-10
Pennsylvania	-	17	-
North Carolina	41	15	26
Maine	-	15	-
Georgia	84	15	69
New Jersey	2	15	-13
Massachusetts	4	14	-10
Ohio	3	14	-11
Vermont	-	14	-
New York	13	13	0
Texas	77	13	64
Maryland	25	13	12
West Virginia	10	13	-3
New Mexico	27	13	14
Delaware	-	12	-
Arkansas	73	12	61
Indiana	12	11	1
Kentucky	19	11	8
Tennessee	34	11	23
Missouri	29	11	18
Florida	50	10	40
Connecticut	-	10	-
Mississippi	92	9	83
New Hampshire	-	9	-
Rhode Island	12	9	3
Virginia	38	8	30
Oklahoma	47	4	43
Louisiana	86	4	82
South Carolina	96	1	95

in support towards the Union Party would reduce Roosevelt's Electoral College tally in 1936 to 213 – 53 votes short of victory.⁹⁵

The conclusions drawn from this historic-trend analysis thus sustain the forecasts reached by Hurja in his polling analysis. There is a correlation between those states identified by Hurja as vulnerable for Roosevelt in the 1936 election (as detailed in figures 1, 2, 3 and 5) and those considered to be vulnerable for Roosevelt based on the historic trend analysis (detailed in figure 6). In total, 10 states appear in these

tables on 4 or more occasions (Ohio, Illinois, New York, Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Wyoming, West Virginia and Nebraska). Ohio and New York feature on every occasion. Success for the Union Party in these 10 most vulnerable states would reduce Roosevelt Electoral College total by 167 votes and deliver Landon the election by a single vote. The overall consistency between historic voting trends, Farley's traditional methods of information-gathering, and Hurja's forecasts suggests that the DNC and, indeed, the president himself, were not unreasonable in accepting the perceived threat of the Union Party established by the statistician.⁹⁶ However, given the significant gap between the final results achieved by Lemke in the November election and Hurja's forecast, there is an immediate question about how accurate the statistician's forecast of the perceived threat actually was.

Hurja constructed his forecast vote for the Union Party based on past voter trends combined with an estimate of Lemke's appeal to radical reform-minded voters who had voted for Roosevelt in 1932. In reaching this conclusion, Hurja had taken account of other countertrends he had identified that seemed to suggest that urban voters were switching towards Roosevelt, as were voters across a wide range of his racial, class and gender 'quota' groups. However, such were the entrenched patterns of previous voter behaviour – African-American voters and urban voters, for example, had overwhelmingly supported Hoover in 1932 – that he was cautious as to what extent he applied these emerging trends. This caution eventually proved unwarranted, however. The Union Party despite its polling data was a chimera. Its polls did not translate into actual votes. In the November election the Union Party secured no Electoral College votes in comparison to Roosevelt's 523.⁹⁷

Looking back on his electoral forecasts after the presidential election, Hurja observed that 'the character of Roosevelt's victory in 1936 was entirely different from his earlier victory in 1932.' In particular, the final election results demonstrated that Roosevelt had gained in his voting strength in 143 of the nation's 157 largest urban centres (those with a population in excess of 50,000). This was a reversal of an

electoral trend evident throughout the 1920s, where the Republicans' had carried the urban vote by a large margin. Roosevelt had been elected in 1932 not by overturning the Republicans' urban base, but by carrying overwhelming numbers of rural voters. Hurja described this shift as 'emphatic.'⁹⁸ This reversal in urban and rural support could be explained by changes in the Democratic electoral support. The emergence of the New Deal coalition brought together industrial workers living mainly in the large urban centres, supportive of New Deal labour legislation, with those millions of formerly Republican-voting, poor African-Americans who had fled the rural south during the Depression years in search of employment in the cities and had benefited from the safety net provided by the Second New Deal. Roosevelt won 76 per cent of African-American votes in the 1936 election. This was a complete reversal of the 1932 election. In hindsight, Hurja accepted that such was the transformation of the composition of the Democrats electoral coalition in 1936 that he had underestimated the effects of the trends he had identified in both his 'area' and 'quota' voters.⁹⁹

Evidence derived from Farley's correspondence with local Democratic officials was combined with Hurja's polling forecasts to establish the level of the threat to Roosevelt's re-election from the Union Party, which was perceived to be genuine by both Roosevelt and the DNC. However, in constructing his polling results, Hurja had underestimated the effects of exceptional shifts in voter behaviour towards rather than away from Roosevelt that occurred between the 1932 and 1936 elections. Hurja's conservatism distorted his electoral forecast and thus projected the election to be closer than it really was.¹⁰⁰ In this circumstance, it is questionable how much the perceived threat constructed by Hurja was, like the party itself, anything more than fiction. The DNC, and the president, did not benefit from this hindsight when constructing their response to the Union Party in the autumn of 1936. In his final meeting with the Cabinet prior to the election, Roosevelt confirmed he believed he would win, but only according to the margin forecast by his chief pollster.¹⁰¹

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- ¹ Transcripts of taped interviews between Sheldon Marcus and CC, SMP.
 - ² *NYT*, June 17, 1936.
 - ³ Data extracted from DNC poll, April 1935, EHP.
 - ⁴ Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 15.
 - ⁵ Bernard A. Cook, 'Covington Hall and Radical Rural Unionization in Louisiana,' *Louisiana History*, 18:2 (1977), 229-230.
 - ⁶ WL to CH, August 20, 1935, WLP; WL to CH, June 8, 1935, WLP.
 - ⁷ WL to CH, February 8, 1934, WLP.
 - ⁸ WL to CH, February 1, 1935, WLP.
 - ⁹ CH to WL, May 19, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁰ CH to WL, June 2, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid.*
 - ¹² WL to CH, June 8, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹³ CH to WL, June 2, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁴ CH to WL, July 16, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁵ WL to CH, July 20, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁶ CH to WL, July 24, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁷ WL to CH, August 2, 1935, WLP.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁹ WL to CH, June 10, 1936, WLP.
 - ²⁰ Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*; 89; Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics*, 293; Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 56; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agrarian Discontent*, 190; Bennett, *Demagogues*, 90-92.
 - ²¹ *NYT*, July 26, 1936.
 - ²² *Ibid*; *NYT*, July 15, 1936.

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- ²³ *Kansas City Star* editorial reprinted in *NYT*, June 28, 1936.
- ²⁴ *NYT*, June 28, 1936.
- ²⁵ *NYT*, June 20, 1936.
- ²⁶ *SJ*, June 29, 1936.
- ²⁷ *SJ*, August 17, 1936.
- ²⁸ *NYT*, September 21, 1936.
- ²⁹ *SJ*, August 17, 1936.
- ³⁰ *SJ*, November 9, 1936.
- ³¹ *SJ*, November 9, 1936. The full platform as published in *SJ* on June 22, 1936 is reproduced in full below.
1. America shall be self-contained and self-sustained: no foreign entanglements, be they political, economic, financial or military.
 2. Congress and Congress alone shall coin, issue and regulate all the money and credit in the United States through a central bank of issue.
 3. Immediately following the establishment of the central bank of issue, Congress shall provide for the retirement of all tax-exempt, interest-bearing bonds and certificates of indebtedness of the Federal Government, and shall refinance all the present agricultural mortgage indebtedness for the farmer and all the home mortgage indebtedness for the city owner by the use of its money and credit which it now gives to the control of private bankers.
 4. Congress shall legislate that there will be an assurance of a living annual wage for all laborers capable of working and willing to work.
 5. Congress shall legislate that there will be assurance of production at a profit for the farmer.
 6. Congress shall legislate that there will be an assurance of reasonable and decent security for the aged, who, through no fault of their own, have been victimized and exploited by an unjust economic system which has so concentrated wealth in the hands of a few that it has impoverished great masses of our people.
 7. Congress shall legislate that American agricultural, industrial, and commercial markets will be protected from manipulation of foreign moneys and from all raw material and processed goods produced abroad at less than a living wage.
 8. Congress shall establish an adequate and perfect defense for our country from foreign aggression either by air, by land or by sea, but with the understanding that our naval, air and military forces must not be used under any consideration in foreign fields or in foreign waters either alone or in conjunction with any foreign power. If there must be conscription, there shall be conscription of wealth as well as a conscription of men.

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9. Congress shall so legislate that all federal offices and positions of every nature shall be distributed through civil service qualifications and not through a system of party spoils and corrupt patronage.
 10. Congress shall restore representative government to the people of the United States to preserve the sovereignty of the individual states of the United States by the ruthless eradication of bureaucracies.
 11. Congress shall organize and institute federal works for the conservation of public lands, waters and forests, thereby creating billions of dollars of wealth, millions of jobs at the prevailing wages, and thousands of homes.
 12. Congress shall protect small industry and private enterprise by controlling and decentralizing the economic domination of monopolies, to the end that these small industries and enterprises may not only survive and prosper but that they may be multiplied.
 13. Congress shall protect private property from confiscation through unnecessary taxation with the understanding that the human rights of the masses take precedence over the financial rights of the classes.
 14. Congress shall set a limitation upon the net income of any individual in any one year and a limitation on the amount that such an individual may receive as a gift or as an inheritance, which limitation shall be executed through taxation.
 15. Congress shall re-establish conditions so that the youths of the nation as they emerge from schools and colleges may have the opportunity to earn a decent living while in the process of perfecting themselves in a trade or profession.

³² *SJ*, June 22, 1936.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *SJ*, June 29, 1936.

³⁶ *Kansas City Star* editorial reprinted in *NYT*, June 28, 1936.

³⁷ *NYT*, June 21, 1936.

³⁸ *SJ*, June 29, 1936.

³⁹ William Skeeles (hereafter WS) to WL, July 2, 1936, WLP.

⁴⁰ David O. Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 151.

⁴¹ WS to WL, July 2, 1936, WLP. WS to WL, July 15, 193, WLP.

⁴² WS to William Lemke, Jr., August 6, 1936, WLP.

⁴³ William Lemke, Jr. to WS, August 16, 1936, WLP.

⁴⁴ John Nystul to WS, July 13, 1936, WLP.

⁴⁵ *SJ*, July 20, 1936.

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- ⁴⁶ *Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Campaign Expenditures of Presidential, Vice-Presidential and Senatorial Candidates in 1936* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), 24-28.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ CC interview transcript, SMP.
- ⁴⁹ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 206.
- ⁵⁰ CC interview transcript, SMP.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *SJ*, June 12, 1936.
- ⁵³ *SJ*, July 6, 1936.
- ⁵⁴ *NYT*, June 22, 1936.
- ⁵⁵ *NYT*, June 24, 1936.
- ⁵⁶ CH to WL, June 2, 1935, WLP.
- ⁵⁷ JAF, Private File Note, June 1936, JAFP.
- ⁵⁸ *SJ*, June 29, 1936.
- ⁵⁹ *NYT*, May 28, 1936.
- ⁶⁰ Walter Baertschi to WEB, July 2, 1936, WEBP; WEB to Walter Baertschi, July 8, 1936, WEBP; WL to WEB, July 2, 1936, WEBP; WEB to WL, July 8, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶¹ CC to WEB, July 30, 1936, WEBP; WEB to CC, July 30, 1936, WEBP; WEB to CC, August 2, 1936, WEBP; WEB to CC, August 2, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶² H.F. Swett to WEB, October 15, 1936, WEBP; WEB to H.F. Swett, October 17, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁶³ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 196-197.
- ⁶⁴ *SJ*, July 6, 1936.
- ⁶⁵ WL to Thomas C. O'Brien (hereafter TCOB), June 16, 1936, WLP; WL to TCOB, July 22, 1936, WLP; William Skeeles to TCOB, August 31, 1936, WLP; TCOB to WL, November 2, 1936, WLP.

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- ⁶⁶ *NYT*, September 11, 1936.
- ⁶⁷ State of Massachusetts, 'MA US Senate Race – November 3, 1936,' *Our Campaigns*, <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=147417> (17 October 2010).
- ⁶⁸ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 152-153.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 153.
- ⁷⁰ George Schottenhamel, 'How Big Bill Thompson won control of Chicago,' *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 45:1 (1952), 42-46; State of Illinois, 'IL – Governor Race – November 3, 1936,' *Our Campaigns*, <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=262952> (17 October 2010).
- ⁷¹ *NYT*, June 20, 1936.
- ⁷² Election data derived from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.
- ⁷³ Melvin G. Holli, 'Emil E. Hurja: Michigan's Presidential Pollster,' *Michigan Historical Review*, 21:2 (1955), 125-126.
- ⁷⁴ Melvin, G. Holli, *The Wizard of Washington: Emil Hurja, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Birth of Public Opinion Polling* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 68-69.
- ⁷⁵ Holli, 'Presidential Pollster,' 128-129.
- ⁷⁶ Holli, *Wizard of Washington*, 63-64.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid*.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 68.
- ⁷⁹ DNC poll, April 1935, EHP.
- ⁸⁰ Edwin Amenta *et. al.*, 'Stolen Thunder? Huey Long's "Share our Wealth": Political Mediation and the Second New Deal,' *American Sociological Review*, Volume 59 (October 1994), 689; DNC poll, April 1935, EHP.
- ⁸¹ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 208.
- ⁸² Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 208-09; DNC poll, April 1935, EHP.

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- ⁸³ Holli, *Wizard of Washington*, 68.
- ⁸⁴ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 13.
- ⁸⁵ *NYT*, June 22, 1936.
- ⁸⁶ *NYT*, June 28, 1936.
- ⁸⁷ J.R. Landy to JAF, August 8, DNC Papers, FDRL (hereafter DNCP).
- ⁸⁸ Frank L. Kloebe to JAF, August 19, 1936, POF.
- ⁸⁹ *NYT*, July 12, 1936.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁹¹ Document titled 'Preliminary Report on Election Situation,' September 25, 1936, EHP.
- ⁹² Document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ JAF, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 64.
- ⁹⁷ Holli, *Wizard of Washington*, 76.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid*; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: the Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: the Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 72.
- ¹⁰⁰ Holli, *Wizard of Washington*, 68.
- ¹⁰¹ JAF, *Jim Farley's Story*, 64.

Chapter Five

The Union Party in Reality

Things are progressing in a most satisfactory manner except we are desperately in need of funds.

John Nystul to William Skeeles, July 13, 1936.¹

Private opinion polling undertaken by Emil Hurja, Deputy Chairman of the DNC forecast that the 1936 presidential election would be close and that the newly formed Union Party would play a part in determining the outcome. The perceived threat of the Union Party was accepted by the DNC, and indeed the president himself. In reality, this threat proved unfounded. Exposed to the full force of the Democrats' professional campaign, it was revealed that the Union Party had been constructed on sand – its leader and his union of backers with quite different visions for its future. When the Union Party was exposed to the reality of the campaign trail, the union and the party simply fell apart.

The actions taken by the Democratic administration since January 1935 to reform the New Deal had encouraged the radicalisation and polarisation of its opponents in the November presidential election. For the Republican Party, the administration's shift away from the business-friendly approach that typified the First New Deal established distance between its core conservative support and the Democratic Party. Seeking to exploit Roosevelt's supposed anti-business orientation, the conservative RNC had nominated Alf Landon, a relatively weak candidate with supposed appeal in the western states, on a platform that, although it contained certain concessions to reform-minded voters, was stringently anti-New-Deal in its tone and rhetoric. Likewise for the leaders of the diverse radical reform movements, the Second

New Deal's embrace of elements of their social reform agendas forced them to demonstrate their distance from the president by moving progressively towards the fringes of the political spectrum. It was from this position, and on this unstable basis, that the Union Party had been formed. The Democrats, in contrast, placed their centralist position at the heart of their campaign.

Roosevelt set the tone for his presidential campaign at the Democratic National Convention held in Chicago, Illinois between June 27 and July 2, 1936. The president's grip over the Democratic Party was evidenced by his re-nomination by general acclaim on the first ballot and the agreement of a party platform that was strongly supportive of the New Deal. In his State of the Union Address in January 1936, Roosevelt had celebrated the success of the Second New Deal in starting to ease the worst effects of the Depression and in providing a safety net for those not yet touched by the economic recovery. He also contrasted his strong personal record of achievement to the opposition, who he claimed sought to disrupt the progress made during his first administration. This theme was magnified in the speech that marked the president's re-nomination. Briefing chief speech writer Raymond Moley, Roosevelt made his strategy for his nomination speech clear: 'There's one issue in this campaign, it's myself, and people must be either for me or against me.'² Moley did not disappoint. When Roosevelt rose in front of an audience of 100,000 supporters to accept the re-nomination, he reminded his audience of the heavy responsibility which faced them in November. 'This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny,' the nominee proclaimed. 'In America we are waging a great and successful war. It is not alone a war against want and destitution and economic demoralization. It is more than that; it is a war for the survival of democracy.'³ The subsequent applause lasted for over an hour.

Roosevelt was able to take a bold stance in favour of his positive social reforms because of the success of the Second New Deal and also because of the continuing economic crisis that made it a necessity. The transformation in the economy brought

about by the New Deal had been remarkable. By June 1936, unemployment had dropped by 4 million from its high-point in early 1933, and 6 million new jobs had been created. The volume of industrial production had doubled; business failures were one third of what they had been in 1932; and the total cash income of farmers had increased by \$3 billion. Despite these impressive improvements, the reality was that this economic recovery still rested directly on federal government investment. In the first Roosevelt administration, \$5 billion of federal funding was poured into public works programmes designed to kick-start economic recovery through mass federal employment. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, through its direct subsidies, was providing a substantial proportion of the increased farm income. The Reconstruction Finance and Home Owner's Loan corporations had provided millions of dollars in federal loans to maintain business activity and assist debt-burdened home owners. In 1936, between 8 and 9 million Americans were still unemployed and dependent on direct, federally funded relief.⁴ Rather than hide these facts, Roosevelt claimed his social reforms were necessary to underpin the recovery that was gradually being delivered through his new economic policy and placed them at the heart of his campaign. Ignoring the Union and Republican party election platforms and presenting the coming election as a 'war for democracy', Roosevelt defined the terms of the debate fusing the cult of presidential character with vitality of the reform measures and exploited his opponents' weaknesses. *Reject me, reject the New Deal, reject recovery, reject the safety net* became the central thrust of his campaign message.

In response to Roosevelt's campaign strategy, rather than present a positive message focused on their own reform plans, both the Republican and Union party candidates launched explicitly negative campaigns. Landon, happy in having a fellow ally in his campaign against the New Deal, had publicly welcomed the Union Party to 'the great debate.' With Lemke widely considered to be drawing his voter base mainly from the president, there is little evidence that the Republicans regarded Lemke as a barrier to Landon's campaign. Indeed, John D.M. Hamilton, RNC National Chairman,

claimed that Lemke would help the Republicans 'materially' in the Mississippi valley where they believed that Lemke would take up to six Roosevelt votes for every one he took from Landon. In this circumstance, there was no explicit campaign to minimise the Union Party threat.⁵ Implicitly, however, Lemke and his radical backers became part of a wider threat posed by the turn towards reform evident in the first Roosevelt administration. Rather than accept their rejection at the polls in 1932 and 1934, the Republicans rejected the need for social and economic reform, attempted to justify the actions of the Hoover administration and warned that a continued rejection of their core conservative values would lead the nation only towards its ruin.⁶ Kicking off a national tour in New York in July, Hamilton informed his audience that 'the electorate has not yet been told the evils of the New Deal policies or what its continuation will mean to American institutions.'⁷ Hamilton's ominous warning was reinforced by vice-presidential candidate Frank Knox, who declared in Chicago that the very 'preservation of free enterprise was the issue of the campaign.' 'The New Deal candidate', he proclaimed, 'has been leading us towards Moscow.'⁸ When Landon hit the campaign trail in August, he promised a return to 'the American way of life,' which offered security and abundance 'without sacrifice of the freedom of the individual citizen.'⁹

Whereas the Republicans were explicit in their rejection of the New Deal, the Union Party presented a more complex challenge. They were supportive of much of the social reform that lay at the heart of the Second New Deal; indeed, much of it had its origins in their own independent radical reform proposals. Roosevelt claimed that the Democrats were the only party promoting a platform of positive social reforms in the presidential election, but a direct comparison between the nineteen pledges that made up the Democratic Party platform of 1936 and that of the Union Party shows many links. Of the fifteen planks of Union Party platform, twelve shared significant similarities with those of the Democratic Party. These ranged from measures to refinance agricultural property, to civil service reform, the need to break up industrial monopolies, measures to enhance youth employment, protection of American markets

from international interference, and taxation for the wealthy. What is telling is that where the two parties shared views, the difference was in tone more than in the intended outcome of policy implementation. Often, the proposals of the Union Party were more forthright, short and definite (Union Party planks start with the phrase 'Congress shall' in thirteen of their fifteen statements). In comparison, the Democrats generally favoured longer statements pledging action by 'government' (Congress is not mentioned once in the Democratic platform). Thus, for example, where the Union Party proposed simply that 'Congress shall set a limitation upon the net income of any individual in one year and a limitation on the amount that such an individual may receive as a gift or as an inheritance, which limitation shall be executed through taxation,' the Democratic platform proposed that 'as the requirements of relief decline and national income advances, an increasing percentage of Federal expenditures can and will be met from current revenues, secured from taxes levied in accordance with ability to pay.' The decisive, assertive tone of the Union Party platform reflected the rhetoric of its leaders. Compared to the generally more balanced tone of the Democratic platform, the forced negativity and confrontation of Union Party rhetoric had the effect of making their often similar policy intentions appear more radical to the electorate, thus naturally limiting their appeal to moderate voters.¹⁰

The oppositional tone evident in the platform of the Union Party was echoed in the party's campaign tactics. The conventions of the OARP and the NUSJ provided Lemke and his backers with considerable public exposure. The conventions would enable Lemke to both boost his personal profile and his ambition to establish the Union Party as a legitimate third party. Lemke's ambitions were not, however, shared by Townsend and Coughlin. They had supported the Union Party campaign as a protest against the president and they had no intention of letting the new third party leech on their organisations or their funding base. The stresses of waging this negative and oppositional campaign opened up the evident disunity at the heart of the Union Party. It also encouraged its backers, in particular Coughlin and Smith, to displays of the

worst kind of excess. These conflicting aims and the inherent weakness of the union were exposed to the public during the conventions and ultimately only served to reinforce Roosevelt's message of the stability and dependability of his presidency.

The second national convention of the OARP which opened on July 15, 1936, proved unruly and unreliable. Townsend had organised the agenda so that on the first day Coughlin, Smith and he would present their cases for the endorsement of the Union Party's presidential candidate. The climax of the convention was planned to take place at Cleveland Stadium, where it was intended that before 100,000 supporters Lemke's candidacy would receive the official endorsement of the OARP. However, Townsend had underestimated the continued anger of the 12,000 elderly delegates present at the recent congressional investigation's revelations of corruption at the head of the organisation. In advance of the convention, Townsend had attempted to explain that his proposal for the OARP to support the Union Party campaign was not in conflict with the organisation's continued independence, but his elderly members roundly rejected his plans.

During the convention, Townsend gave his members little reason to rally around his cause. He opened the convention with what the *New York Times* described as a 'mild and scholarly philippic against the Roosevelt administration.' Reading from the text of his address, he advocated Lemke's endorsement and pleaded with his followers to 'unite in an unbreakable phalanx of militant activity that cannot be gainsaid.' The crowd expressed polite appreciation for their leader, but little more.¹¹ Roosevelt had accused his opponents of being dangerous radicals but there was little evidence of this in Townsend's lacklustre performance. Gerald Smith, on the other hand, did not disappoint.

For Smith, the creation of the Union Party was a crowning glory. He had gone in just a few months from the doldrums to the political director of one of the nation's largest mass movements. As the OARP convention got into full swing, there was no doubt that Smith would seek to exploit his position within the leadership of the

movement to its maximum. He roamed the floor of the auditorium, shaking hands with the delegates and giving interviews to reporters, full of remarks sure to be printed in the next day's papers.¹² When the time came for Smith to deliver his convention address, his excessive oratorical display epitomised the tone of the Union Party campaign. Clutching his Bible, he delivered a performance that had the elderly audience cheering in appreciation. In colourful, often violent language, Smith ('coatless, dripping with perspiration,') directly challenged Roosevelt's claims that he alone could save the American democratic system.¹³ 'Too long,' he shouted, 'have the plain people of the United States let Wall Street and Tammany rule them.' It was Roosevelt himself, Smith claimed, who had side-lined Congress and governed through unelected agencies that by their actions had undermined American individuality and self-determination. 'We must make our choice in the presence of atheistic-communistic influences,' he challenged. 'It is the Russian primer or the Holy Bible! It is the Red Flag or the Stars and Stripes! It is Lenin or Lincoln! Stalin or Jefferson! James A. Farley or Francis E. Townsend!' 'As far as I am concerned,' he said, turning at last to the subject of Lemke and the Union Party, 'I don't see how I can vote for anybody for president, except the only man that has come out on the Townsend platform. Mr William Lemke.' In a final roar he concluded, 'I can tell you we are going to seize the government of the United States!' At the end of his address, the crowd stood to praise Smith's dramatic performance.¹⁴ Yet, as he basked in his success, the ties that loosely bound the Union Party's backers began to unravel.

Not everyone was as taken about the crowd's reaction. As Smith gave his rabble-rousing address, Coughlin, scheduled to speak early the next day, sat anxiously at the side of the stage. The priest had not before witnessed the effectiveness of Smith's oratory. Reflecting later, Coughlin recognised the extent to which Smith's display had usurped Townsend's authority. 'Smith was,' he later recalled, 'a viper, a leech.'¹⁵ From then on, Coughlin would consider Smith a direct rival to his own power. Smith's melodramatic display brought out the worst aspects of Coughlin's unstable

character. In his convention address he asserted that the third-party movement was the only means of saving the country from the 'gold standard Republicans and the double-crossing Democrats.' Seeking to rally the crowd to the levels achieved by Smith the previous day, Coughlin stepped back and in a dramatic gesture threw his coat and clerical collar to the ground. Returning to the microphone, he screamed that Roosevelt was both a 'liar' and a 'great betrayer.' How many Townsendites, he demanded, would follow their leader into the third-party movement? The crowd, impressed by the priest's passion, stood and applauded wildly. The *New York Times* declared his speech the 'high point of the whole day.' He 'laid them in the aisles,' they reported.¹⁶

Coughlin's rhetorical display was certainly striking, but his pursuit of the theatrical over careful political messaging undermined the effectiveness of the Union Party campaign. His speech was applauded by the *New York Times* for its drama, but in the cold light of day, the *Times* reflected, it appeared uncontrolled, excessive, and ultimately unseemly for a practising Catholic priest. Attempting to move beyond the power and passion of the performance of the 'rip-roaring clerics,' the *New York Times* was damning in its criticism of the content of their presentations. 'The wild words at Cleveland make it obvious that no logical process will impress those who utter or, without understanding, cheer them,' they concluded. 'But the reasonable American public will not miss the point.'¹⁷ For the members of the OARP executive board, concerned by the revelations of the Congressional investigation and by Townsend's apparent turn toward extremism with Smith's appointment as political director, these declamatory displays were the final straw and they rallied to establish control over the convention.

Gomer Smith, Democratic senatorial candidate from Oklahoma and member of the OARP executive, took to the rostrum to warn against those who preached alternative kinds of 'salvation.' He denounced Coughlin and ridiculed the idea that Gerald Smith could deliver the votes of 6 million SoW members. He suggested that the

place to look for these supposed voters would be in the 'swamps of Louisiana' and that they 'would turn out to be bull frogs.' On this basis, support for the Union Party, he concluded, would not assist the OARP to achieve its aims. 'Up to now,' Smith said, 'the Townsend movement had been doing very well' by sticking to their singular aim of achieving a \$200-per-month pension for everybody over 60.¹⁸ He finished his speech by hailing Roosevelt as a 'golden-hearted patriot' who had saved the nation from Communism – and received a rousing cheer from those same delegates who had cheered the earlier denunciations of the president.¹⁹ These cheers for Gomer Smith demonstrated the diversity of opinions within the audience and reflected the gap that existed between Townsend's personal vendetta and the political thrust of the executive and the OARP membership. The tone of the convention having now shifted decisively away from Townsend, a chorus of speakers pleaded with delegates not to endorse the Union Party: 'We are not going to lose with Lemke,' said one. 'We are going to triumph with Townsend.' Unable to steer the convention back on their favoured course, Townsend and Smith's proposal that the OARP back Lemke's candidacy was resoundingly defeated when the delegates passed a resolution that the organisation should not 'at any time during the campaign directly or indirectly endorse any presidential or vice-presidential candidates.'²⁰

Rejected by the OARP, Lemke's planned coronation on July 19 was an embarrassment to the candidate and his union of backers. Speaking before a sparse crowd of 5,000 within the cavernous stadium, Lemke attacked Roosevelt's 'brainless trust' and declared that he stood 'four square with Dr. Townsend in his battle for common people.' His greatest praise, however, was for the fallen Huey Long – 'the greatest Democrat that this nation produced in the last one hundred years.' It was ultimately to his 'immortal' friend that he dedicated the Union Party. 'We intend to make this a government for the benefit of the great mass of the people,' he concluded. 'We are going to bring about a condition where every man is a king, and I may add – where every woman is a queen.' The audience, such as it was, 'gave one last whoop,'

reported the *New York Times*, 'and then ran for the exits, grabbed their bags and started home.'²¹ The OARP convention had provided the Union Party with a significant public platform, but this exposure had done little to instil confidence in the electorate in either the long term viability of the party or the presidential qualities of its candidate.

The failure of Townsend and Smith to mobilise the OARP behind the Union Party significantly dented Lemke's ambition that it be established as a genuine third party. In addition, it reduced its effectiveness as a protest movement. The OARP's explicit rejection of Townsend and Smith's leadership and its show of support for the president demonstrated how successful Roosevelt had been in taking the political centre-ground from his rivals. Yet, blinded by his overwhelming anger at the administration, Townsend refused to back down. Unwilling to accept defeat, he announced he would defy his members and would personally support Lemke's election, but would not, he admitted to reporters, 'try and coerce' his followers to copy him.²² The rejection of his support for the Union Party was not, however, the pension leader's final humiliation. Unruly delegates passed a series resolutions which severely curtailed Townsend's executive authority. The executive board, until then controlled entirely by Townsend, was reappointed for a further year only. Thereafter, its membership would be made up of locally elected representatives. The reformed organisation was renamed 'The Townsend Recovery Plan, Incorporated'; this symbolic promotion, ironically, marked an abrupt end to Townsend's unchallenged control.²³

The new limits to Townsend's authority were quickly evident. Meeting with his executive the day after the convention, a furious Townsend demanded Gomer Smith's immediate resignation. He was for free speech, he said, as long as 'troublemakers' did not take unfair advantage of it.²⁴ Townsend's weakness and vulnerability were demonstrated when the executive resolutely rejected his proposal and instead presented a counter challenge to remove Gerald Smith. Seeking to reassert his leadership, Townsend stormed from the meeting, expecting his board to seek a compromise. Having waited patiently for some time with members of the press

stationed outside, when it became obvious that no compromise would be sought, Townsend returned to the meeting. In return for Gerald Smith retaining his directorship, he accepted the continuation of Gomer Smith's membership.²⁵ Townsend's decision to align himself with Gerald Smith and his decision to back the formation of the Union Party thus proved a costly mistake for the elderly doctor.

Whereas Townsend and Smith ultimately found themselves constrained by their members, Father Coughlin was restrained by the Catholic Church. Despite his often dramatic rhetoric, prior to his appearance at the OARP convention Coughlin had always been able to carefully balance the respectability that his position within the clergy naturally afforded him with his overtly political radio sermons. However, the challenge set down by Gerald Smith, the receptiveness of the crowd to theatrical oratory, and the priest's tendency towards dramatic gestures all combined to push Coughlin beyond the boundaries of popular acceptability. Letters published in the *New York Times* in the days that followed Coughlin's address demonstrated how much the priest had angered Catholic voters in particular. Not one letter was published that supported the priest. It 'goes against the grain for any honest, self-respecting Catholic to have respect for any man, priest or layman, who, from a public platform, call the Chief Magistrate of our nation a "liar",' wrote a 'Catholic Voter' on July 17, 1936. "'Upon what meat" does Father Coughlin feed that he can call the President a liar and betrayer?' questioned Ernest Bristol on July 16. Alongside these criticisms was one common proposed solution: 'A clergyman playing politics is a clerical error,' suggested a 'Catholic Voter.' 'It is time for his church to "spew him out,"' recommended another.²⁶

Coughlin could have chosen to ignore public criticism of his speech. He was, after all, seeking to appeal to a section of the electorate that was already alienated from the president and was thus more likely to back his stance than those moderate voters writing to the *New York Times*. He could not, however, afford to offend his bishop who ultimately provided him with the personal freedom from his clerical duties to continue his political campaign. Coughlin's superior, Bishop of Detroit Michael J.

Gallagher, was personally sympathetic to the priest's campaign for social justice and had never previously censured him for his political actions, but the display at the OARP convention proved too much. On July 18, Gallagher issued a public statement expressing his disapproval: 'Father Coughlin is entitled to his own opinion, but I do not approve of the language he used in expressing himself on the president.'²⁷ Whatever the members of the NUSJ might have thought of his speech or his actions, recognising that he had breached the limits of acceptability set down by his bishop, on July 23, 1936, Coughlin was forced to issue an embarrassing open letter of apology.

Addressing the president as 'Excellency,' the priest attempted to draw a distinction between Roosevelt's role as chief executive and as a candidate for political office. 'When he becomes a candidate he subjects himself to criticism and to the campaign speeches of his opponents,' Coughlin explained. But by blurring the distinction between these two identities in his speech, and in accusing the 'president' rather than the 'candidate' of being a liar and a betrayer, Coughlin confessed that 'in the heat of civic interest and in righteous anger,' he had overstepped acceptable boundaries. Discussing his apology with the press, Coughlin admitted that his address was extemporaneous, and that if he had prepared in it advance he 'would not have used the strong terms in which he referred to the president.'²⁸ The apology and the priest's confession of his moment of excess were principally intended to defuse the anger emerging from amongst the church hierarchy. Instead, like Townsend's forced capitulation to his rebellious executive, they merely illustrated Coughlin's weaknesses and the limitations of his power.

Coughlin was constrained by his church, but remained the unopposed leader of the NUSJ. Having witnessed firsthand Townsend's public humiliation and his ultimate loss of face and control of the OARP, Coughlin went to great lengths to carefully orchestrate the NUSJ convention to ensure that he would both sustain his leadership position and additionally mobilise his movement behind the Union Party as an anti-Roosevelt protest. Wishing to make it categorically clear that he had no intention

personally, or on behalf of his members, that the NUSJ should support the permanent establishment of the Union Party, he announced on the eve of the convention that while he wanted his organisation to ratify Lemke's candidacy, he did not want it to endorse the new party.²⁹ To suppress any opposition to his proposal emerging through the course of the convention, early on the first day of business, Coughlin pushed delegates to pass a proposal to endorse Lemke's presidential campaign. Delegates passed the resolution 8,152 votes to 1, but also, unanimously rejected formal endorsement of the Union Party.³⁰

The passage of the NUSJ resolution opposing formal endorsement of the Union Party ended Lemke's hopes that the new party might overcome its deficiencies in finance and organisation by effectively merging with Coughlin's established movement. Lemke was now entirely dependent upon his meagre resources and the goodwill of others. The limitations of the NUSJ's endorsement of his candidacy were quickly apparent. On one relatively short-term level, Coughlin's members rose to support Lemke but by no means would they actively campaign for his election to the presidency. When Lemke delivered his address to the NUSJ delegates, he once again failed to rouse a sleepy crowd in a two-thirds-empty Cleveland Stadium.³¹

Coughlin had successfully guided the NUSJ to back Lemke's candidacy as a protest against the continuation of the Roosevelt presidency. He had thus avoided the public humiliation endured by Townsend at the OARP convention. With the resolution passed, however, he was forced to contend with another challenge to his authority from Gerald Smith. The press had speculated in advance of the convention whether, following his humbling public apology, Coughlin would ensure no repeat performance by withdrawing the speaking invitations issued to Townsend and Smith. Not wishing to undermine the already weak union, Coughlin insisted that his fellow leaders retain their speaking slots, but he explicitly ruled out an 'oratorical contest.'³² Smith would be allowed to make an address, but only late in the evening, when the business of the convention had ended – with the delegates tired from the long days of speeches.

However, Coughlin's attempt to limit the preacher ultimately ended in failure and his own personal embarrassment. When the time came for Smith to speak, he was able to quickly rouse the flagging crowd. 'Our president is being Kerenskyized in preparation for the chaos that is inevitable,' he shouted. 'When he runs out of money, the members of his own party will turn upon him. When this time comes, there will be inflation, repudiation, chaos.' His address was, if anything, more effective than the one he had used at the OARP convention. 'The Rev. Mr. Smith,' the *New York Times* concluded, 'was in his best rabble-rousing form.'³³ As the crowd rose in support, Coughlin realised he had allowed Smith once again to upstage him. However, constrained by his actions at the OARP convention and his subsequent apology, the priest was unable to deliver to match the preacher's display of rhetoric. Instead, he provided a perfect moment of drama. The following day, rising to officially close the convention, halfway through his speech Coughlin stepped back from the microphone and collapsed. With the press and his followers expressing serious concerns for his health and his ability to continue his political campaign, Coughlin once again pushed Smith from the press headlines.³⁴

The relative success of the early stages of the presidential campaign can be determined by an assessment of Gallup polling data. With the president having yielded the floor to his opponents during the month of August, there were apparent signs that their negative campaigns were generating public support. The first poll following the major party nominations was published on August 9, 1936, with research undertaken in mid-July. This suggested that Roosevelt's popularity had dropped by 4.2 per cent to 49.3 since the pre-convention poll published on June 7, whilst Landon's had increased by 2.6 to 44.8 per cent. Lemke, appearing for the first time, received 3.4 per cent of the vote.³⁵ The first poll published in the wake of the NUSJ convention on August 30 revealed a small bounce for Lemke, with his rating increasing to 4.6 per cent (drawing support mainly from other minor candidates). In comparison, however, support for the main party candidates had remained static. The OARP and NUSJ conventions thus

appeared to have confirmed Lemke's status as the most significant of the minor candidates. Beyond that, however, the dramatic oratorical displays against the president had failed to draw support away from Roosevelt. It was questionable, given the unstable nature of the union of Union Party backers and the limited support that their organisations had afforded Lemke, how sustainable his slender level of support would be as he moved away from the natural spotlight of the conventions and onto the campaign trail proper.³⁶

The NUSJ and OARP conventions might have provided a small boost for Lemke's electoral chances, but they ultimately tested the limits of the union beyond its maximum capacity. Coughlin cared little for Lemke or the Union Party. The NUSJ convention, like that of the OARP before it, had confirmed that the Union Party was simply not viable as a political party. Its existence provided Coughlin and his supporters with a symbolic protest movement behind which to rally their campaign of opposition to the president. The failure of the OARP to back Lemke's candidacy, and Coughlin's personal oratorical battle with Smith, limited the continued usefulness of the union. Whatever the wishes of the Union Party or its presidential candidate, the union of backers was unravelling swiftly.

Immediately following their speeches to the OARP convention, flushed with the enthusiasm of the crowd, Townsend, Smith and Coughlin posed for the photographers. Throwing his arms around his colleagues, Coughlin had announced his intention to mount a joint national campaign on behalf of Lemke's candidacy. Yet, in the wake of Coughlin's humble apology and his concerns at the personal ambitions of Gerald Smith, the priest withdrew from the campaign, announcing in August that despite his best intentions, he had discovered that he had no time in his busy schedule.³⁷ The reality was that Smith was the thread that had bound the loose union of diverse radical reformers together. With Coughlin unwilling to be usurped by the Baptist preacher, this thread quickly unwound. In the wake of Coughlin's announcement, an embarrassed Smith was forced to explain to reporters that they had decided that:

It would be a waste of energy and duplication of effort to campaign together. Instead, we plan to go in two or three different directions, cover two or three times as much territory as if we travelled together, and, of course, address two or three times as many people.³⁸

The weakness of the union that had backed the formation of the new political party was now publicly transparent. With the union dissolved moreover, Lemke lost any final control he might have had over his backers. The Union Party candidate was forced to place his fate in the hands of others – an action he lived to regret. Thereafter, entirely without Lemke's knowledge, influence, guidance or control, the campaign in support of his candidacy split into four entirely independent and unrelated crusades. Candidate Lemke toured the country attempting to generate momentum behind his new party, but the newspapers preferred to report the colourful displays of Coughlin and Smith or the difficulties of Townsend. Unable to control, constrain or distance himself from the actions of the individuals who dominated his campaign but did nothing to support him, Lemke and the Union Party were drowned.

The formal Union Party campaign, directly controlled by party chairman John Nystul and delivered by candidate Lemke, was fragile and ineffective and generated little press coverage or public comment. Despite his personal vision and commitment to the Union Party cause, Lemke proved a weak candidate for the highest office and his appeal remained distinctly regional. Embracing his rural western roots, he immersed himself in the life of a farmer: the suits he wore were un-ironed, and his speeches – laden with his strong, twangy accent – were often delivered with one or more days' worth of stubble. This, in combination with his bald head pocked with smallpox scars, slightly jaundiced skin and glass eye, made him extremely unpresidential in his appearance.³⁹

Lemke's lack of broad electoral appeal became apparent when he embarked upon the campaign tour that Nystul was able to arrange for him. The candidate started his tour in the Midwest, speaking before 35,000 people in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and drawing large crowds in Colorado, Michigan and Ohio. Lemke was careful throughout

his campaign to sustain his support for all the planks of his platform. His greatest passion, however, was reserved for his proposals for agricultural reform. These agricultural crowds warmly received his pleas to fight against the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and to 'get off the hearses and get onto the bandwagon.'⁴⁰ Appealing directly to his core constituency, his passionate speeches did not go unnoticed; William Borah wrote to Lemke in July, 'I have said two or three times that I thought you were making the most effective vote-getting speeches that have yet appeared.'⁴¹ Lemke's focus on agricultural voters looked to be generating momentum for his campaign. In mid-August, the *Farm Journal* reported that a straw poll of farmers in Iowa, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin indicated that the Union Party candidate might win 25 per cent of the vote.⁴² Buoyed by this success, Lemke told a meeting of the Farmers' Union in Iowa, 'I think I am going to be the next President.'⁴³ Lemke would soon discover, however, that outside of the farm states, his rural image and agrarian message carried little weight. With the full-scale advent of television a decade away, it is true that Lemke was largely spared the type of hype that has become associated with image since, but even so, the radio could not hide his poor speaking voice, nor the newspapers and newsreels hide his strange appearance.⁴⁴ Challenged by reporters, an angry Lemke dismissed the importance of his image. 'I'm not running for Hollywood!' he exclaimed. 'This is not a beauty race, but a contest for the presidency of the United States.'⁴⁵ As Lemke moved from the agricultural to the industrial heartlands, he found his rural message failed to resonate. In late August, he failed to impress sparse crowds in New England, the west coast and the industrial cities of the northeast. One stunned crowd in Portland, Maine, sat silently as Lemke rallied them against the 'Harvard and Yale boys sent to teach our pigs birth control.'⁴⁶

Despite Lemke's best efforts, in reality the formal Union Party campaign was little more than a sideshow to the main events of the election. Lemke toured the country selling his vision, but he found few interested in listening to him. His former union of backers, however, fared little better in their independent campaigns

undertaken nominally on his behalf. With the Democratic campaign machine now in full operation, Smith, Townsend and Coughlin found the constraints placed upon them too much. The presidential campaign drained their remaining reserves of power almost to exhaustion and they did little to mobilise the public behind Lemke's candidacy.

In late August 1936, the full extent of Townsend's public humiliation at the hands of his executive began to become apparent to the elderly doctor. Complaining of nervous exhaustion, he retreated to the central offices of the pension movement in Chicago. From there his ability to mount a personal campaign for Lemke's candidacy was severely limited. Unable to call upon the OARP's financial or organisational resources, Townsend exploited his last remaining lever of influence – his editorial control of the *National Townsend Weekly*. In an August 24 editorial, Townsend reiterated his personal position in favour of Lemke's candidacy: 'I would be a hypocrite and disloyal to my followers if I refused to support William Lemke for President of the United States.'⁴⁷ In September, Townsend re-emphasised this message, suggesting that loyal Townsendites voting for any other candidate would be 'very foolish indeed.'⁴⁸ In October, his staff writers stated it more bluntly: 'no Townsendite can be a sincere supporter of the Townsend Plan unless he votes for William Lemke for President.'⁴⁹ In a final election-eve radio address, Townsend called again for Lemke's election, instructing that every Townsendite 'must vote for men who are pledged to the Townsend plan.'⁵⁰ Lemke himself mused privately, 'I cannot imagine how any person who is for the Townsend movement can at the same time be for either Landon or Roosevelt.'⁵¹ Townsend remained resolutely behind Lemke's candidacy to the very last. It is questionable however, given the level of opposition to Lemke from amongst OARP members, whether the doctor's continued personal campaign boosted the Union Party vote.

Townsend's continued loyalty to Lemke's candidacy was not shared by his erstwhile partner Gerald Smith. Having no movement of his own, the Baptist preacher had used his partnership with Townsend to elevate himself to a position of leadership

within the OARP. This had provided him access to national platforms at the OARP and NUSJ conventions from which to establish his leadership credentials in the eyes of the massed delegates and press. These highs, however, were followed by a series of damaging blows to his personal credibility and broader political ambitions. The decision of the OARP executive board to reject Townsend's proposal that Gomer Smith be removed as a director and to limit Townsend's authority, damaged the pension leader and isolated Gerald Smith. The preacher, moreover, realised that he had misjudged the extent of Townsend's authority and with the elderly doctor now reduced in status his political value to Smith was removed. Moving swiftly, Smith sought to capitalise upon his raised profile and abandoned the doctor. Smith summed up his situation in a 1939 letter: 'As my man [Huey Long] had been killed and I had no money with which to organize independently, I had the choice between dropping back into obscurity or pursuing the course I followed.'⁵²

Lacking even the skeletal organisational structure available to support Lemke's Union Party campaign, the limitations of Smith's political influence were quickly apparent. Seeking to galvanise support of former SoW followers, Smith embarked upon a solo tour of the southern states with a loudspeaker truck. His campaign generated little interest. Like a traveling salesman, he gave no advance warning of his speaking engagements; instead, he arrived in a town and walked the streets encouraging individuals to come and hear him speak. If no crowd arrived, he would start his performance and hope that his showmanship would draw a crowd of passers-by.⁵³ Smith's abandonment of the OARP thus proved a miscalculation. In early October, Townsend, recognising that Smith had effectively resigned his position, removed the preacher from the OARP board of directors. He was once again relegated to the status of a leader without a movement.⁵⁴

Townsend's action forced Smith to make an immediate and dramatic response which only served to demonstrate the limitations of his political skills and broad public appeal. Huey Long had been successful because he had been able to combine his

oratorical skills with an adroit political mind. He had built his support amongst the poor of Louisiana over many years. As his electoral power grew, he drew together a complex political machine dedicated to him and dependent entirely upon him. By the time of his death, Long stood like a general over a vast army of dedicated workers. Smith might have shared Long's sense of dramatic oratory, but with the Long machine now behind Roosevelt, and the OARP membership having rejected his advances, the preacher's power was limited to his words alone. This was not enough to sustain Smith in a position of national political leadership. On October 17, 1936, in one final desperate attempt to capitalise upon his recent press exposure, Smith announced the formation of 'The Committee of One Million.' Its aim, he said, was 'ultimately to seize the government of the United States.' He claimed he had 400 friends in 22 cities who had pledged to him one per cent of their incomes, in order to rescue America.⁵⁵ Whatever the truth of these pledges, on October 20, at a rally held at the New York Hippodrome intended to launch his new movement, he found embarrassingly little support. The *New York Times* reported that an audience of fewer than 600 within the cavernous hall merely sat and listened politely to Smith's harangue.⁵⁶

Smith's failed political move ended any notion that he was formally involved in supporting Lemke's election campaign. Coughlin, Lemke and Townsend each issued statements disavowing any connection with Smith's new group. Townsend, his fingers most burnt by his association, was bluntest in his condemnation. 'Gerald Smith,' he wrote, 'shall henceforth have no connection with our organisation. This is definite and final.'⁵⁷ Smith's fall from grace was hard and sharp. He made only one more appearance in the *New York Times* in 1936. That was a brief item on November 2, announcing he had been arrested and jailed in New Orleans on charges of disturbing the peace, reviling an officer and using abusive language.⁵⁸ Far from leading Lemke to victory, Smith spent Election Day in jail. Smith's participation in Lemke's campaign encouraged still further the public's general view that the Union Party was

untrustworthy and potentially dangerous and likely did little to mobilise voters behind Lemke's candidacy.

With Smith and Townsend neutered by the OARP, and with his own campaign generating little press or public interest, Lemke was almost entirely reliant upon Coughlin. With a well-financed and properly organised movement working behind him, it was Coughlin who presented the greatest opportunity to rally the electorate behind the Union Party candidate. Lemke's almost total dependence upon Coughlin overexposed the Union Party campaign to a significant, uncontrollable risk. Coughlin's personal instability had already become very apparent by the time the presidential campaign moved beyond the convention halls. The pressure of taking sole responsibility for promoting Lemke's candidacy ultimately proved too much for the priest. As Coughlin failed to gain traction, Lemke's meagre electoral popularity crumbled.

When Coughlin embarked upon the campaign trail for Lemke, he entirely abandoned advocacy of the Union Party platform. Instead, his speeches focused upon the alleged weakness of the Roosevelt administration at the hands of 'international bankers' and the president's failure to fulfil promises to deliver social and economic reform set out in the 1932 Democratic platform. Utilising the national and local organisational resources of the NUSJ, Coughlin mounted a series of high-profile rallies in the large northeastern cities and in the farming centres of the west. *Social Justice* was used to promote events well in advance. The events were well-attended – every NUSJ member wanted an opportunity to see the great man in person and no expense was spared in delivering a good show. Mindful of his recent humbling by his bishop, Coughlin attempted to tread a careful line, ensuring his dramatic illustrations of the alleged failings of the federal government were not perceived as personal attacks upon the integrity of the president. Roosevelt had placed his personal credibility at the centre of his campaign strategy, but Coughlin was unable to challenge him directly on this account. In turn, this confused Coughlin's simple message of opposition and limited

his effectiveness as a rabble-rousing orator. Ultimately, Coughlin was unable to balance the pressure of expectation placed upon him to mobilise his supporters behind Lemke's campaign with the constant need to ensure he did not offend his bishop.

Despite the limitations placed on him, Coughlin nonetheless stumped hard using language familiar to his followers. In North Carolina, Coughlin instructed a crowd of stunned farmers that they should be prepared to 'repudiate your debts and if anybody tries to enforce them, repudiate them also.' In Providence, Rhode Island, he hysterically informed a crowd of 25,000 that if the Roosevelt administration continued, then there would be 'more bullet holes in the White House than you could count with an adding machine.'⁵⁹ The grandest display of his campaign came on September 6, when a Chicago crowd estimated at between 100,000 and 125,000 paying supporters experienced a massed rally that echoed in scale the dictators of the 1930s. Preceded by a motorcycle police escort, Coughlin was ushered into the park past 2,500 guards of honour. He ascended a platform 50 feet high and 50 feet wide.⁶⁰ The symbolism was deliberate and meticulously planned – indeed, the platform was an exact copy of one that Coughlin's campaign organiser Philip Johnson had witnessed when he had attended a Nazi rally in 1932.⁶¹ Coughlin launched an unparalleled attack on the weakness of the Roosevelt administration, blaming 'international bankers' who had 'set upon the American people.' He described the Democratic platform of 1932 'like a papier mache sieve through which we have fallen deeper into the depression.' Screaming himself hoarse, he concluded, 'We all know for whom we're voting if we vote for Mr. Roosevelt, for the Communists, the Socialists, the Russian lovers, the Mexican lovers, the kick-me-downers.'⁶² On September 19, in response Coughlin's rabble-rousing speech, Republican-backing newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst alleged in a front-page editorial that on orders from Moscow, the Communists were working to re-elect Roosevelt.⁶³ Encouraging panic, not promoting policy, thus become the central thrust of Coughlin's negative campaign.

The symbolism and the message of the Chicago event reinforced the stark choice between safety and chaos that Roosevelt had presented in his acceptance speech, and as the campaign moved into the autumn months, the spectacle became too much for many of Coughlin's supporters. What had been an entertainment had taken on dangerously demagogic attributes, and the priest's speeches, always a torrent of emotion, were becoming increasingly erratic and violent. Coughlin's weakness, said NUSJ campaign organiser Philip Johnson, was that 'his imagination frequently ran away from him.'⁶⁴ And so too did the crowds. In September, in New York City, an expected crowd of 60,000 turned out to be a disappointing 22,000. In a mildly hysterical tone, Coughlin explained that the election had become a contest 'between the basic principles of Christianity and the old doctrines of paganism which seem to be rising up to defy God.'⁶⁵ He informed a crowd in New Haven that they should expect the red flag of communism to be raised in the U.S., and followed this with a statement to reporters in St Louis that he foresaw the 'last general election we'll ever have unless the evils of modern capitalism are immediately eliminated.' Finally, in Philadelphia, he announced that the nation had to be ready to resort to bullets to preserve American liberties. A new revolution would be needed to free the people from the domination of the federal government.⁶⁶ The violence and spectacle of Coughlin's campaign reduced appeal for Lemke in the wider electorate. Between early September and mid-October, Lemke's forecast share of the popular vote fell by 1.4 points to just 3.6 per cent.⁶⁷

In August 1936, in direct contrast to Lemke, Townsend, Smith and Coughlin's negative campaign message, Roosevelt set out on the campaign trail taking every advantage available to him from the privilege of his office to demonstrate his central campaign message that his New Deal was delivering both economic recovery and a safety net for those who had yet to feel the benefits of the gradual return to prosperity. By providing clear and continuous evidence to back up his assertions, Roosevelt was easily able to counter the increasingly shrill accusations of his opponents.

To underline Roosevelt's central campaign message of the success of his administration, he did all he could privately to enhance the effectiveness of the New Deal agencies. When the National Emergency Council provided the president with evidence that the recovery had begun in 1932, his personal secretary, Stephen Early, was dispatched to inform them that the report would need to be rewritten. 'The President is insistent,' he wrote, 'that the low point in the Depression be fixed as March, 1933, or early in the year 1933 – this is for obvious reasons.'⁶⁸ Roosevelt instructed Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace: 'Henry, through July, August, September, October and up to the fifth of November, I want cotton to sell at 12 cents. I do not care how you do it. That is your problem. It can't go below 12 cents. Is that clear?' When the Works Progress Administration planned its annual reduction of relief workers during the winter months, when the weather restricted building projects, Roosevelt informed Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., 'You tell [Assistant WPA Administrator] Corrington Gill that I don't give a damn where he gets the money from but not one person is to be laid off on the first of October.'⁶⁹

With its agencies working at their maximum capacity, further evidence of the effectiveness of the New Deal came in late August, when Roosevelt embarked upon a tour of farm states gripped by a drought equal in size to one-third of the nation. Determined to demonstrate leadership, the president held five major conferences with governors and state officials to agree how the federal government might be able to assist. As a result, the federal administration was mobilised into action to provide loans, relief payments and short-term employment to over 400,000 families.⁷⁰ Roosevelt's actions provided ample evidence of the effectiveness of the federal government and its New Deal agencies to respond when state resources proved inadequate. His swift response to the crisis placed the president's opponents on the defensive, particularly Landon, who as governor of a drought state was invited to attend one of the emergency conferences. Forced to accept Roosevelt's lead during the proceedings, and unable for the sake of his constituents who genuinely needed

federal support to use the conference as a grandstand for his own anti-New-Deal campaign (it was later pointed out on the campaign trail by a Roosevelt official that three quarters of the public money spent in 1935 by Landon in Kansas had come via New Deal agencies), the Republican candidate could only stand meekly by. Leaving the conference, Landon was asked what he thought of Roosevelt; he humbly replied, 'He's a very fine, charming gentleman.'⁷¹ This event was a significant embarrassment to Landon's campaign. With the economy now burgeoning, Benjamin Anderson of the Chase Manhattan Bank and Leonard P. Ayres of the Cleveland Trust Company visited Landon to confirm their belief that the recovery was genuine and would continue to move upwards. Landon later recalled, 'I knew then that I was beaten.'⁷²

Seeking to disprove Roosevelt's message that his New Deal reforms were gradually bringing about a recovery in the nation's economic situation, his opponents embarked on an increasingly negative campaign. By late September, it was clear that there was a large, immovable block of support in favour of the New Deal which was holding firm despite their vigorous attacks. This was bitterly ironic for Lemke and his Union Party colleagues who had found elements of their own independent social and economic reforms absorbed into the New Deal and which the president placed centrally in his own campaign. With Roosevelt having integrated large numbers of newly unemployed, moderate former middle-class voters who had formed the core support of the independent radical reform movements within his emerging electoral coalition, his opponents found themselves directing their appeals towards the most extreme and discontented fringes of society. From this position, they found that no matter what dramatic display of oratory they might deliver, they were unable to broaden their support amongst the electorate. Thus, when Roosevelt began his official campaign tour on September 29 at the New York State Democratic Convention, his opponents' campaigns had largely been derailed. Under these circumstances, it was opportune for Roosevelt to ridicule his opponents for their excess. So desperate had they become, the president suggested, that they were dragging out red herrings 'to divert attention

from the trail of their own weaknesses.’ He directly refuted accusations that he was a Communist and seized the political high ground. ‘I have not sought, I do not seek, I repudiate the support of any advocate of Communism or of any other alien “ism”,’ he proclaimed, ‘which would by fair means or foul change our American democracy.’ Returning to his central campaign theme, he warned that it was through *not* voting for him that the nation would risk a turn towards Communism. His opponents, by encouraging economic and social unrest, he explained, would establish the conditions in which Communism would thrive. In sharp contrast, the Democrats, by tackling the causes of unrest, struck Communism at its very roots.⁷³ The President’s cool reason was in contrast with the intemperance of his opponents. ‘If it is “Communism” to urge a squarer deal for labor and the farmers,’ the *New York Daily News* commented, ‘then there are a lot of “Communists” in this country.’⁷⁴ Throughout the remainder of October, Roosevelt toured the nation delivering a series of carefully planned speeches before ever-increasing crowds, drawing the difference in economic and social conditions before and after the New Deal. Voters who had benefited from the New Deal’s social and economic reforms cared little for their origins. The passage of the Second New Deal and Roosevelt’s willingness to embrace the success it had given him had thus largely rendered the Union Party irrelevant even before its formation.

The greatest symbol of the success of the Second New Deal and the comparative peripheral nature of the Union Party was the implementation of the pension element of the Social Security legislation. In the autumn of 1936, as the campaign was moving into its final stage, millions of Americans received in the post a document from the newly established Social Security Board. It explained that from January 1, 1937, the payroll tax would take effect and a Social Security account would be set up for them ‘which will give about 26 million working people something to live on when they are old and have stopped working.’ In sharp contrast to the direct accusations issued by Coughlin against the president’s personal integrity at the OARP convention, the letter was a vivid illustration that the president could be trusted and was

making a real difference to the lives of millions of Americans. This powerful statement was best illustrated by the final sentence of the letter – a solemn promise that from the moment of retirement, ‘you will get a government check for the rest of your life. This check will come to you as your right.’⁷⁵ Through this carefully calculated political action, the administration demonstrated that whilst the president’s opponents could carp, criticise and speculate from the sidelines, only Roosevelt had the power to provide the dollars needed to change real lives.

With Social Security now a reality, his opponents were forced into a final desperate series of appeals that only reinforced their position upon the political fringes. For the Republicans, the focus of their campaign was the payroll tax required to fund the new Social Security provision. In an October speaking engagement in Milwaukee, Landon proclaimed that Social Security was ‘unjust, unworkable, stupidly drafted and wastefully financed.’ Unemployed relief should be a matter for the states, and pensions should be funded through a special tax. The Republican Party, he concluded, would have nothing to do with a proposal that involved the federal government prying ‘into the personal records of 26 million people.’⁷⁶ Seeking to scare workers, Landon specifically targeted the payroll tax that would fund the scheme. In late-October, placards sprang up in factories announcing that all workers would be subject to a permanent pay cut from January 1 unless they rejected Roosevelt. In addition, notes included in pay packets informed workers that employers would be compelled to make a 1 per cent pay deduction from wages and turn it over to the federal government. ‘You might get this money back,’ the note concluded, but ‘there is NO guarantee.’ In his final campaign address, Landon attempted to rally worker support. How, he asked, would the federal administration keep track of these 26 million Americans? ‘Are their photographs going to be kept on file in a Washington office? Or are they going to have identification tags put around their necks?’ The following day the Hearst press ran with the front-page headline: ‘Do You Want A Tag And A Number In The Name Of False Security?’⁷⁷

Social Security and the administration's record of labour relations also become the focus of Coughlin's last weeks on the campaign trail. On October 26, he accused Roosevelt of being a 'scab president' and termed the administration 'the greatest employer of scab labor in history.'⁷⁸ In his final campaign rally on October 29, Coughlin concluded his frenzied address by observing that with the New Deal 'oppressing labor and fastening shackles upon the wrist of the people,' it was no wonder that 'the Comintern in Moscow advises its members here to vote for Roosevelt.'⁷⁹ The public was not interested in listening. Coughlin became increasingly frustrated, erratic and ultimately extreme as his campaign unravelled and his credibility crumbled. Hounded by reporters in Rhode Island, he snatched one man's glasses from his face and pushed him against a wall. Ultimately restrained and dragged away, Coughlin shouted back, 'If I ever see that fellow again, I'll tear him to pieces!'⁸⁰ Three days later, at a rally in Detroit, a heckler jumped onto the stage and emptied a feather pillow over Coughlin's head; in a fit of rage, the priest grabbed the man by the throat, pounded him and pinned him to the floor. The press reported that Coughlin was completely 'losing his grip.'⁸¹ It was clear now that Coughlin's shrill appeals were reducing Lemke's potential support even amongst the priest's most desperate and radicalised followers. One correspondent informed Farley in late October that 'there is doubt in the minds' of Coughlin's closest supporters, 'as to whether he may not be leading them down a "blind alley."⁸² Another correspondent observed bluntly that there could be no doubt that Coughlin's statements and attitudes had cost him a tremendous amount of influence: 'Many of his former warmest friends in Philadelphia,' he wrote, 'are disgusted with him.'⁸³ On October 31, in a final indignity, Coughlin was once again forced at the direct instruction of his bishop to issue an apology at the derogatory language he had directly towards the president.⁸⁴

As Coughlin's campaign wound to a close he was exhausted, sick and irritable. There can be no doubt that he had campaigned hard. With his sense of occasion and personal star quality, he had generated genuine moments of real excitement. This

drive for drama, however, was not enough to turn voters away from an administration that was demonstrably delivering on the promises they had made in 1932, whatever Coughlin's and Lemke's suggestions to the contrary. Furthermore, the distance between the priest and the Union Party candidate grew so wide as the months passed that the connection was often forgotten. Coughlin had made it his mission to warn the public of the dangers of re-electing Franklin Roosevelt. However, he did not present Lemke's positive platform of reforms as a viable alternative. The campaign had succeeded in propelling the priest into the headlines – but ultimately at the cost of Lemke's already undermined campaign.

The gap between Roosevelt's centralist positive campaign message and his opponents' negativity is illustrated by opinion polling on public support for the payroll tax element of the Social Security legislation. A Gallup poll taken in November revealed that 68 per cent of the population supported the payroll tax, including 82 per cent of Democrats, and, crucially, 73 per cent of Unionists and 50 per cent of Republicans. With the majority of the electorate agreeing with the president rather than the position advocated by their own parties, it is no surprise that neither the Republican nor Union Party candidates were able to generate momentum behind their anti-New-Deal crusades. Roosevelt later commented that his opponents' accusations were 'so obviously untrue and unfair that we were helped.'⁸⁵

With unemployment down to 15.3 per cent (the lowest rate since 1931) and the Dow Jones hitting 189 points (a 100 per cent increase since the mid-terms in 1934), Roosevelt ended his campaign with a final rally at Madison Square Garden on October 31. His speech was one of the most powerful of his career and once again presented a vivid contrast of his positive message of hope against his opponents' warnings of despair.⁸⁶ Yet again, without providing names, Roosevelt listed the mysterious forces opposed to his re-election: 'business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, and war profiteering.' He continued, 'Never before, in all our history have these forces been so united as they are today. They are

unanimous in their hate for me and I welcome their hatred.' He had battled on the people's behalf to save them from the evil intent of his opponents, and, should the people will it, he would continue the fight. With the crowd rising in excitement, he concluded: 'I should like to have it said of my first administration that in it the forces of selfishness, of lust for power, met their match. I should like to have it said of my second administration that in it these forces met their master.'⁸⁷

Roosevelt's Madison Square Garden address was an exceptional performance and one to which his opponents were in no position to respond in either style or content. At the end of the campaign, the *New York Times* characterised Landon as 'divided between confidence and hope.' He accepted that his campaign message had failed to broaden his appeal amongst the voters and that it was extremely unlikely he would secure any support in the western states. He clung on to the aspiration, however, that his conservative message might sustain the party's support in the previously solid northeast. This, coupled with some Republican gains in Congress, would provide a solid basis for the party to build upon for the 1940 elections.⁸⁸

Undermined or deserted by their supporters, Coughlin, Smith and Townsend were unable to rally the electorate behind the Union Party's transient protest at the continuation of the Roosevelt presidency. Despite his faltering campaign, Lemke remained committed to turning the Union Party into a genuine third party. There can be no doubting his commitment to the Union Party cause or his willingness to innovate in the delivery of his campaign message. In an age when presidential campaigns were fought from the back of a train, he became the first candidate to use an aeroplane. Funded by Lemke taking out a mortgage on his North Dakota home, in a final exhausting haul from October 14 to Election Day, he visited 40 cities across the nation. Ultimately, few third-party candidates have made such an effort in their campaigns. He travelled over 30,000 miles, visited 33 states and gave hundreds of speeches.⁸⁹ Yey, despite his effort, the Union Party, forced to the fringes of the political spectrum, offered only very limited electoral appeal. Beyond his traditional farming constituency, Lacking

in the basic organisational and financial support he needed, Lemke was unable to demonstrate the relevance of his campaign or of his party.

The final Gallup poll demonstrated the effectiveness of Roosevelt's campaign. Between early October and the beginning of November, Roosevelt had increased his popularity by 2.2 points to 52.8 per cent, whilst both Landon and Lemke fell back sharply. Roosevelt's lead over his Republican opponent now stood at 11 per cent. Lemke's final polling figure of 2.2 per cent was half that he had been forecast to receive a month earlier.⁹⁰ Returning home to North Dakota to cast his ballot, Lemke's final rally before his loyal local supporters once again reflected the suspicion and negativity at the heart of the Union Party campaign. Rather than use his time promoting the central proposals of his platform, Lemke bitterly accused Jim Farley of running a dirty campaign against him. Lemke refused to accept responsibility for his failure, preferring even to the last to find in the actions of others. 'I find,' he declared, 'that he has let a number of striped cats out of the bag in this State. These animals have no regard for the truth or fact and run true to form in this administration.' 'They and the truth,' he concluded, 'are total strangers.'⁹¹ It was too late, however, to shift the view of the vast majority of the electorate. They had rejected Lemke on the campaign trail and they would also reject him at the ballot box.

¹ John Nystul to WS, July 13, 1936, WLP.

² Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 577.

³ FDR, 'Acceptance Speech for the Renomination for the Presidency, Philadelphia, Pa., June 27, 1936,' *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15314> (12 September 2010).

⁴ Burns, *Roosevelt*, 266-268.

⁵ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 203.

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- ⁶ Jenner, *FDR's Republicans*, 72.
- ⁷ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 101.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 102; Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 606.
- ⁹ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 103.
- ¹⁰ Democratic National Committee, 'Democratic Party Platform, 1936,' *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29596> (12 September 2010); *SJ*, June 22, 1936.
- ¹¹ *NYT*, July 16, 1936.
- ¹² Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 10; *NYT*, July 16, 1936
- ¹³ *NYT*, July 16, 1936.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*; *NTW*, July 27, 1936.
- ¹⁵ Excerpt from the transcript of an interview between CC and Sheldon Marcus, SMP.
- ¹⁶ *NYT*, July 17, 1936.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*.
- ²⁰ *NTW*, July 27, 1936.
- ²¹ *NYT*, July 20, 1936.
- ²² *NYT*, July 20, 1936; *NYT*, July 21, 1936.
- ²³ *NTW*, July 27, 1936.
- ²⁴ *NYT*, July 17, 1936.
- ²⁵ *NYT*, July 18, 1936; *NYT*, July 21, 1936.
- ²⁶ 'Catholic Voter' to the Editor of the *NYT*, July 17, 1936, published *NYT*, July 20, 1936; Ernest M. Bristol to the Editor of the *NYT*, July 16, 1936, published *NYT*, July 20, 1936.
- ²⁷ *NYT*, July 19, 1936.
- ²⁸ *NYT*, July 24, 1936.

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- ²⁹ *NYT*, August 14, 1936.
- ³⁰ *NYT*, August 16, 1936.
- ³¹ *SJ*, August 24, 1936.
- ³² *NYT*, August 14, 1936.
- ³³ *NYT*, August 16, 1936.
- ³⁴ *NYT*, August 17, 1936.
- ³⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 25, 31.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 25, 31, 33.
- ³⁷ *NYT*, August 14, 1936.
- ³⁸ *NYT*, August 15, 1936.
- ³⁹ Smith, *To Save a Nation*, 40.
- ⁴⁰ *NYT*, August 2, 1936.
- ⁴¹ WEB to WL, July 8, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁴² *NYT*, August 17, 1936.
- ⁴³ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 324.
- ⁴⁴ Smith, *To Save a Nation*, 40.
- ⁴⁵ *NYT*, September 21, 1936.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*.
- ⁴⁷ *NTW*, August 24, 1936.
- ⁴⁸ *NTW*, September 14, 1936.
- ⁴⁹ *NTW*, October 12, 1936.
- ⁵⁰ *NTW*, November 9, 1936.
- ⁵¹ WL to D. S. Walters, July 21, 1936, WLP.
- ⁵² Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 63.
- ⁵³ Bennett, *Demagogues*, 238.
- ⁵⁴ *NYT*, October 18, 1936.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

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- ⁵⁶ *NYT*, October 21, 1936.
- ⁵⁷ *NTW*, November 2, 1936.
- ⁵⁸ *NYT*, November 3, 1936.
- ⁵⁹ *NYT*, August 3, 1936; *NYT*, August 6, 1936.
- ⁶⁰ *SJ*, September 14, 1936; *NYT*, September 7, 1936
- ⁶¹ Franze Schulze, *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 126.
- ⁶² *NYT*, September 7, 1936.
- ⁶³ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 619.
- ⁶⁴ Excerpt from the transcript of an interview between Philip Johnson and Sheldon Marcus, SMP.
- ⁶⁵ *NYT*, September 12, 1936.
- ⁶⁶ *NYT*, September 17, 22, 27, 1936.
- ⁶⁷ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 34, 37.
- ⁶⁸ Burns, *Roosevelt*, 268.
- ⁶⁹ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 139.
- ⁷⁰ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 278.
- ⁷¹ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 609-610, 623.
- ⁷² Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 278.
- ⁷³ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 620.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 622.
- ⁷⁵ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 282.
- ⁷⁶ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 612-614.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 635-636.
- ⁷⁸ *NYT*, October 27, 1936.
- ⁷⁹ *NYT*, October 30, 1936.
- ⁸⁰ *NYT*, October 14, 1936.

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- ⁸¹ *NYT*, October 18, 1936.
- ⁸² Francis B. Condon to JAF, October 21, 1936, POF.
- ⁸³ H. Eugene Heine to JAF, September 10, 1936, POF.
- ⁸⁴ *NYT*, November 1, 1936.
- ⁸⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 40; FDR to Josephus Daniels, November 9, 1936, Elliot Roosevelt ed. *The Roosevelt Letters*, 191.
- ⁸⁶ Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 284.
- ⁸⁷ Black, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, 389.
- ⁸⁸ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 111.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁰ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 33, 39.
- ⁹¹ *NYT*, November 3, 1936.

Chapter Six

Why Did the Union Party Fail?

The campaign was so amateurish and so poorly organized and the personality of our candidate was so ineffective that I was surprised that we got as many votes as we did.

Gerald L.K. Smith, February 6, 1970.¹

Upon the formation of the Union Party, Gerald Smith claimed that 20 million Americans under the influence of Father Coughlin and Doctor Townsend would rise in support of Lemke's candidacy.² As the electorate arrived at the polling booths on November 3, 1936, however, such aspirations had long evaporated. Lemke and his backers had simply failed to connect with the electorate, achieving only 891,886 votes (1.95 per cent of the popular vote) and no votes in the Electoral College. He received more than 4 per cent of the vote in only 8 states (North Dakota, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Oregon, Wisconsin, Ohio and Michigan). His best showing in any state, 13 per cent, was in his home state of North Dakota, where he was also successful at regaining his seat in Congress.³ In comparison, Roosevelt's grand centralist coalition delivered him 60.8 per cent of the popular vote and 523 votes in the Electoral College.⁴ In December 1936, addressing what remained of his party, a solemn Lemke looked back on the election and could only muse: 'About two or three million people applauded for me just like you did today, but they forgot about me on November third.'⁵

With the Union Party polarised to the fringes of the political spectrum, crusading against the excesses of the New Deal, Lemke lacked broad electoral appeal. Equally, the limited success of the Republicans' anti-New-Deal strategy was reflected in Alf Landon's poor record. The Republican candidate secured only 36.5 per cent of the

popular vote and 8 votes in the Electoral College. He received his strongest support in the northeastern states, winning his only victories in Maine and Vermont, but still accumulated only 43.4 per cent of the popular vote in the region. In the west, Landon's conservative appeal fell flat, polling only 34.4 per cent of the vote and failing to win a single state. The party's traditional strength amongst middle-class voters in urban areas evaporated; Landon failed to come close to winning in any of the nation's largest 12 cities.⁶ The election outcome might have been a disappointment for Landon, but for Lemke it was devastating. The gap between expectations in June 1936 upon the launch of the Union Party and the dismal showing for its candidate in November is so large that it requires a post-mortem. Why did the Union Party fail?

In his final electoral forecast, published on October 25, 1936, DNC Deputy Chairman Emil Hurja had established the threat that he perceived that the Union Party might present in those 13 states he considered most vulnerable to defeat for Roosevelt (Figure 1). Hurja had forecast that in these states Lemke would poll

Figure 1: Forecast Union Party Vote in 1936 Presidential Election, Derived From National Inquirer Poll Published October 25, 1936, Compared to Final Election Results.

	Estimated Union Party Vote	Final Union Party Vote	Difference between forecast and final result
Michigan	13.4%	4.2%	-9.2%
Minnesota	11.8%	6.6%	-5.2%
Idaho	10.1%	3.8%	-6.3%
Maryland	10.0%	0.0%	-10.0%
Rhode Island	10.0%	6.3%	-3.7%
Ohio	9.5%	4.4%	-5.1%
Iowa	9.4%	2.6%	-6.8%
Arizona	9.2%	2.7%	-6.5%
Wyoming	8.1%	1.6%	-6.5%
Colorado	6.7%	2.0%	-4.7%
Illinois	6.5%	2.3%	-4.2%
Nebraska	6.2%	2.1%	-4.1%
Indiana	5.9%	1.2%	-4.7%
West Virginia	3.6%	0.0%	-3.6%
Pennsylvania	3.1%	1.6%	-1.5%
Kansas	3.0%	0.0%	-3.0%

an average of 7.6 per cent of the vote. In reality, however, the average vote cast for Lemke in these states was only 2.6 per cent. The perceived threat of the Union Party constructed in the minds of the DNC had proved to be a significant overestimation. Figure 2 details the final breakdown of the Union Party's national vote.⁷

Figure 2: Total Vote for William Lemke, 1936 Presidential Election.

STATE	WILLIAM LEMKE (Union)	
	Popular vote	% of total popular vote
North Dakota	36,708	13.4
Minnesota	74,296	6.6
Massachusetts	118,639	6.4
Rhode Island	19,569	6.3
Oregon	21,831	5.3
Wisconsin	60,297	4.8
Ohio	132,212	4.4
Michigan	75,795	4.2
Idaho	7,684	3.8
South Dakota	10,338	3.5
Connecticut	21,805	3.2
Arizona	3,307	2.7
Iowa	29,687	2.6
Washington	17,463	2.5
Maine	7,581	2.5
Montana	5,549	2.4
Illinois	89,439	2.3
New Hampshire	4,819	2.2
Nebraska	12,847	2.1
Colorado	9,962	2.0
Pennsylvania	67,467	1.6
Wyoming	1,653	1.6
Kentucky	12,501	1.3
Indiana	19,407	1.2
Missouri	14,630	0.8
New Mexico	924	0.5
Utah	1,121	0.5
New Jersey	9,407	0.5
Texas	3,281	0.4
Delaware	442	0.3
Alabama	551	0.2
Virginia	233	0.1
Tennessee	296	0.1
Georgia	141	0.0
Arkansas	4	0.0
Total	891,886	2.6

The Union Party may have failed to meet the ambitions of either its founder or its union of backers to displace the president, but it still galvanised nearly 900,000 voters to support Lemke. It is not possible, of course, to identify exactly who voted for Lemke in the 1936 election. It is possible, however, through use of opinion polling data gathered by Gallup during the course of the election, supplemented by other available data, to identify general trends. Together the data suggests a particular type of individual who might have been more likely to register his vote for Lemke.

An analysis of Lemke's performance at regional level suggests that his appeal, such as it was, was limited to a small number of western rural states. Lemke achieved 5 per cent or more of the vote in 8 states. Of these 6 were in the west (North Dakota, Minnesota, Oregon, Wisconsin, Ohio and Michigan). These were states, for example

Ohio, Minnesota and North Dakota, whose legislators had shown consistent support for the passage of Lemke's agricultural reform proposals in Congress. As a proportion of the popular vote, Lemke achieved an average of 2.9 per cent in the west equating to an average of 26,544 votes per state. The remaining two states where Lemke received more than 5 per cent of the vote were in the northeast (Massachusetts and Rhode Island). He received an average of 1.9 per cent of the popular vote in this region equating to an average vote of 20,811. Lemke's support in the northeast (in those states in which he was able to obtain a place on the ballot) is correlated with those states where Father Coughlin's radio audience was at its strongest. Lemke performed extremely poorly in the south where his connection with Coughlin and the Catholic Church held little appeal. He was unable to secure a place on the ballot in 5 southern states and he achieved more than 1 per cent only in Kentucky. Overall he averaged 0.2 per cent of the popular vote in the region equating to an average of 2,434 votes. Lemke's extremely poor showing across the south suggests that Gerald Smith's contribution to his campaign was negligible.⁸

While Lemke might be expected to perform poorly in comparison with his major party challengers, a more interesting analysis can be made by comparing his results with those of the three significant third-party challenges since the Civil War – those of James Weaver (People's Party) in 1892, Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive Party) in 1912 and Robert La Follette (Progressive Party) in 1924. The gap between Lemke's average vote and that received by these candidates at state level is considerable. In total, Lemke received 5 per cent or more of the popular vote in 5 states. In comparison, the average significant third-party candidate received this level of the vote in 45 states. Lemke's candidacy clearly failed to connect with the electorate to the extent of these previous campaigns.⁹

Given the gap in the total number of voters registered, it is more interesting to consider Lemke's relative performance against the average third-party candidate as set

out in Figure 3. To judge the relative performance of the candidates, the states have

Figure 3: Analysis of the Relative Performance of the Average Significant Third-Party Candidate and the Union Party at State Level.

	% of significant 3rd Party vote split into quartiles	% of Union Party vote split into quartiles
States most likely to support significant 3rd party candidates		
Alabama	1	4
Colorado	1	4
Idaho	1	3
North Dakota	1	1
South Dakota	1	3
States likely to support significant 3rd party candidates		
Arizona	2	4
Minnesota	2	2
Montana	2	4
Nebraska	2	4
Oregon	2	3
Washington	2	4
Wisconsin	2	3
Wyoming	2	4
States less likely to support significant 3rd party candidates		
Arkansas	3	4
Delaware	3	4
Georgia	3	4
Illinois	3	4
Iowa	3	4
Maine	3	4
Massachusetts	3	2
Michigan	3	3
New Jersey	3	4
New Mexico	3	4
Ohio	3	3
Pennsylvania	3	4
Texas	3	4
Utah	3	4
States unlikely to support significant 3rd party candidates		
Connecticut	4	3
Indiana	4	4
Kentucky	4	4
Missouri	4	4
New Hampshire	4	4
Rhode Island	4	2
Tennessee	4	4
Virginia	4	4

been divided into quartiles ranked on the average votes received by the significant third-party candidate. This generates a ranking of those states according to likelihood of voting for a significant third-party candidate. Only the states in which the Union Party appeared on the ballot have been included. The same approach has then been

taken with the percentage of the vote received by Lemke at state level. The difference between the columns produces a comparison of relative performance. This analysis suggests that there is a close correlation between those states both 'less' and 'unlikely' to vote for the average significant third-party candidate and the Union Party. That Lemke would poll poorly in these states, therefore, is not a surprise. What is more interesting is that Lemke's performance was below expectations in those states 'likely' to support significant third-party candidates and, with the exception of North Dakota, considerably below expectations in those states where significant third-party candidates had previously found the greatest levels of support.¹⁰ Together these factors suggest that Lemke appealed more to a fringe vote than these previous significant third-party candidates.

Lemke's marginal appeal is sustained by contemporary analysis. Immediately following Lemke's defeat, Rodney Dutcher scrutinised the failure of the Union Party in the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*. Dutcher reported that 'cagier veteran politicians' had predicted that support for the new party would decline from the levels experienced upon its formation. These politicians, he wrote, were in agreement that the Union Party would not be able to generate popular appeal amongst reform-minded voters unless it had a 'central driving' theme. Lemke, as a 'not so well known candidate,' would struggle, Dutcher's sources concluded, to achieve the same number of votes as Coughlin 'hammering away for state ownership of banks' or Townsend 'vehemently preaching his old age pension plan.' In the absence of this clarity of purpose, Lemke's 'grudge fight' simply failed to 'rouse' reform-minded members of the electorate.¹¹

The nature of the fringe voter attracted to Lemke's campaign can be determined by an analysis of Gallup polling data. Figure 4 brings together available voting data from the Gallup polls that might be used to suggest the likely gender, age and class of Union Party supporters. Based on the four 'special groups' of voters that Gallup identified, and accepting that as the percentages included are so small it is only

possible to draw general conclusions, it can be suggested that Lemke voters were more likely to be in receipt of government relief than any of the other categories and to identify themselves as farmers. They were least likely to be young. Indeed a poll published by Gallup on September 27, 1936, found that Lemke voters were twice as likely to be aged 45-54 or 55 and over as aged 21-24 or 25-34.¹²

Figure 4: Percentage of Votes for Lemke in Gallup Polls amongst 'Special Groups'

Gallup 'Special Groups'	% of vote in August 16 poll	% of vote in August 30 poll	% of vote in September 13 poll	% of vote in October 25 poll	Average % Vote
Farmer	3.4	5	-	4.5	4.3
Young (21-24)	2.2	2	-	2.3	2.2
Women	2.3	3.4	-	2.9	2.9
Relief	4.2	5.3	5.3	5.6	5.1

Gallup did not include race within its 'special groups,' but a poll conducted by Gallup in October 1936 found that, nationally, 69 per cent of African-American voters supported Roosevelt's re-election. Combined with Lemke's poor electoral performance in the south and the large urban cities of the northeast, this suggests that Lemke held little appeal to African-American voters.¹³

Finally, although Gallup did not break down Lemke's voters by religion, an analysis of the election returns undertaken by Samuel Lubell revealed that outside of North Dakota, where Lemke's support was particularly strong amongst the German Protestant population, he received more than 10 per cent of the vote in only thirty-nine counties nationally. Of these, twenty-one were in counties with a majority Catholic population. The only four cities where Lemke got more than 5 per cent of the vote were also heavily Catholic. In Cincinnati, Lemke's best showing of 12 per cent came from the heavily Catholic Price Hill. To place these results within context, however, Gallup polls demonstrated that Roosevelt received the support of 78 per cent of Catholics nationally. Lemke's candidacy might have proved popular amongst certain parts of the Catholic population, but despite Coughlin's erstwhile popularity, only amongst a very small proportion of the Catholic electorate.¹⁴

This analysis suggests that, based on the data drawn from these various sources, and accepting that this can create only a very general picture, the ‘typical’ Lemke supporter was likely to be either a middle-aged, white, western, Protestant farmer or a northeastern, middle-aged, white Catholic in receipt of federal relief. This picture of a ‘typical’ Union Party supporter fits well with the general appeal of Lemke, his backers and the central agricultural, pension and broader economic and social reforms contained within the Union Party platform. These would be voters who had been hit hard by the effects of the Depression. As older, white members of the electorate, they had possibly lost secure jobs and even their savings. That they were also likely to be continuing to claim federal relief suggests that they had yet to feel the benefits of the gradual return to prosperity brought about by the Second New Deal.

This view of a ‘typical’ Lemke voter is further enhanced and consolidated by an additional set of data gathered by Gallup across a broad range of political and social questions. Figure 5 sets out the responses received by Gallup in a number of surveys undertaken in 1936 where the respondents were asked to identify their political alignment. The results present a striking picture. Union Party supporters were more

Figure 5: Comparison of Views of Lemke Voters with Those of the Major Political Parties in Political and Social Issues According to Gallup Polls.

Gallup Political and Social Polls	% of Lemke voters	% Difference between Union Party and Democratic Voters	% Difference between Union Party and Republican Voters
In favour of Labour Unions	85	2	20
In favour of a national referendum before Congress can declare war	86	16	18
In favour of the pension element of Social Security	73	-9	23
In favour of the Post Office Department being put under the Civil Service	87	3	-1
In favour of 2nd Roosevelt Administration being more liberal than the 1st	50	31	46

likely than those of both either major political parties to support unions and less likely to trust politicians in relation to a decision to intervene in foreign wars. They were also overwhelmingly supportive of limiting political inference in running national services like

the Post Office. Together these polling results suggest that the 'typical' Lemke supporter was generally more suspicious of those in positions of power, be they politicians or employers, than those of the major parties. This sense of alienation and suspicion reinforces the general picture created by the analysis in Figure 4, and is further enhanced by the responses to the final two polling questions. Lemke supporters were overwhelmingly supportive of the steps taken through Social Security to provide a pension for elderly Americans, sustaining the view that these were likely voters to be sympathetic to the safety net provided by the Second New Deal. Finally, and most tellingly, 50 per cent of Lemke supporters desired the second Roosevelt administration to be more liberal than his first. This was an overwhelming 31 per cent higher than supporters of the Democratic Party.¹⁵ This again supports the notion that Lemke's supporters were more likely than those of the major parties to be on the fringes of the political spectrum. They were likely those most resentful about the loss of status they had suffered due to the worst effects of the Depression, but also those who were least likely to have felt the benefit of the return to prosperity. Equally, they were likely those who recognised the benefits of the safety net provided by the federal government to support them in these difficult times, but were also likely most suspicious of politicians and figures of higher status that they believed had unjustly caused their current desperate situation. As historian James Shenton concluded, the Union Party had become the representative of a group of people 'alienated not only from American society, and from the New Deal and its leader, but also from their own church and its priesthood.'¹⁶ The discontented minority that voted for Lemke did not represent the average American in 1936. Why then did the Union Party lack in appeal to the average American voter? The answer provides the key to understanding the Union Party's failure in the 1936 presidential election.

The Union Party's campaign in 1936 was full of drama, incident and entertainment, with the press recording all the colourful speeches of Coughlin and his erstwhile allies. These dramatic oratorical displays, however, failed to connect with the

electorate. Roosevelt defined the election as a referendum on the success of the New Deal and his opponents, offering only a limited alternative and marred by excessive hyperbole, struggled on the campaign trail. On Election Day, Lemke's appeal was limited to a disgruntled minority. A number of additional factors, both constitutional and political, contributed to the third party's failure.

The principal reason for the failure of the Union Party was the success of the New Deal. Fighting from the fringes of the political spectrum, the Union Party and its backers naturally limited their appeal amongst the electorate. In contrast, Roosevelt's positive, centralist campaign consolidated support for the New Deal and drew together sections of the electorate unconvinced by his opponents' negative campaigns. The nature of the mass coalition of voters established in support of the Second New Deal is revealed by an analysis of Gallup opinion polls undertaken amongst key voter groups between July and October 1936. In addition to the majority of farmers (51.3 per cent) supporting Roosevelt's re-election, Gallup found majority support for his candidacy amongst workers (64.7 per cent), women (51.4 per cent) and young voters (57.4 per cent). Like farmers, these voters had benefited directly from Second New Deal legislation providing jobs, union recognition and worker rights; federal relief and employment programmes to feed and support families; and federal assistance to stay in school or attend college.¹⁷ As well as expanding and consolidating Democratic support amongst these traditional producer and consumer groups, the success of the Second New Deal had helped Roosevelt to extend his support amongst African-American voters and the new category of 'Relief' voters – that mass of unemployed voters sustained through sources of federal relief that had put in place by the New Deal legislation.

In 1932, despite the national rejection of Hoover, African-American voters had remained loyal to the party of Lincoln. Indeed, given the southern-dominated Democratic Party's continued antipathy towards the black vote, they expected little from Roosevelt. However, the social legislation passed in the Second New Deal was

colour-blind; as a result, African-Americans, who counted amongst their population some of the poorest of the nation's citizens, received substantial assistance in the form of relief payments, federal employment, farm subsidies, unemployment insurance and pensions, which transformed both their economic position and their political loyalties. As a consequence, Gallup found in October 1936 that 69 per cent of African-American voters supported Roosevelt's re-election.¹⁸ This shift of the African-American vote alone was enough to alter voting patterns. However, when combined with the so-called 'great migration' of African-American voters, when millions of poor blacks had left the rural south during the Depression to seek opportunities – including unimpeded voting rights – in the nation's largest cities, it had a transformative effect on the electoral popularity of the Democratic Party, especially in the urban northeast.¹⁹ Gallup reported that Roosevelt enjoyed the majority of support in eleven of the nation's largest cities, from San Francisco to Chicago to New York.²⁰

Finally, and decisively, the success of the Second New Deal had brought a new, amorphous mass of voters out in support of the president, drawn from all racial, gender and class groups: the 'Reliever' vote. Gallup found that Roosevelt's support amongst those in receipt of federal relief far outweighed that amongst any other category of voter, increasing from an already overwhelming 75.9 per cent at the start of the campaign to 78.8 per cent at the close. The introduction of Social Security payments from January 1937, announced during the final stages of the presidential campaign, was a powerful demonstration of the transformative effect that the New Deal had brought to a broad spectrum of the American electorate, from this new mass of unemployed members of the former middle classes who had lost everything in the Depression to the poorest white and African-American voters who had never had anything. These 8 to 9 million individuals, each with first-hand experience of the New Deal safety net, readily heeded the president's warning that only a vote for Roosevelt would protect their already vulnerable position in society, and they flocked to the polls

to defend it. The combined power of this alliance of producers and consumers brought together in defence of the New Deal was overwhelming.²¹

Such was the size of the shift in the electoral coalition on Election Day 1936 that, although Emil Hurja had identified the emerging trends in his opinion polling, he had misinterpreted the final effects on the election results. By underestimating how resilient Roosevelt's core 1932 vote had remained in 1936, Hurja had inflated the size of the projected Union Party vote. He had also misjudged the additional swing towards Roosevelt from former Republican voters particularly the African-American and labour vote. In combination, these factors had produced the appearance of a close election. The reality, however, was significantly different. At the final count, Roosevelt increased his majority over his Republican opponent by 5 million popular votes.²² 'I am beginning to come up for air after the baptism by total submersion on Tuesday night last!' Roosevelt wrote to his friend Josephus Daniels on November 9. 'The other fellow was the one who nearly drowned!'²³ The removal of the overestimated Union Party vote alone turned the close election into a landslide.

The irony for Lemke, Coughlin, Smith and Townsend, should they have been able to recognise it, was that the passage of much of the legislation that formed the Second New Deal, including the wealth redistribution taxes, labour laws and indeed Social Security itself, had threads that led directly back to the diverse plans proposed by their individual radical reform movements. The results of the mid-term elections in November 1934, which saw the Democrats return to Congress with overwhelming and enhanced majorities in both houses, demonstrated the electorate's demand for continued economic and social reform. Moreover, an analysis of successful candidates shows that the electorate favoured a quickened pace of reform. Representatives favouring the New Deal were more likely to be elected than those opposing it. Where both candidates were in favour of reform, however, it was generally the more radical who won victory. When the new Senate convened in 1935, it is estimated that a third

of members favoured the passage of more radical social and economic reform than that contained within the president's existing legislative plans.²⁴

In the light of this pressure from the electorate, it was not surprising that the administration responded by absorbing elements of its opponents' radical reform proposals and transforming them to make them relevant to its agenda of industrial recovery. Roosevelt had thus accommodated demands for liberal social reform within the New Deal not by radicalising it, but by strengthening its central mission to restore and rehabilitate the economic cycle. The president's positive, decisive and swift actions rendered his opponents largely impotent. Long's agenda had been effectively emptied of political material, while Coughlin's call for worker unionisation and Townsend's pension plans had been co-opted by Roosevelt. These, and the other measures that formed the Second New Deal, had brought about quick, sustained and dramatic results: employment levels began to rise and the economy was placed on a stronger footing. By June 1936, as a result of the \$5 billion of federal funding allocated to support New Deal agencies during the first Roosevelt administration, unemployment had dropped by about 4 million from its highpoint in early 1933, and 6 million new jobs had been created.²⁵ In this circumstance, it is not surprising that the platforms of both the Union and Democratic parties shared many common threads; yet, seeking to demonstrate their distance from and opposition to the president, the Union Party adopted a decisive, assertive, often negative and confrontational tone that placed itself and its reform proposals actively on the fringes of the political spectrum. This naturally limited the appeal of the Union Party to a mass of moderate voters who turned instead to the president.²⁶ With its positive agenda of economic and social reform effectively absorbed within the Democratic platform, the Union Party was rendered irrelevant as a significant political movement even before the moment of its creation. As the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* concluded, 'The only appeal the Union Party conceivably could have, was to the discontented, "underprivileged" elements. Roosevelt made his appeal to such groups and it was too bad for Lemke.'²⁷

The second reason for the failure of the Union Party was its overwhelming structural weakness as a political party. Despite Lemke's long-term ambitions to found a new party, the reality was that little had been done to lay the groundwork for the foundation and operation of the Union Party in the weeks ahead of its formation. Townsend, Smith and Coughlin had exhausted every possible outlet for their opposition to the president before they had finally been forced into the decision that, following William Borah's failed campaign to win the Republican presidential nomination, the only remaining option was to back their own presidential candidate. Reporters were joking when they commented that the presidential nominating convention of the Union Party must have been held in a phone booth, but the joke reflected a serious observation that, up to the moment that Coughlin announced his backing for Lemke's candidacy, no one outside of a very restricted circle had any knowledge of the existence of the Union Party.²⁸ This short-term, *ad hoc* approach did not enable the proper planning to take place that was necessary to establish the national apparatus for the party to allow it to function as an effective electoral machine. Indeed, the delays and prevarications that pre-dated the formation of the Union Party had already dealt it a significant blow. Reflecting upon the launch of the Union Party, the *New York Times* commented upon the difficulties it would have in participating in the 1936 election. 'Only nineteen of the forty-eight states permit a new party to participate as such in an election immediately after organising,' they wrote, 'and some of the nineteen have deadlines which have now passed.'²⁹ Accordingly, the Union Party did not appear on the presidential ballot in Kansas, Oklahoma and West Virginia. In addition, Lemke was eventually only able to find a way onto the Michigan and New Jersey ballots when the Union Party ticket received the endorsement of local political organisations that had filed before the deadlines.³⁰ 'It is easier to announce a new national party than achieve it,' commented the *New York Times*.³¹

The problems faced by any new political party in the American electoral system were magnified by the major differences in the intentions of Lemke and his political

backers. Lemke had embarked upon his new endeavour based on his fundamental belief that the failings of both the Democratic and Republican parties had led to the nation's economic downfall. He believed America could be restored only under a new doctrinal political party intended, Lemke announced, to 'save democracy and put a permanent end to the so-called depression' – the Union Party.³² In contrast, Townsend, Smith and Coughlin had come together in a loose, tentative union to back the formation of the Union Party as a protest against the continuation of the Roosevelt presidency. 'When the third party did come up, it was merely a protest,' Coughlin later informed historian Sheldon Marcus.³³

Coughlin and Townsend had no desire to hand Lemke either control of, or drain funding from, their successful independent radical reform movements. They also recognised that it was difficult for them to continue their campaign of protest against the president without a legitimate alternative candidate to offer to the electorate. Lemke's candidacy provided this alternative. In this circumstance, they had no interest in supporting the formal establishment of the Union Party as a legitimate political party. Indeed, both Townsend and Coughlin went to great lengths in both public and private to distance themselves and their movements formally from the new party. For example, in Coughlin's July 6, 1936, *Social Justice* editorial, he reassured his supporters that the NUSJ was not dissolving and that none of its fundamental principles were being altered or sacrificed as a result of support for Lemke's candidacy. At no time, Coughlin concluded, 'was it ever contemplated that the National Union should become an adjunct to any political party.'³⁴ On this basis, Coughlin was able to engineer the NUSJ's endorsement for Lemke's candidacy – but explicitly ruled out any support (including financial) for the Union Party itself.³⁵ In contrast, internal political dissent within the OARP against Townsend's leadership and his relationship with Gerald Smith led to the rejection of the Union Party and its presidential candidate. Thereafter, Townsend and Smith vowed personally to support Lemke's candidacy but,

isolated from the OARP, they did not have access to the machinery or funds required to back their campaigns.³⁶

The absence of organisational or financial support for the Union Party from the OARP and the NUSJ sharply intensified the challenges faced by Lemke to establish it as a fully functioning, independent political party. Lemke announced the formation of the Union Party on June 18, 1936, yet it was not until three weeks later that his close friend, John Nystul, as party chairman, formally opened a small party office in Chicago. Working alongside a team of three drawn from Lemke's close circle of friends in North Dakota, all lacking experience in running a national political campaign, Nystul sought to put in place the organisational structures required of a new political party.³⁷ He was, however, severely constrained by the lack of funding. Nystul had written to William Skeeles, Lemke's private secretary in Washington, D.C., in mid-July 1936 complaining that he was 'desperately in need of funds.'³⁸ Despite his subsequent public call for 'dollars for the poor man's party,' in total the Union Party raised only \$92,033 over the course of the election campaign.³⁹ This was simply not enough to fulfil Lemke's ambitions.

In contrast to the Union Party's paucity of funding, confidential information obtained by Democratic Chairman Jim Farley revealed that money orders to a total value of \$324,105 had been paid into the accounts of the National Union of Social Justice at the post office in Royal Oak, Michigan, between January and June 1936 alone.⁴⁰ While Coughlin enjoyed healthy financial support, however, the candidate he endorsed had no such luxury. Accounts submitted by Lemke to Congress reveal the pitiful personal contributions he received (and subsequently turned over the Union Party) between July and October 1936. His largest single donation was for \$5,000 from independently wealthy NUSJ organiser Philip Johnson and his companion Alan Blackburn. The second-largest donation amounted to \$100. The remaining contributions often amounted to no more than a dollar.⁴¹ These contributions were not

enough to fund Lemke's expenses and having mortgaged his house to obtain additional funds, he was left with a \$7,000 personal debt he struggled to repay.⁴²

One immediate consequence of the Union Party's difficult financial situation was a decision not to run candidates for the congressional elections. Instead, Lemke announced that the 'Union Party will be nonpartisan in the coming election. It would support those members of Congress who 'voted for progressive legislation' and it would do this 'regardless of party or party affiliations.'⁴³ In the circumstances, this was a logical decision, but it had consequences for the establishment of the Union Party as an independent political party. Local and regional operations provide a political party with the communication structure to feed information from the centre to local operatives, who in turn spread the message out to the electorate. The election of local and regional candidates on a third-party ticket demonstrates that the people believe these candidates can achieve something for them at a local level. By their actions, these local and regional party officials increase the legitimacy of the national party. Lemke, however, had few local campaign workers whose own political futures were tied to the success of the national party. Where Nystul was able to establish local 'Lemke for President' clubs, they were made up of relatively ineffective political amateurs. Where these local organisations chose independently of the national headquarters to run congressional candidates, they were often politically inexperienced, (for example, Lemke's vice-presidential running mate, labour lawyer Thomas O'Brien who also ran for the Senate in Massachusetts) or undesirable, (notoriously corrupt former Mayor of Chicago William Thompson, who ran for Governor of Illinois). Without a local infrastructure to legitimise its national activity, the Union Party appeared transitory and unstable. This limited its appeal to the electorate.⁴⁴

The problems faced by the ineffectual national office in organising the Union Party on a national, regional or local basis were exacerbated by the breakdown in the loose union of its political backers. The highly ambitious Gerald Smith had been the thread that pulled the leaders of the independent radical reform movements together.

Smith's grandstanding oratorical displays at the OARP and NUSJ conventions, however, concerned both Coughlin and the Executive Board of the OARP. Concerned that Smith was attempting to use the tentative union as a way of usurping the power of the established leadership of both movements, steps were taken to eradicate his threat. In July 1936, the Executive Board of the OARP sought to remove Smith from his directorship, but found Townsend resistant. Instead, they isolated the Baptist preacher by imposing strict new limits on Townsend's authority over the movement.⁴⁵ The following month, Coughlin, having no formal relationship with Smith, protected his interests by terminating the political union between the three men.⁴⁶ These actions removed any hope that Lemke or Nystul might have had about developing a centrally coordinated strategy for the Union Party or Lemke's campaign. The union having been dissolved, any notion that Lemke had central responsibility for his campaign was removed. Coughlin, Townsend, Smith and Lemke embarked on four entirely uncoordinated, separate campaigns. The Union Party central office was able to do little more than issue reports on speech-making schedules and distribute a few pamphlets describing the party's platform and candidate.⁴⁷

The effects of the weak national, regional and local structures of the Union Party were quickly evident. Lacking a mature network of workers at the grassroots, Nystul was forced to depend upon his skeleton network of amateurish Lemke Clubs or favours gained from local NUSJ units, whose volunteers themselves tended to lack the experience of those working for the traditional political parties.⁴⁸ This scattered, inexperienced, uncoordinated network was not an effective political machine. This weakness manifested itself in two distinct ways: firstly in problems accessing the ballot and secondly in generating and retaining support for Lemke's candidacy.

By the time that Nystul had established party headquarters in Chicago in mid-July 1936, the deadlines for accessing the state ballots in Kansas, New Jersey, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Michigan had already passed. Nystul's inability to establish a functioning party organisation impaired the party's ability to gain access to

the remaining state ballots. By mid-August, Nystul had appointed a network of local supporters with responsibility for placing the Union Party on the state ballot. None were established political figures, and none had experience of running a state-level political campaign. Often an individual had responsibility for multiple states; for example, Luke Lea of Savannah, Georgia, was handed responsibility for all of the party's operations in the south, and George Iverson of Baltimore, Maryland, for much of the party's operations in the northeastern states. There is no evidence from Lemke's papers that either of these men had the experience required to undertake this essential task. Furthermore, the limited influence of these individuals is reflected in an exchange between Herbert Swett, Director of the Union Party in Idaho, and William Skeeles in Lemke's private office. Swett wrote to Skeeles in late July seeking advice on the names of 'contact men' for the party across the far western states, only to receive a reply from Skeeles in early August that he had 'no information regarding those who have indicated a willingness to assist in this campaign.'⁴⁹ The lack of basic knowledge even at the highest levels of the Union Party that this correspondence reveals is evidence of considerable ineffectiveness of the organisation.

Co-ordination of the nominating petitions required for the Union Party to access the ballot in a number of states placed a strain upon Nystul's local party organisers. Despite the best efforts of his inexperienced local workers, in the absence of a strong, well-financed, centrally co-ordinated party machine, they found the task an almost impossible challenge. In Townsend's home state of California, local activists failed to gather the signatures of the required 118,040 registered voters in time for the deadline. In Ohio, 328,000 signatures – half of which had to be obtained across 44 of the 88 counties – needed to be gathered by the first week of August if the party wished to be registered on the ballot. In the event, following an exceptional effort, the party gathered 282,000 signatures. In September, only after a month of further pressure and expense, Lemke was awarded access to the ballot as an independent candidate.⁵⁰ While New York state law required third parties to gather 12,000 signatures, it further stipulated

that this had to include a least 50 from each of the 62 counties. The Union Party filed petitions including almost 33,000 signatures by the deadline, but missed the required target in 4 upstate counties. Following an intense and costly legal battle, on October 23, less than 2 weeks before the election, the Democrat-dominated State Court of Appeals formally barred the Union Party from the ballot. The significance of this New York victory to the Roosevelt campaign was demonstrated in Emil Hurja's final electoral forecast released on 25 October (with polling undertaken before Lemke's withdrawal) which showed Roosevelt winning the state and its 47 electoral votes by 0.1 per cent. Lemke's removal from the ballot effectively guaranteed the state for the Democrats. The challenge to access the ballot was a major distraction for Lemke and his colleagues from the main focus of his campaign.⁵¹

The inexperience and inherent weakness of the Union Party's organisation was easily exploited by Lemke's opponents. In mid-July 1936, a conference of Democratic Party state chairmen in New York agreed to take advantage of the Union Party's lack of effective state level operations by registering candidates pre-emptively under the new party's name.⁵² This policy, alongside state laws restricting ballot access, resulted in Lemke eventually being listed on the ballot under the titles of 'Union Progressive Party' in Illinois, 'Royal Oak Party' in Pennsylvania, 'Third Party' in Michigan, 'National Union for Social Justice' in New Jersey, and as an 'Independent' in Oregon, Ohio and South Dakota. Although there is no direct correlation between Lemke's relative electoral success and the party title he appeared under on the ballot (he achieved 4 per cent or more of the vote in Michigan, Ohio and Oregon), the Union Party's inability to achieve a consistent national public profile enhanced the general perception of its ephemeral nature and confused voters.⁵³

As polling day approached and each state's deadline passed, the news became more disheartening. In all, the Union Party would not be represented on the ballot in 14 states (Figure 6). Some were states – including California and Louisiana, with their thousands of Townsend and Long supporters – where Lemke might have received

substantial popular support. In 3 of the states where Lemke was unable to secure a place on the ballot (Kansas, Maryland and West Virginia), Hurja had estimated in his October 25 report that the Union Party would receive between 3 and 10 per cent of the votes cast.⁵⁴ The Union Party managed to appear under its own name in only 28 states.⁵⁵ ‘Tricky laws devised by the machinations of political bosses,’ complained *Social Justice*, ‘have sought to make it impossible to place a third political party on the ballot.’⁵⁶ These problems in reaching the ballot considerably reduced Lemke’s chance of electoral success, thus reducing further his appeal amongst the electorate.

Figure 6: States where the Union Party Did Not Feature on the Ballot.

States where the Union Party was unable to get on ballot	Hurja's Forecast Union Party Vote
California	-
Florida	-
Kansas	3%
Louisiana	-
Maryland	10%
Mississippi	-
Nevada	-
New York	-
North Carolina	-
Oklahoma	-
South Carolina	-
Vermont	-
West Virginia	4%

Lemke might have been able to overcome some of the difficulties faced by his organisation if he had proven an inspirational politician, able to draw the electorate to his cause by his personality and oratorical excellence alone. Lemke was, however, a poor candidate for national office. His suits un-ironed and his chin unshaved, he lacked the expressive, self-assured personality and suave appearance of the aristocratic Roosevelt or, indeed, the ordered neatness of Landon. Attempts by Lemke to use his prairie farmer appearance to his advantage – ‘The best president you ever had was almost as homely looking as I – Abraham Lincoln,’ he once commented to a crowd of supporters – only served to place him in a more unfavourable contrast.

Lemke's poor appearance was not countered by his speaking style. Flat and monotonous, Lemke's speech before the Townsend convention was described by writer H.L. Mencken described as 'dull from end to end.'⁵⁷ Lemke was, however, able to connect with audiences in the agricultural states, and in mid-August, the *Farm Journal* reported that a straw poll of farmers in Iowa, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin indicated that the Union Party candidate might win 25 per cent of the vote. Beyond this constituency though, the candidate generated little appeal.⁵⁸

Neither were Lemke's personal failings in any way compensated for by a charismatic vice-presidential candidate. Thomas C. O'Brien was a political unknown who had effectively been chosen for Lemke by Coughlin in the absence of any alternative established political figures willing to join the party. Lemke had never previously met O'Brien and did little to communicate with him following the announcement of his candidacy. On the rare occasions that Lemke and O'Brien shared a platform, O'Brien, though always gracious towards his running mate, acted more as a spokesperson for Coughlin than an advocate for the Union Party. This did little to help Lemke. With O'Brien eventually choosing to focus on his campaign for the Senate seat in Massachusetts, Lemke was forced to take the full burden of responsibility for his campaign and took to the stump alone.⁵⁹ Reflecting later on the failure of the Union Party, Gerald Smith laid the majority of the blame with Lemke: 'He was a complete composite of unattractiveness.'⁶⁰

The combination of weak presidential and vice-presidential candidates with a barely functional national, regional and local party organisation made it extremely difficult for the Union Party to generate and sustain support for Lemke's candidacy at a local level. Lacking established party loyalty, potential Lemke voters had no formal affiliation with the Union Party to bind them to his candidacy and as a consequence were vulnerable to approaches from his opponents. In Ohio, for example, building upon the NUSJ and OARP conventions held in Cleveland in July and August 1936, a supreme effort co-ordinated by local activists had gathered 282,000 signatures on a

petition to establish Lemke's place on the ballot as an independent candidate in November.⁶¹ However, the Union Party petition, as a public document, provided a tool for Democratic Party workers to bolster support for the president. A local activist, Frank Kloebe, recognised that the petition provided the party with an unparalleled source of information on Lemke's supporters. Working with support from the DNC, using the names and addresses compiled on the petition, Democratic state workers targeted individual signatories in an attempt to persuade them to back Roosevelt's re-election.⁶² By mid-September, this direct approach at ground level was bearing fruit, and Jim Farley received a report that, following questioning of their intentions, 'quite a number of Democrats [had] signed the Lemke petition under the wrong impression.' They now realised that 'they should not have done so,' and would not vote for Lemke.⁶³ A *Social Justice* editorial expressed the intense frustration felt by Union Party activists at the actions taken by the DNC:

There is a fairly widespread belief among American voters, a belief fostered by both major parties, that a third-party movement has no place in our political scheme. Yet the founders of our government set no limit upon the number or character of political parties.⁶⁴

The immature skeleton network of Union Party activists was, however, simply unable to counter the Democrats' effective electoral machine and Lemke's support slipped away. In October, even local Union Party officials were persuaded to sign a letter addressed to all petition signers, instructing them not to vote for Lemke. 'Don't throw your vote away,' it concluded. 'We urge you to vote for Roosevelt and a continuance of progressive government and prosperity.'⁶⁵ Lemke's total vote in Ohio in November equated to barely half of those who had signed his nominating petition.

These local efforts to shore up the vote for Roosevelt were replicated in other ways by non-partisan groups outside of the political system who favoured the president's re-election. The most notable of these was the Catholic Church. Upon its launch, Coughlin's NUSJ had initially generated support from Catholics across America. Hearing the priest's warnings that Roosevelt was 'being driven by sinister

influences he does not fully comprehend,' they rushed to support the priest and other large Catholic, anti-Communist organisations, such as the Catholic Daughters of America and the Holy Name Society, to denounce the supposed 'Red Menace.'⁶⁶ The established American Catholic hierarchy, however, was strongly opposed to Coughlin and his anti-Roosevelt message. This was because much New Deal legislation, such as the National Recovery Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the labour policies, were seen to be in accord with papal encyclicals, and because of Roosevelt's particularly liberal attitude towards the Catholic Church. The president had rewarded the support of the Church by appointing many distinguished Catholics, such as Joseph Kennedy, inaugural Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and Frank Murphy, Governor General of the Philippines, as trusted advisors in his first administration.⁶⁷

Upon the launch of the Union Party, concerned at the potential damage that Coughlin's campaign against the president might have on Roosevelt's support amongst Catholic voters, the American Catholic Church came to the president's defence. In July 1936, Reverend Maurice Sheehy, Assistant to the Rector at Catholic University, informed the president's personal secretary Margaret Lehand:

At a meeting in the Waldorf-Astoria in New York last night, four bishops, three monsignori, another priest and I discussed the attack of Father Coughlin on the President. We decided how this matter might be handled most effectively. We have taken action.⁶⁸

Following this meeting, Sheehy took responsibility for a campaign to rally ordinary lay Catholics in favour of the Democratic campaign. Sheehy played an important role in persuading the Catholic press to come out against Coughlin. In late September, he reported to Roosevelt that 'on the whole all Catholic publications, except a few disreputable and uncontrollable publications, are getting in line.' Those who stubbornly remained in opposition were 'being subject to the strongest possible influences' and 'they will be curbed.'⁶⁹ In addition, Sheehy toured the nation to encourage cardinals and bishops to denounce Coughlin's actions publicly.⁷⁰ Sheehy's efforts translated into

significant actions in the Catholic heartlands where Coughlin found the majority of his support. In Boston, Cardinal O'Connell instructed his clergy not to listen to Coughlin's radio sermons. In Minnesota, Archbishop John Gregory Murray issued an order that there were to be no more NUSJ meetings on church property.⁷¹ In Chicago, Cardinal Mundelein gathered all of the priests under his jurisdiction and, as Sheehy described it, took less than five minutes to 'destroy' Coughlin's reputation.⁷² By October 1936, the effect of Sheehy's pro-Roosevelt campaign was evident. Following a trip across the western states Sheehy wrote once again to Margaret LeHand to confirm 'President Roosevelt is stronger than ever before.' 'There is a feeling prevalent among the priests that the priesthood through Father Coughlin has betrayed the president,' he concluded, 'and some extraordinary things are being attempted to offset this betrayal.' Sheehy's actions, like those of Democratic Party workers in Ohio, assisted Roosevelt in sustaining his support and reduced Lemke's electoral appeal.⁷³

With Lemke's weak support vulnerable to external influence at the grassroots, the Union Party's campaign was further undermined by the actions of the erstwhile union of its high-profile backers. There is no evidence in Jim Farley's private file notes or in the files of DNC that he was responsible for encouraging OARP executive member Gomer Smith to deliver his pro-Roosevelt, anti-Lemke platform speech at the organisation's national convention. There is evidence, however, that he had watched carefully the turn of events and was proactively and personally involved in the further actions taken by the disgruntled members of the OARP leadership once the convention had ended. On July 20, the week following the OARP convention, at Farley's invitation, Gomer Smith held a series of secret meetings with the Chairman of the DNC to agree a strategy for Townsend's removal from the leadership of the movement. Farley observed in his private diary that he found Smith 'a very convincing fellow, extremely frank, confident of his ability, and one on whom you could rely.'⁷⁴ The following week, Farley followed up Smith's visit by meeting with Robert Clements, Townsend's former colleague and co-founder of the OARP, whose evidence against the doctor had been

used by the Congressional Committee investigating the movement in May 1936 to discredit the pension leader.⁷⁵ Thereafter, in early August, OARP executive members Smith, Clinton Wunder and J.B. Kiefer, and regional directors Nathan Roberts and William Parker denounced Townsend's endorsement of Lemke and his continued support for Gerald Smith. The dissenting directors joined with other disgruntled ex-Townsendites as plaintiffs in a suit seeking the removal of Townsend as president of the organisation.⁷⁶ The OARP's National Secretary, Gilmour Young, conceded publicly that many club members had protested against Townsend's leadership and that they had written pleas for national headquarters to abstain from continued involvement in national politics.⁷⁷ The challenge climaxed in mid-October when Townsend, sensing that he was in danger of completely losing control of the organisation, used extraordinary powers vested in him as president to dissolve the OARP board and replaced it with an emergency national executive committee consisting of his closest and most loyal supporters. The following week, the *National Townsend Weekly* called for all those who 'cannot follow Dr. Townsend's non-partisan leadership' or 'who are attempting to use the organisation for selfish and partisan purposes' to be put out.⁷⁸

The extent of Townsend's new lack of control was exemplified in August, when the local Townsend organisation in Idaho mounted a campaign against the re-election of William Borah that threatened to defeat the doctor's trusted friend. Borah's comments regarding the potential weakness of the Townsend plan during his run for the Republican presidential nomination had angered the Idaho Townsend movement, and its director, Byron Defenbach, had entered the Republican Senatorial primary with the intention of defeating the respected insurgent. Such was the strength of potential opposition that Borah considered withdrawing from the race. 'If I could have stepped out with ease, and dignity, I have preferred to have done so; in fact, I had resolved at one time to do so,' he confided to one correspondent in July 1936. Having resolved to fight on ('regardless of his personal wishes'), Borah defeated Defenbach in the August primary, but the Townsendite determined to stand against him as an independent

candidate in the November election.⁷⁹ Thereafter, it was only after two months of direct pressure that Townsend was able to engineer the removal of the OARP candidate from the November ballot. 'As a result of a previous conversation between our mutual friend, Carl Bachmann, and myself I have been informed by our organization that Mr. Deffenbach is now out of the race,' confirmed Edward Margett, state manager of the California OARP, to Borah in early October.⁸⁰ Although Townsend had ultimately regained control, there can be no doubt that the public battle over leadership, and supported in private by the DNC, had affected his respect amongst his members and his political influence. His reputation damaged by the insurrection of his national leadership, Townsend had offered little positive momentum to Lemke's campaign.

Townsend's struggle to re-establish control over the leadership of the OARP had one other significant negative effect on Lemke's campaign. Gerald Smith, recognising that his efforts to usurp Coughlin's and Townsend's leadership had failed, abandoned the OARP and set out to capitalise upon his oratorical displays at the OARP and NUSJ conventions by founding his own political movement. Without any resources or organisational network to depend upon, Smith's subsequent tour of the southern states generated little interest in the press or the wider public. His October announcement of the formation of the quasi-fascist 'Committee of One Million' to lead a revolution to seize the White House equally failed to take hold of the public's imagination and saw him both formally rejected by Lemke and ejected from the OARP.⁸¹ The *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* was blunt in its assessment of Smith's contribution to Lemke's campaign. Smith's 'efforts to assume the late Huey Long's mantle have been funnier than successful,' they commented. Furthermore, his 'speeches do not make sense and his call for a Fascist army of a million men to handle the ballot boxes has pancaked along with the caller.'⁸²

As the pressure of the presidential campaign began to mount, Coughlin began to exhibit similarly unpredictable tendencies to his erstwhile colleague. As the *Evening Independent* concluded, 'Father Coughlin's prestige declined perceptibly during the

campaign.’ The cause of Coughlin’s decline could be attributed, the paper commented, directly to the negative response he had received, particularly from amongst the Catholic voters whom he had previously counted amongst his staunchest supporters, following his criticism of the president as ‘a liar’ and ‘anti-God’ as well as his ‘conspicuous smugness’ and ‘arrogance.’⁸³ As well as a cause for embarrassment to the American Catholic Church, Coughlin’s comments and high-profile actions in opposition to the president raised diplomatic concerns at the highest levels within the Vatican.

The United States had not established formal diplomatic relationships with the Vatican upon its establishment as a nation-state in 1929. However, in 1935, when Joseph Kennedy raised the possibility with Roosevelt, he found the president open on the question.⁸⁴ Coughlin later informed Gerald Smith that he had been informed by an emissary from the Vatican, Monsignor Joseph P. Hurley, of the conditions for these discussions going ahead. ‘The arm of Jim Farley is long,’ Coughlin said. ‘Mr. Roosevelt has served notice on the Pope that he will not give the Church a fraternal delegate in Rome unless Father Coughlin is silenced.’⁸⁵ In accordance with this statement, in late August 1936, Coughlin’s superior, Bishop of Detroit Michael Gallagher, was called to Rome to defend the political actions of his priest. The formal action that could be taken, however, was strictly restrained. Officially the Church could do nothing to stop Coughlin doing or saying anything he wanted, as under canon law each priest was directly under the control of his bishop. Fortunately for Coughlin, Gallagher was one of his strongest supporters. Though the Church had no formal mechanisms to control Gallagher’s or Coughlin’s actions, they recognised the effect a public shaming would have on the two men, and excitement was generated in the press around the reason for Gallagher’s visit to Rome. Speaking to reporters, the bishop admitted that he had been informed by Vatican prelates, including the Pope’s closest political adviser Monsignor Giuseppe Pizzard, that Coughlin needed to tone down his activities for the good of the Church.⁸⁶ This was followed by a statement

published in the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, in early September that rebuked Coughlin for his violent criticism of the Roosevelt administration.⁸⁷ When Coughlin dismissed the story as 'one newspaper's opinion,' unusually, the Vatican issued a release directly to all press organisations, reiterating the criticism of the priest and emphasising that the statement represented the official Vatican line on the issue.⁸⁸ Returning from Rome, Gallagher remained unmoved. He believed that Coughlin's actions were legitimate and, as long as the priest continued to respect the limitations he had placed upon him, his campaign should continue. 'It's the voice of God that comes to you from the great orator of Royal Oak,' he told a crowd of Coughlin supporters waiting at the quayside. 'Rally round it!'⁸⁹

With the position of the Vatican publicly clear, the administration sought to consolidate Roosevelt's support among Catholic voters and exploit the active dissent emerging from within the American Catholic Church to Coughlin's continued campaign against the president by moving to formally discredit and isolate the priest from lay Catholic voters. In mid-September, Dean Al Fange, Chairman of the Democratic National Campaign Committee, Foreign Language Citizens' Department, wrote to Jim Farley expressing the view that:

Those who have the interests of the president, the Church and the internal peace of the nation at heart should strive to bring about an authoritative declaration from...the Church to the effect that [it] is not in politics; that it is not supporting any particular candidate; and that Father Coughlin is speaking only for himself.⁹⁰

Subsequently, on October 8, 1936, in a national radio link-up, Monsignor John A. Ryan took to the air on behalf of the DNC with a speech entitled 'Roosevelt Safeguards America.' In his positions as Rector of Catholic University and Director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Ryan had become one of the best-known Catholic priests in the United States. In the early years of the Roosevelt presidency, Ryan had been an outspoken critic of New Deal legislation, suggesting that its reforms were not as radical as those advocated by the papal

encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. His views apparently aligned with those of Coughlin, and in December 1933, the *New York Times* published excerpts of a private letter between the two priests in which Ryan described Coughlin as 'a messenger of God, donated to the American people for the purpose of rectifying the outrageous mistakes they have made in the past.' By 1936, however, Coughlin's turn towards radicalism had broken the relationship between the two men, and Ryan's speech became a public retraction of his earlier support. Ryan believed it essential that the impression that Coughlin spoke on behalf of the Catholic Church should be ended.⁹¹

Ryan began his address by emphatically denying that Roosevelt or any of his advisors were under the influence of Communism; it was men like Roosevelt and his New Deal agents, he said, who had 'frustrated the growth of Communism in the United States.' Ryan then moved to challenge Coughlin's economic theories. If enacted, he said, 'they would prove disastrous to the American people.' Despite Coughlin's claims, Ryan insisted that his proposals for radical economic and social reform found 'no support in the encyclicals of either Pope Leo XIII or Pope Pius XI.'⁹² Indeed, he concluded, the encyclicals were designed to prevent exactly the kind of class antagonism that Coughlin was attempting to create.⁹³ Ryan closed with an impassioned plea for Roosevelt's re-election, asking his listeners not to vote 'against the man who has shown a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of your needs and who has brought about more fundamental legislation for labour and for social justice than any other president in American history.'⁹⁴

Ryan's speech completely discredited Coughlin. Roosevelt wrote to him in thanks that it was 'very heartening to know that I have so valiant a vindicator as yourself.'⁹⁵ Farley wrote that he considered it 'one of the most outstanding talks of the campaign,' then increased the impact of Ryan's address by distributing thousands of copies across the Catholic centres of America.⁹⁶ Molly Dewson, Chairwoman of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Campaign Committee, wrote to one local activist in Ohio, 'I am sending you some of Monsignor Ryan's address. I believe they

will be useful to you in holding the Catholic campaign workers to Roosevelt.⁹⁷ Finally, Maurice Sheehy circulated copies of the speech to members of Congress.⁹⁸ So highly did Roosevelt think of Ryan's action that, following his November victory, he personally invited the priest to give the benediction at his second inauguration.⁹⁹

Seeking to capitalise upon the favourable statements published in *Osservatore Romano* and the positive reception of Father Ryan's address, Roosevelt moved to restore formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican, extending a private invitation for Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, Papal Secretary of State (and future Pope Pius XII), to visit the United States.¹⁰⁰ Pacelli's visit in mid-October proved a significant positive boost to Roosevelt's appeal to Catholic voters. Although the Vatican was at pains to point out that the cardinal's visit had no connection with Coughlin's ongoing political activities, the press and the public drew a different conclusion. Pacelli's refusal to answer questions on the topic only served to confirm these suspicions. Pacelli's public presence in the United States reinforced the Vatican's statements opposing Coughlin's activities and reinforced the messages publicly issued on behalf of the American Catholic Church by Father Ryan.¹⁰¹ Meeting on November 5, 1936, at Roosevelt's personal residence in Hyde Park, New York, the president reached agreement with Pacelli to appoint to the Vatican a representative with full diplomatic status.¹⁰²

The active support from the Vatican and the American Catholic Church for Roosevelt increased the polarisation of Coughlin's campaign. Coughlin's voice became shrill, his statements increasingly violent – which served only to reinforce Roosevelt's argument against him and distance him from moderate Catholic voters. A Gallup poll published in early October 1936 found that an overwhelming 78 per cent of Catholic voters favoured Roosevelt's re-election. The poll illustrates the success of the Democrats' efforts to consolidate the Catholic vote within the New Deal coalition.¹⁰³ In contrast, Coughlin's waning support damaged not only the reputation of his own NUSJ, but also the Union Party with which he was intimately connected. Like Townsend and Smith, Coughlin concluded the presidential campaign radicalised, diminished and

isolated from his erstwhile supporters. 'All in all,' concluded the *Evening Independent*, 'it probably isn't a very rash prediction if one suggests that Coughlin, Townsend and Smith have all passed the apex of their political strength.'¹⁰⁴

The radicalisation and isolation of Lemke's central supporters was also a significant factor in distancing Lemke and the Union Party from the Republican insurgents and the representatives of the small western radical reform parties. In order to broaden Roosevelt's appeal amongst the electorate, the DNC sought to emphasise the president's broad electoral support outside the party by sponsoring the creation of three independent, non-partisan networks: the Good Neighbor League, Labor's Non-partisan League and the Progressive National Committee for the Re-election of Roosevelt. These networks were not officially part of the Democratic Party machine, but were closely integrated into the party campaign strategy. This pro-Roosevelt strategy provided a considerable boost to his campaign.

The Good Neighbor League was formed in April 1936 with the intention of bringing non-political community leaders into the campaign. Co-chaired by social worker Lilian Wald and philanthropist George Foster Peabody, the League created a network of pro-Roosevelt churchmen, school and university teachers, social workers and intellectuals operating in twenty states. It was estimated that 40 per cent of its supporters were registered Republican voters. During the course of the campaign, the League organised many local events designed to appeal to independent-minded, middle-class voters. The most important of these were six mass rallies held on September 21, 1936, for African-American voters. The African-American vote had been so long part of the Republican coalition that Landon and Lemke did little, if anything, to court it. In contrast, Roosevelt's address at the New York rally, before a wildly appreciative capacity crowd, and broadcast nationally (excluding southern states), rallied African-American voters to join the New Deal coalition.¹⁰⁵

The role of Labor's Non-partisan League was equally important. Intended to educate workers on Roosevelt's extensive pro-labour record, under the leadership of

John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers of America and a lifelong Republican, the League brought together a powerful alliance of unions. In addition to organisation and education, the League provided an avenue for fundraising. With business reducing its contribution sharply, the \$770,000 raised for the Democratic Party via the League marked a historic shift in the financial base of the party. Of this new union funding, \$469,000 came directly from the United Mine Workers' union, making them the Democratic Party's largest single contributor to the 1936 election.¹⁰⁶

The final of the three organisations was the Progressive National Committee (PNC). The various independent, radical reform movements had never been strongly co-ordinated. The PNC was intended to serve as a temporary tactic to unite these groups behind a single issue – the re-election of the president. The backing of a number of insurgents and radical reformers for Roosevelt's re-election was a significant contribution to his ultimate success. In July 1936, Farley commissioned social reformer Frank P. Walsh to co-ordinate the establishment of the PNC.¹⁰⁷ Working with insurgent Progressive senator Robert La Follette, Jr., who agreed to chair, Walsh received confirmation from 100 prominent radical reform-minded politicians that they would attend a conference on September 11, 1936, to agree a co-ordinated plan of action for the upcoming campaign. Conference attendees included a range of prominent insurgents and radical reformers, including Republican Mayor of New York Fiorello La Guardia; senators Lewis Schwellenbach (Democrat, Washington), Homer Bone (Democrat, Washington) and Hugo Black (Democrat, Alabama); many of the Wisconsin Progressives in the House of Representatives; Democratic Congressman Maury Maverick of Texas; and labour leaders Sidney Hillman and John L. Lewis. Lemke and his backers, however, received no invitation.¹⁰⁸

Radical reformers, such as the La Follettes in Wisconsin, who joined the PNC felt that Roosevelt offered them the best option for passage of their legislative agenda. In addition, they believed the favour of the president would be reflected in various kinds of electoral support that the Democratic hierarchy would bestow upon faithful

supporters, including control of federal appointments, the distribution of federal grants, and direct funding for their campaigns. Those who backed the PNC, willing to accept what historian Donald McCoy described as 'half-a-loaf rather than continue to struggle for the whole,' effectively rejected their radical reforming heritage and joined the centralist course offered by the New Deal.¹⁰⁹ When the conference met, radical reform-minded voters across the nation were called upon to unite behind Roosevelt in order to 'preserve liberty; establish security and re-create equality of opportunity.' 'It is unthinkable,' announced insurgent Republican Senator George Norris of Nebraska in his keynote address, 'that a liberty-loving people would displace him, when his work is but partially completed.'¹¹⁰ In particular, the PNC delegates could not risk a Landon victory with a Union Party vote. In this context, great significance was attached to the formal presentation at the conference of a telegram composed on his deathbed by Floyd Olson, Farmer-Labor Governor of Minnesota. The choice, he wrote, was between Roosevelt and Landon. He had the 'utmost respect' for Lemke and Coughlin, but 'for the liberals to split their votes is merely to play into the hands of the Wall Street gang.' He concluded, 'The defeat of Landon is of the utmost importance to the great masses.' The delegates listened to a short debate and issued a statement offering full support to Roosevelt's re-election.¹¹¹

The PNC's support for the president isolated the Union Party and divided the insurgent bloc. As one conference attendee, E. W. Kibler, confirmed to Jim Farley, Lemke's 'influence was greatly lessened by the Chicago parley of liberals.'¹¹² As Kibler had suggested, following the PNC conference, support for the Union Party amongst national legislative figures evaporated. Of those twelve senators who could be identified as part of the insurgent bloc upon Roosevelt's inauguration in March 1933, one (Cutting) was dead, six backed Roosevelt's re-election (Johnson, Norris, Norbeck, Couzens, La Follette and Shipstead) and two backed Landon (the relative conservatives Capper and McNary). Only Lemke's closest associates, Borah, Nye and Frazier, continued their endorsement of the Union Party. Yet, despite its passionate

advocacy for the president, the platform of the PNC is remarkably similar to that of the Union Party. Indeed, it maps almost entirely onto the Union Party platform. For example, principle two, 'The right of every American on the farm and in the city to earn a comfortable living by useful work,' echoes the Union platform's point four, 'Congress shall legislate that there will be an assurance of a living annual wage for all laborers capable and willing to work.' Principle three, 'The right of American youth to develop their talents through public education...and to find a place in the life and work of the country,' matches Union point fifteen, 'Congress shall re-establish conditions so that the youths of the nation as they emerge from schools and colleges will have the opportunity to earn a decent living.' Finally, principle four, 'The right of men and women...to face their declining years free from fear of want,' links to Union point six, 'Congress shall legislate that there will be assurance of reasonable and decent security for the aged.'¹¹³ The similarity of the two platforms suggests that, under usual circumstances, sharing a loosely aligned ideology, the Union Party and the PNC might have been natural allies. This was not going to happen in the political climate of 1936. With the insurgents divided, it became increasingly difficult to separately identify the radical reforming stream in American politics.

It is possible to estimate the potential damage the backing of the regional radical reform movements did to Lemke's campaign with an analysis of the vote that he received in the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota. These were states where, respectively, the Progressive Party and Farm-Labor parties held widespread support amongst the electorate. In addition, they were states where significant third party candidates had previously polled strongly. Yet, even though these states ranked within the top six in terms of the popular vote for Lemke as a percentage of total votes cast, his candidate did not appeal with local voters to the extent of previous significant third-party candidates. The average vote for the previous significant third-party candidate was 23 per cent higher than the votes received by Lemke in Minnesota and 19 per cent higher than his vote in Wisconsin. The PNC contributed towards the

consolidation and enhancement of Roosevelt's support amongst the group of voters most likely to be attracted particularly to the Union Party. Even in Lemke's home state of North Dakota, his relatively impressive showing of 13 per cent was actually 28 per cent lower than the average achieved by previous significant third-party candidates.¹¹⁴

Detached, ineffective, isolated, weak and irrelevant, the Union Party failed because it could not overcome the simple argument that a vote for Lemke was a wasted vote. His Democratic opponents argued that Lemke stood no chance of making any impact in the election. In this circumstance, a vote for Lemke only effectively reduced votes for the president, increasing the chance that the conservative Landon might win the election. Nellie Dougerty, former Democratic Committeewoman from North Dakota, wrote to Farley in August 1936 articulating the practical approach to be taken with Lemke supporters. 'It is my opinion,' she explained, 'that all speakers should emphasise the fact that a vote for Lemke is really a vote for Landon.'¹¹⁵

In the dire circumstances that Lemke found himself in as the campaign reached its final stage, the wasted vote argument was one they were simply unable to deny. The wasted-vote argument was echoed repeatedly by Democrats in speeches and publications throughout the campaign. Guidance issued by the PNC's speakers' bureau urged speechmakers to emphasise and repeat to their audiences the idea that a 'vote cast for any other than Roosevelt will divide liberal strength and will constitute a vote for Landon!'¹¹⁶ Leaflets issued by the committee offered voters a stark choice: 'a vote against Roosevelt is a vote for Landon – and the danger of: war, Hoover starvation, Republican reaction, [and] suppression of civil liberties.'¹¹⁷ Union Party supporters were forced to defend their right to access to the electoral system in their national publications. Labelling the wasted-vote argument 'a foul misstatement,' a series of articles published in *Social Justice* and the *National Townsend Weekly* pleaded with voters not to turn away from Lemke. 'It is strange,' concluded an editorial in *Social Justice* regretfully, 'that an intelligent people, so sophisticatedly skeptical of

commonplaces, should be so gullible in matters that affect them so vitally.’¹¹⁸ These calls had little effect however.

The wasted-vote argument was the final and most effective tool used to enhance and consolidate support for Roosevelt. The need to concentrate the majority of its meagre resources on registration drives meant that there was little left to dedicate to overcoming damaging perceptions of Lemke’s intentions. Marginalised, easily exploited and lacking any counter to his opponent’s simple argument, Lemke and his supporters were left desperately imploring for support. ‘Can we stick together – when victory is within our grasp and restore prosperity to America?’ challenged the *National Townsend Weekly* in September. ‘A decent citizen will vote for principle rather than for a winner,’ pleaded *Social Justice* in October.¹¹⁹ Looking back on the campaign, Lemke expressed the intense frustration felt by Union Party activists at their inability to persuade grass-roots voters to retain support for his campaign:

The people may like a program but too many of them still spend their money on booze and other useless things rather than contribute their bit to help bring about conditions that will make them better men and women.¹²⁰

Yet, the reality was that Lemke had simply failed to persuade the electorate that a vote for the Union Party would provide him with the victory he required to implement his reform platform. Swept away by the Democratic tide, rather than being an enabler of reform, the Union Party was easily presented as a barrier. Lemke’s final voter tally would thus ultimately reflect that the key issue for voters in 1936 was simply to elect the only pro-reform candidate capable of victory: Roosevelt.

Townsend, Smith and Coughlin’s personal ambition to mobilise voters behind the Union Party as a protest to defeat the president did not appeal to the significant majority of voters who felt they had personally benefitted from the economic and social reforms introduced as part of the New Deal. They wanted to protect and enhance these benefits, not see them ended or undermined. Equally, this centralist coalition of voters, content with progress made under the Democratic administration and not

attracted by the conservative alternative offered by the Republicans, rejected Lemke's notion that a third national party was necessary to force the passage of reform more radical than that advocated by the president. The result was a landslide victory for Roosevelt. In comparison, Lemke's chaotic, poorly funded and easily undermined campaign, though entertaining for the press, was unable from the fringes of the political spectrum to establish its appeal with pro-reform voters and ultimately succeeded in attracting only a small and particularly needy group of individuals to his cause.

The Union Party campaign was an embarrassing failure for its candidate and its backers. In the final count, Lemke's fringe voters were not enough to register as much more than part of the footnotes of American history. They do, however, represent an element of the electorate left behind in the construction of Roosevelt's grand centralist electoral coalition. Such fringe voters were unlikely to provide the necessary finance and functional national organisation that Lemke required to transform his small national vote into a sustainable, national political party. In contrast, Roosevelt's victory would be recorded as one of the greatest in American history. In November 1936 he could be confident that the actions taken by his administration had succeeded in united the nation behind his goal to place the nation squarely back upon the road to recovery. Yet, Roosevelt's grand coalition did not appeal to all pro-reform voters. If the Union Party achieved nothing more, it provided a voice for this small, alienated section of the electorate to express their legitimate opposition to the president and by doing so got him to recognise the continued difficulties of their everyday lives. In this way, at least, Lemke's grand folly must be considered in some small way a success.

¹ GLKS to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP.

² *NYT*, June 17, 1936.

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- ³ Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*.
- ⁴ Dave Leip, '1936 Presidential Election Results,' *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.
- ⁵ Document titled 'Minutes of the 1936 National Conference of the Union Party,' December 19, 1936, WLP.
- ⁶ Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 112.
- ⁷ Document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP; Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* For evidence of Lemke's support amongst western legislators, see vote on Farm Mortgage Refinance Bill, *NYT*, May 14, 1936. For evidence of the reach of Coughlin's radio audience, see Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 206-207.
- ⁹ See Figure 6, Chapter 4. Significant third-party candidates included in the average: James Weaver, People's Party, 1892, Theodore Roosevelt, Progressive Party, 1912 and Robert La Follette, Progressive Party, 1924. Election data derived from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*; Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
- ¹² Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 32-35, 37.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 36; Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*.
- ¹⁴ Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1952), 143.
- ¹⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 31, 35, 40, 41.

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- ¹⁶ James P. Shenton, 'The Coughlin Movement and the New Deal,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 73 (1958), 366.
 - ¹⁷ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 32, 37.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 36.
 - ¹⁹ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 72.
 - ²⁰ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 37.
 - ²¹ *Ibid*, 34, 37.
 - ²² Dave Leip, '1936 Presidential Election Results,' *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.
 - ²³ FDR to Josephus Daniels, November 9, 1936, Elliot Roosevelt ed. *The Roosevelt Letters*, 191.
 - ²⁴ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 229-236.
 - ²⁵ Burns, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 266-268.
 - ²⁶ Democratic National Committee, 'Democratic Party Platform, 1936,' *The American Presidency Project*, *SJ*, June 22, 1936.
 - ²⁷ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
 - ²⁸ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 223.
 - ²⁹ *NYT*, July 7, 1936.
 - ³⁰ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 148-150.
 - ³¹ *NYT*, June 21, 1936.
 - ³² WL, Statement announcing the formation of the Union Party, undated, WLP.
 - ³³ Transcripts of taped interviews between Sheldon Marcus and CC, SMP.
 - ³⁴ *SJ*, July 6, 193-6.
 - ³⁵ *NYT*, August 16, 1936.
 - ³⁶ *NTW*, July 27, 1936; *NYT*, July 20, 1936; *NYT*, July 21, 1936.
 - ³⁷ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 224.
 - ³⁸ John Nystul to WS, July 13, 1936, WLP.

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- ³⁹ *SJ*, July 20, 1936; *Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Campaign Expenditures of Presidential, Vice-Presidential and Senatorial Candidates in 1936* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937) 24-28.
- ⁴⁰ JAF private file note, July 1936, JAFP.
- ⁴¹ Copies of WL's contributions and expenditures to the Special Committee to Investigate Campaign Election Expenses, July-August, September and October, 1936, WLP.
- ⁴² WL to CH, May 2, 1936, WLP.
- ⁴³ WL statement announcing the formation of the Union Party, undated, WLP.
- ⁴⁴ Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 32; Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 152-153.
- ⁴⁵ *NTW*, July 27, 1936; *NYT*, July 18, 1936; *NYT*, July 21, 1936.
- ⁴⁶ *NYT*, August 14, 1936.
- ⁴⁷ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 152-153.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Document titled 'List of Contact Men for Filing Union Party in Each States,' August 7, 1936, WLP; H.F. Swett to William Skeeles, July 30, 1936, WLP; William Skeeles to H.F. Swett, August 4, 1936, WLP.
- ⁵⁰ Document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP; *NYT*, August 9, 1936; *NYT*, September 4, 1936.
- ⁵¹ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 150; *NYT*, October 23, 1936; *NYT*, October 24, 1936; document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP.
- ⁵² *NYT*, July 21, 1936.

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- ⁵³ Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*; Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 150-151.
- ⁵⁴ Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*; document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP. Significant third party candidates included in the average: James Weaver, People's Party, 1892, Theodore Roosevelt, Progressive Party, 1912 and Robert La Follette, Progressive Party, 1924. Election data derived from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.
- ⁵⁵ Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Organisation and Finance,' 148-150.
- ⁵⁶ *SJ*, July 20, 1936.
- ⁵⁷ David O. Powell, 'The Union Party of 1936: Campaign Tactics and Issues,' *Mid-America*, 46:2 (1964), 128.
- ⁵⁸ *NYT*, August 17, 1936.
- ⁵⁹ Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 196-197.
- ⁶⁰ GLKS to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP.
- ⁶¹ Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 212.
- ⁶² Frank L. Kloebe to JAF, August 19, 1936, POF.
- ⁶³ E.C. Amos to JAF, September 11, 1936, POF.
- ⁶⁴ *SJ*, August 17, 1936.
- ⁶⁵ J.F. Trump to JAF, October 5, 1936, POF.
- ⁶⁶ George Q. Flynn, *American Catholics and the Roosevelt Presidency 1932-1936* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 203-204.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 237.
- ⁶⁸ Maurice Sheehy to Margaret Lehand, July 18, 1936, PPF.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*.
- ⁷⁰ Stephen Early to FDR, September 30, 1936, PPF.

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- ⁷¹ Mrs Stanley V. Hodge to JAF, July 13, 1936, POF.
- ⁷² Stephen Early to FDR, September 30, 1936, PPF.
- ⁷³ Maurice Sheehy to Margaret Lehand, October 5, 1936, PPF.
- ⁷⁴ JAF private file note, July 20, 1936, JAFP.
- ⁷⁵ JAF private file note, July 27, 1936, JAFP.
- ⁷⁶ *NYT*, August 13, 1936.
- ⁷⁷ Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement*, 178.
- ⁷⁸ *NTW*, October 12, 1936.
- ⁷⁹ WEB to Henry Johnson, July 8, 1936, WEBP; WEB to Alex Gumberg, July 8, 1936, WEBP; WEB to Charles Coughlin, August 2, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁸⁰ Carl G. Bachmann to WEB, September 3, 1936, WEBP; Edward J Margett to WEB, October 6, 1936, WEBP.
- ⁸¹ Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 238.
- ⁸² *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ Gerald P. Fogarty, *The Vatican and the American Hierarchy from 1870 to 1965* (Washington, D.C.: Michael Glazier, 1985), 248.
- ⁸⁵ GLKS to Sheldon Marcus, February 6, 1970, SMP; Charles R. Gallagher, *Vatican Secret Diplomacy: Joseph P. Hurley and Pope Pius XII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 52.
- ⁸⁶ Marcus, *Father Coughlin*, 122.
- ⁸⁷ Tull, *Father Coughlin*, 143.
- ⁸⁸ Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 255.
- ⁸⁹ Tull, *Father Coughlin*, 144.
- ⁹⁰ Dean Alfange to JAF, September 25, 1936, POF.
- ⁹¹ Tull, *Father Coughlin*, 467-468.
- ⁹² Flynn, *American Catholics*, 227.

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- ⁹³ Shenton, 'The Coughlin Movement and the New Deal,' 366.
- ⁹⁴ Flynn, *American Catholics*, 228.
- ⁹⁵ FDR to John Ryan, October 6, 1936, PPF.
- ⁹⁶ JAF private file note, October 1936, JAFP.
- ⁹⁷ Mary Dewson to Ann Ryan, October 21, 1936, DNC Women's Division Papers.
- ⁹⁸ JAF private file note, October 1936, JAFP.
- ⁹⁹ Flynn, *American Catholics*, 233.
- ¹⁰⁰ Fogarty, *Vatican and the American Hierarchy*, 246-248.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰² John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, (London: Viking, 1999), 177.
- ¹⁰³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 36.
- ¹⁰⁴ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
- ¹⁰⁵ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 646.
- ¹⁰⁶ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 188.
- ¹⁰⁷ JAF private file note, July 1936, Ernest Cuneo Papers.
- ¹⁰⁸ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 225.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 112; McCoy, 'The Progressive National Committee,' 461.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 460; Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 595.
- ¹¹² E. W. Kibler to JAF, September 14, 1936, POF.
- ¹¹³ *SJ*, June 22, 1936; McCoy, 'The Progressive National Committee,' 468.
- ¹¹⁴ Leroy D. Brandon, 'Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1936,' *U.S. House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives*; document titled 'Discussion of Presidential Polls,' undated, EHP. Significant third party candidates included in the average: James Weaver, People's Party, 1892, Theodore Roosevelt,

Progressive Party, 1912 and Robert La Follette, Progressive Party, 1924. Election data derived from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*.

¹¹⁵ Nellie Dougerty to JAF, August 7, 1936, POF.

¹¹⁶ McCoy, 'The Progressive National Committee,' 465.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 461.

¹¹⁸ *SJ*, August 17, 1936.

¹¹⁹ *NTW*, September 14, 1936; *SJ*, October 12, 1936.

¹²⁰ WL to CH, May 2, 1939, WLP.

Conclusion

As William Lemke reached the climax of his speech at the Union Party's inaugural conference on December 19, 1936, it became clear that his focus was not on the failings of the past, but the potential of the future. 'Go out of this room united on the principles of the Union Party platform,' he declared, 'and we will not be defeated because you cannot defeat right. You can postpone it – we just postponed it on November third.' Lemke's mood of optimism in the face of defeat set the tone for the meeting. Despite his fundamental disagreement with his erstwhile union of backers, Lemke and his colleagues expressed no bitterness, instead formally resolving to express thanks for the 'loyal support rendered by Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, Dr. Francis Townsend and Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith and the officers and members of the organizations which they represent.' The absence of bitterness and recrimination evident from the minutes of the meeting is striking. Speaker after speaker followed Lemke's lead and focused on the brightness of the future and not the darkness of the past.¹

As the morning turned to afternoon and evening and the delegates left to make their way home through the dark Chicago streets, they had elected Lemke the inaugural president of the party and confirmed John Nystul in his position as chairman. Furthermore, they resolved to begin a concerted effort to establish the Union Party at state level in preparation for the 1938 congressional elections. Their combined ambition was clear. 'I believe with proper organization,' declared Lemke, 'we should have sufficient strength to put over say fifteen or twenty Congressmen in 1938 and in 1940 we will sweep the Nation.'² Ever confident, Lemke and his Union Party colleagues underestimated the enduring appeal of the New Deal, the strength of the labour and urban voting base, and the looming World War. The radical reformers and

their Republican insurgent colleagues soon found that in an era of collectivism and internationalism, their calls for individual self-determination and isolation made them not proponents of radicalism, but of conservatism. Lemke's predictions thus failed him once again. His party was unsuccessful in capturing the public's attention, but their focus on isolation ensured a renaissance of sorts for the radical reformers.

Three major political and social changes between 1937 and 1940 hastened the return to relevance for the radical reformers and their insurgent colleagues in the Senate: first Roosevelt's attempts to rebalance the machinery of government to enhance the authority of the president; second, the return to economic recession; and third, the growing threat of war. The Union Party had enshrined within its platform a core belief in the primacy of the individual against concentrations of power, whether that was big business, the wealthy or government itself. The role of the federal government, specifically the powers invested in the executive branch under Roosevelt, had been one of the dominant issues in the Union Party's campaign of 1936. The Union Party and its backers had embarked upon a negative campaign questioning Roosevelt's thirst for centralised power and variously accused him of being a dictator or a Communist. These charges had been dismissed, but Roosevelt's actions in the months following his second inauguration in January 1937 seemed to sustain the radical reformers' earlier calls and fuelled their concerns over the accretion of power within the executive branch.

Frustrated that key elements of New Deal legislation had been struck down by what he considered a Republican-leaning Supreme Court, in February 1937, the president presented a bill intended to rebalance the membership of the court in his favour. The so-called 'court packing' plan surprised members of Congress from all parties and established a new alignment between the Republicans and the southern Democrats, who feared that Roosevelt might use the proposed powers to push through radical pieces of legislation that favoured northeastern urban voters, in particular African-Americans. Importantly, court-packing also had the effect of reuniting the

Republican Party. The insurgent bloc in the Senate was diminished by the deaths of senators Couzens of Michigan and Norbeck of South Dakota in the late autumn of 1936, but of those 8 senators who took the oath in January 1937, 6 immediately sided with the Republican old guard in their opposition to the president's plan. Only La Follette of Wisconsin and Norris of Nebraska, both of whom had favoured Roosevelt's campaign for re-election in 1936, expressed any support for the president. In the House, Lemke too shared the concerns of his senatorial colleagues, objecting to what he considered to be clear evidence of the president's undemocratic leanings. In July 1937, following 5 months of debate, the Senate voted 70 to 20 to recommit the bill, and Roosevelt conceded defeat.³

The insurgents' reintegration within the mainstream Republican Party was further accelerated by the administration's proposed 'Reorganization Act,' through which the president sought to expand the White House staff, extend the civil service by placing a number of independent agencies under the control of cabinet-level departments, and create two new cabinet departments of Social Welfare and Social Works. Outside of Congress, Coughlin took once again to the airwaves to rally his supporters to oppose what he termed the 'Dictator Bill.' As a result, 100,000 telegrams reached Washington, D.C., by the following Monday. In Congress, the president's opponents rose under Borah's leadership to counter this apparent attempt to enhance Roosevelt's direct authority. The bill eventually passed in the Senate by 49 votes to 42 (with La Follette and Norris again the only insurgents voting with the president), but opposition within the House eventually saw its defeat by 204 to 196. Roosevelt directly attributed to Coughlin the source of the propaganda that had defeated the bill. Most importantly, such was the party regularity exercised by the insurgents on these core issues that it was almost impossible to identify them separately from their conservative party colleagues.⁴

In the past, the president had successfully deflected the criticisms levelled against him, citing the success of the New Deal in returning the economy to a stable

footing and in providing a safety net for those Americans who had yet to feel the benefits of prosperity. The truth was, however, that the economic recovery was sustained largely by federal investment. In the months following his second inauguration, Roosevelt sought to rebalance expenditure by cutting the federal payroll. As a result, by March 1938, unemployment had risen to 20 per cent and the economy had entered a period of sharp recession. The infallibility of the New Deal's economic solutions suddenly looked questionable, and the president's opponents took their chance to reiterate their earlier concerns.

The faltering economic recovery was coupled with an apparent failure in the social safety net. Roosevelt had placed the introduction of Social Security in January 1937 at the forefront of the final stage of his presidential campaign. However, the implementation of the plan was not uniformly positive. Not wishing to increase the federal deficit, the administration's plan had only ever been intended to pay contributions by an investment fund generated from the introduction of a new payroll tax. As payments were not intended to be made until the fund reached a sustainable level (estimated to be 1942), only very small pensions (on average \$20 per month) were received by those reaching retirement age soon after the introduction of the scheme. Existing pensioners, who had paid nothing into the fund, were not eligible for any benefit. Furthermore, the investment of \$2 billion in the Social Security investment fund in 1937, without the balance provided by the introduction of pension payments, had the effect of reducing purchasing power in the economy and contributed directly to the economic downturn.⁵

With the president's promises apparently compromised, Townsend attempted to re-establish his credibility as the pre-eminent pension expert, and membership in his organisation rose once again. Pressure from Townsend and his congressional supporters saw the administration launch a review of Social Security in 1937. In the summer of 1939, following considerable congressional and public debate, the administration conceded significant changes to the legislation, most notably the

immediate universal entitlement to an old-age pension for all those reaching or already having reached 65, irrespective of their individual contributions to the pension fund. His movement rehabilitated, Townsend remained an active figure in the on-going debates regarding Social Security until his death aged 93 in 1969. The Townsend Movement itself campaigned for a close variant of the \$200 per month plan proposed by the elderly doctor until its eventual closure in 1980.⁶

Insurgent support for Townsend's campaign to amend Social Security was not, however, matched by action from the insurgents to move forward with the implementation of further economic and social reform. Instead, unhappy with the increasing radicalisation of the industrial workforce, they became a barrier in any attempt by the administration to expand the scope of the New Deal.

The fall into recession galvanised industrial workers as never before. Coughlin, Lemke and the senatorial insurgents had supported the passage of administration legislation enabling the unionisation of the industrial workforce. They viewed the empowerment of the workforce as an important counterbalance to the concentrated power of big business. As their dreams became a reality, however, they recognised that they had underestimated how the creation of mass industrial unions, collected under the newly established Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), represented a concentrated power bloc itself. Furthermore, the CIO encouraged the radicalised collective workforce to take direct action against employers, resulting in mass sit-ins across the rubber, steel and automotive industries. In March 1937, there were 170 sit-down strikes involving 167,210 industrial workers. Employers including General Motors, General Electric, Firestone and RCA, finding the administration unwilling to support the use of federal troops to remove striking workers, were forced to recognise unions and enhance wages and conditions in return for access to their own private property and the resumption of production. With business being held to ransom, the insurgents in Congress attempted to exert what pressure they could to stem the rising tide of union power. When the administration proposed the introduction of a minimum

wage and maximum hours, the insurgents aligned with the Republican old guard in their condemnation of what they considered the federal government's attempts to limit personal freedom through exerting control of the economic and working lives of the American people.⁷ Though their policy positions had largely remained the same, in the face of these new economic and social realities, the ideological distance on social and economic issues between the radical reformers and the Republican Party had closed considerably.

The radical reformers' ideological move towards the Republican Party was further reinforced by the increasing relevance of the second central tenet of the Union Party: its belief in national economic and political isolation. Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend and Smith shared with the insurgents a belief that the Depression had been caused by the manipulation of the currency by international bankers and the so-called 'gold families.' The rise of militant unionism enhanced their paranoid belief that international agents were working to undermine the American government. In particular, outside of Congress, Henry Ford's response to militant unionism became the key driver in the resurgence of both Coughlin's and Smith's political careers. Ford was a brilliant engineer, and his revolutionary approach towards automotive production had made him one of the richest men in the world. Personally, however, he was eccentric, puritanical and paranoid. He saw a direct connection between the rise of radical unions in America and the spectre of international Communism. A zealous anti-Semite, Ford alleged that Communism was itself a Jewish plot, designed to enlist the weak-minded industrial workforce in a plot to establish control of the world. Seeking an outlet to promote his theory, in 1937 Ford approached Coughlin. Together the priest and the industrialist represented a potent force.

Coughlin had not previously been an explicit anti-Semite, but in 1937, prompted by Ford, the priest adjusted his economic theories to establish a wider conspiracy. Coughlin alleged that Jewish bankers and their Communist agents sought to overthrow the American government. To assist Coughlin in the new fight, Ford provided

generous funding first for an attempt by the priest to establish a company-owned union at the Ford plant – the Workers' Council for Social Justice. This endeavour having failed, Ford funded enhancements of *Social Justice*, extending the page length and improving the paper quality and typeface. In addition, Ford provided Coughlin with material drawn from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a notorious forgery that described a supposed meeting of Jewish elders in 1897 in which they outlined plans to undermine Gentile civilisation.⁸

Although the congressional insurgents did not share Coughlin's explicit anti-Semitism – Lemke personally condemned any group that attacked people 'because of their race or religion' – they shared the priest's view that America needed to be isolated from a world war engineered in Europe. 'It seems,' wrote Lemke, 'that many of our people are forgetting that there is no room for European hatreds in the United States of America.'⁹ With war looming, Coughlin further extended his theory, alleging that the Jews, through their attempts to destabilise the German economy, had forced the Nazis to protect the nation by rising up against them. In a radio broadcast delivered on November 20, 1938 (to an audience which, although smaller than its height, still totalled in the millions), Coughlin claimed that Nazism was merely a defence mechanism against Jewish Communism and compared the death of German Jews to the twenty million Christians allegedly murdered by the Communist government of Russia between 1917 and 1938.¹⁰

Coughlin might have taken an extreme position, but his views proved popular with a proportion of the electorate who wished America to maintain a strictly isolationist position in global affairs and to avoid the nation's entanglement in another world war.¹¹ Inside Congress, isolationism was championed by the insurgents and their new old-guard Republican allies. Lemke supported their campaign, and as war approached, he became a passionate advocate of a reduction in the nation's military spending.¹² In the Senate, the insurgents proposed a series of measures intended to enshrine American isolationism into law, and in January 1937, they were successful in passing a Neutrality

Act that strengthened earlier legislation by restricting loans to nations at war and putting in place a strict arms embargo. When the Democratic administration attempted to repeal elements of the Neutrality Act in both 1939 and 1940, insurgents (with the exception of Norris) led the unsuccessful opposition, voting *en masse* against the changes.¹³

The increased relevance of the radical reformers to national debate and Republican Party politics did not, however, translate into a surge in support for the Union Party. In the rural west, where the Union Party had found much of its support, the Democrats' focus on urban, industrial voters increasingly turned the electorate away from the administration and back towards the Republican Party as the traditional regional power. The west's embrace of Republicanism was accelerated as the war approached by the increased affluence of farmers, who benefited from the disruption of the global market and the dependence on American-grown produce both at home and overseas. The shift in Lemke's personal political position was reflective of the increased conservatism of his constituents. Whereas Lemke had once campaigned on behalf of the poor debtor farmers, he became a voice of protest against government regulations that inhibited the expansion of their now-profitable businesses.¹⁴ Lemke's own movement mirrored developments within the Union Party and insurgent columns more broadly. Indeed, with the radical reform message focusing on Jewish insurrection and the insurgents' commitment to the Republican Party, the Union Party increasingly found itself an empty vehicle drained of any relevance or support whatsoever. Although Lemke and Nystul struggled to keep the party functional between 1937 and 1938, it lacked state-level operations, and they were unable to stop local units, for example in Illinois, from being subsumed by Nazi groups. In the spring of 1938, Nystul closed the party headquarters in Chicago; by 1939, all traces of the movement had disappeared.¹⁵

The radical reformer and insurgent focus on isolationism had galvanised support amongst an element of the electorate, but it eventually proved their undoing.

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, discredited their isolationist arguments that the United States was safe from direct attack and without need for its own defences. Following the Japanese assault, the American electorate switched to support direct intervention, and Roosevelt overcame isolationist opposition in Congress. The rapid escalation of U.S. involvement in World War Two undermined the radical reformers' isolationist campaign and made their attacks upon the failure of the New Deal to restore the economy moot. Placing the nation onto a war footing addressed the nation's economic difficulties in fundamental and direct ways, and the shared collective endeavour, as well as the extension of government control over industry, suppressed worker unrest. Although it proved impossible to repeat the success of the 1936 landslide election, Roosevelt's broad appeal and success as a wartime leader saw him uniquely re-elected to serve two further terms in 1940 and 1944.¹⁶

In contrast to Roosevelt's success, in the light of the new social and economic conditions brought about by the war, the radical reformers and their insurgent colleagues looked dated and out of touch with the needs of modern America. In Congress, Borah, McNary of Oregon and Johnson of California died in office in 1940, 1944 and 1945 respectively. Capper of Kansas retired in 1948; Frazier and Nye of North Dakota, Shipstead of Minnesota and La Follette of Wisconsin lost their seats in 1941, 1944 and 1946. Lemke, mellowed by the war, focused his remaining years on a successful campaign to secure the designation of a national park in North Dakota. He died seeking re-election in 1950.¹⁷

Of the president's critics outside of Congress, Coughlin's move towards anti-Semitism proved the last straw for a Catholic Church attempting to align itself with the increasingly internationalist Democratic administration. In 1938, under orders from his new superior Archbishop Edward Moody, Coughlin ended his radio broadcasts. *Social Justice*, however, continued its publication under the priest's control until in 1942. Under threat of a sedition charge, Coughlin was forced by Archbishop Moody to cease

its publication and end his political activities. Constrained by his church, Coughlin maintained his silence until 1966, when he briefly returned to the national political scene by publishing two books heavily critical of the American Catholic Church and its relationship with the Vatican. Coughlin died in 1979 un-reconciled with the leadership of the church he had provided with a lifetime of service and largely forgotten by the American people.¹⁸

The only Union Party backer to prosper in the post-war years was Gerald Smith. Coughlin had dissolved the union of the independent radical reformers in August 1936, concerned that Smith was attempting to usurp his position. History and circumstance would ultimately prove him correct. Coughlin's removal from the airwaves created an opportunity for Smith. Although the entry to the war had shifted mainstream American opinion towards internationalism, there remained a significant fringe who supported isolation. This group became the basis of a political network for the Baptist preacher and turned him into a wealthy man by the time of his death in 1976.

Taken under Henry Ford's wing, Smith replaced Coughlin on his 48-station radio network, absorbed the remaining units of the NUSJ into his own political movement, the 'Committee of One Million,' and upon the closure of *Social Justice* began his own publication *The Cross and the Flag*. By 1942, Smith claimed the membership of his movement, which he had rechristened the 'America First Party,' to be in excess of 3 million, though it was estimated more accurately to be in the region of 1 million. Although a fringe politician, Smith was able to galvanise a significant minority of voters. In 1942, for example, although unsuccessful, his campaign in the Illinois Republican senatorial primary saw him receive 109,000 votes. By 1944, he was generating in excess of \$5,000 per week profit from his direct mail, publications and personal appearances.¹⁹ Although his political aspirations were thwarted, Smith's variously racist, anti-Communist and anti-Semitic publications found a minority marketplace, and he thrived in the anti-Communist crusades of the 1950s and in his

opposition to the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s and the white backlash of the 1970s. In the 1950s, donations to his organisations averaged over \$150,000 per year and by the 1960s had risen to well over \$300,000. In addition to his extremist publication business, in his last years of life, Smith dedicated himself to the establishment of a religious theme park in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. It was this that would prove to be his lasting legacy. Opened in 1969, his 'Passion Play of the Ozarks' attracted 28,852 visitors. By the time of his death, the total number of visitors had exceeded 1 million. His attractions brought about a complete transformation in the local economy. Including the new hotels and shops established to provide for the influx of visitors, the municipal product of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, increased from under \$1 million in 1964 to over \$15 million in 1972. Few visitors to Eureka Springs would today know of the legacy of its founder, but Smith's sacred projects remain one of the top tourist attractions in Arkansas.²⁰

Coughlin, Lemke, Smith, Townsend and Borah would never regain the mass support they had enjoyed in the mid-1930s, but as a significant element of the American electorate moved politically towards the right in the years immediately following Roosevelt's overwhelming victory, they returned temporarily to political relevance. This could not, however, overcome the fundamental problems that had undermined the Union Party's campaign in 1936. Unable to establish itself as a legitimate political party, the Union Party found much of its core doctrine of individualism, self-determination and isolation absorbed within the Republican Party. It thus ultimately proved as irrelevant to the pre-war shift towards conservatism as it had during the height of the pro-reform drive of the 1936 election. Its eventual dissolution generated not one single line of press comment.

The legacy of the Union Party, while small, should not be ignored. Although historians have largely disregarded the role of the Union Party in the 1936 presidential election, the argument presented in this thesis suggests that the Union Party emerged from a wide base of popular political opposition to the New Deal. Its failures were

many, both as a party and as a coherent force. Ultimately, the Union Party faced a considerable power in the shape of the New Deal coalition, and the newly formed party proved incapable of draining voters away from the president. The New Deal, moreover, was singularly successful in galvanising the American people. By turning his 1936 election campaign into a referendum on the success of the New Deal, Roosevelt challenged the electorate to choose the nation's future direction: an America where collective prosperity would be maintained, or a return to the divisive, individualistic self-interest that had brought about the Depression. The electorate made their choice clear: over 27.5 million Americans voted for Roosevelt – over 10 million more than for Landon. Only 892,000 voted for Lemke.

Roosevelt had won the 1932 election promising economic and social transformation in America. Although initially supportive of the president's plans, the five men who would ultimately be central the formation of the Union Party – Coughlin, Townsend, Long, Lemke and Borah – individually sought to capitalise upon the discontent of the newly unemployed middle class who had lost everything in the Depression and felt that the First New Deal's limited reform agenda had done little to restore their economic position. These radical reformers shared a loose set of ideological connections. They each blamed international manipulation of the banking system for the economic collapse and favoured economic and social reforms intended to protect the American people from the excessive influence and abuses brought about by the concentration of economic and, increasingly, political power. In addition to the popular appeal of their separate reform proposals, they were innovative in the way in which they sought to promote both themselves and their reform plans. Working outside of the political system, Coughlin and Long utilised the power and reach of the radio to build popular support and generate momentum for their individual political campaigns. They were able to harness this support by transforming their radio audiences into quasi-political protest movements. Similarly, Townsend sought to bypass traditional

routes of party-based political action by establishing his grassroots, mass-participation pension movement.

Although their challenge to the president had emerged from individual actions, the opposition of the Democratic administration led to their gradual convergence into a series of transitory alliances. Lemke was able, for example, with Long's and Borah's support, to ensure the passage of his Farm Bankruptcy Bill in 1934. In addition, they had success in blocking individual pieces of Democratic legislation, most notably Coughlin, Long and Borah's combined campaign to defeat the World Court resolution in January 1935. More often, however, they found their personal ambitions thwarted even if the Roosevelt administration co-opted aspects of their individual movements within the Second New Deal. These agitators, however, had built their success on independence from the Washington political machine, and they were at times ineffectual in their attempts to turn popular support into votes for their particular plans in Congress. When finally unified beneath the banner of the Union Party, the radical reformers and insurgent politicians proved incapable of cohering behind a core message and sustaining the party. With the exception of Lemke and his ardent supporters, the Union Party was expedient – a means to protest against Roosevelt rather than promote an ideologically coherent platform. Its failure as an electoral vehicle thus lay largely with the diffuse and eclectic origins of the party and the movements that constituted it.

The Democratic administration was able to limit the growth in support for the independent radical reformers by taking direct action to undermine their credibility. Coughlin was discredited, for example, by the administration's release of information on his trading of silver that revealed he was one of the largest owners of the metal in the nation. Similarly, the administration supported actions taken by former Long loyalists to normalise Louisiana following the death of the senator that in turn undermined Gerald Smith's attempts to establish himself as the new leader of the SoW movement. Finally, Townsend was humiliated at the hands of the Democrat-led

congressional committee established to investigate his leadership of the OARP. In addition to reducing the radical reformers' appeal amongst the electorate, such actions pushed them into active opposition to the administration.

Beyond the measures adopted to reduce the credibility of the radical reformers in the minds of the electorate, the Democratic administration was flexible in its response to the challenges presented by the radical reformers. The mass movements established by Long, Coughlin and Townsend lacked the formal structures of traditional political parties, and they inspired only limited allegiance in their supporters. The passage of Second New Deal legislation drawn directly from threads of the radical reformers' proposals not only undermined the appeal of the independent radical reform movements, but saw the transfer of their followers to the Democratic president. Isolated and outmanoeuvred, Townsend, Coughlin and Smith found themselves drawn together into a loose union with a single sole purpose: to defeat the president. They initially directed this support behind Borah's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination; he, however, failed to overturn the powerful conservative leadership of the party, who were convinced that the time had come to scale back the New Deal reforms. Having few other choices and requiring a candidate behind whom they could direct their pro-reform, anti-Roosevelt campaign for the 1936 election, they decided to back the launch of the Union Party. Lemke, believing that the polarisation of the political parties brought about by the New Deal left a gap for a new political party in favour of individual freedom, self-sufficiency, isolationism and economic independence, took the opportunity presented to him by his backers to establish this new party. There was, however, no shared understanding of the purpose of the party. Coughlin, Smith and Townsend, unwilling to support either candidate of the Republican or Democratic Party, were motivated to create the Union Party purely to provide a vehicle through which to mount their anti-Roosevelt campaign. Lemke, by contrast, believed in the party platform, but he was in a minority even among supporters of the union.

The plan to launch the Union Party was ill-conceived and poorly executed. Desperate to protect their self-interest and uninterested in its long-term future, Coughlin and Townsend were unwilling to put in place the proper organisational and financial support the party needed to become an effective political machine. In the absence of such resources, the Union Party was doomed to fail. Yet, these internal organisational issues should not disguise the central reasons for the Union Party's electoral disaster. The Democrats' moves to integrate elements from the radical reformers' positive social reforms within the Second New Deal left the Union Party without a distinctive platform from which to campaign. Moreover, Lemke's vision for a third political party held little appeal for the majority of the electorate content with the progress of reform achieved under the Second New Deal.

New Democratic voters strengthened the party's hold, ensuring a remarkable landslide in 1936. Buried beneath was the Union Party, whose support crumpled in the days preceding the election. The support for the Union position began to wane once Townsend, Coughlin, Smith and Lemke ran negative campaigns that focused not on their positive ideas for reform, but cast doubts upon the president's character. Such increasingly desperate and extreme appeals merely served to broaden and consolidate Roosevelt's centralist support amongst the electorate, opened up the fault lines between his radical opponents, exposed the weakness of its party machinery to external influence, and ultimately limited the Union Party's already marginal appeal.

Although historians have long mentioned – albeit usually in passing – the failures of the Union Party, the party nevertheless still polled some 892,000 votes. These figures were substantially reduced from Emil Hurja's predictions, but they represented a class of deeply marginalised Americans who, despite the president's best efforts, had been left behind by the New Deal's economic recovery or social safety net. For these individuals, the Union Party was both a protest and a statement from a minority who, despite Roosevelt's success, remained isolated from his grand electoral coalition.

The story of the Union Party cannot, of course, be complete without recognising the success and power of Franklin Roosevelt's political and social alliance. Elected on the promise of a 'New Deal' for America, Roosevelt had steered the nation out of the depths of the immediate post-crash recession. He articulated a vision of social and economic change and as this thesis has indicated, he ably co-opted and exposed his political opponents, be they the radical reformers or the Union Party itself. The Union Party proved to be a 'first rate fizzle' but its backers, though now mostly forgotten, are important historical figures who pioneered the use of mass media to generate political pressure outside of the traditional party system.²¹ Coughlin, Smith, Lemke and Townsend's subsequent failure to turn their individual protest movements into an active political party ultimately demonstrates the difficulty of turning a diverse mass of popular discontent into a single, unified political movement that represented more than just opposition. As the *New York Times* commented in June 1936, Lemke 'is the candidate of blind protest and his strength will be in the strength of the blindness.'²² In contrast to the Union Party's hostility, division and myopia, Roosevelt provided a positive, bipartisan vision built upon the proven success of the social and economic reforms of his first administration. The Union Party did indeed fizzle out, but its marginalised voters and candidates still spoke for an isolated America that the New Deal had seemingly passed by.

¹ Document titled 'Minutes of the 1936 National Conference of the Union Party,' December 19, 1936, WLP.

² *Ibid.*

³ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 123-134; Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 255.

⁴ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 94-95; Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 141.

⁵ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 298.

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- ⁶ Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 163-184, 217.
- ⁷ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 288-295; Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 141.
- ⁸ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 127, 145-149.
- ⁹ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 231.
- ¹⁰ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 154-155.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 80.
- ¹² Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 236.
- ¹³ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 179-186.
- ¹⁴ Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 264.
- ¹⁵ Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression*, 274-275.
- ¹⁶ Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism*, 198.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 183-208; Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel*, 271.
- ¹⁸ Warren, *Radio Priest*, 221-256.
- ¹⁹ Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 64-68, 75.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 135-196.
- ²¹ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, November 6, 1936.
- ²² *NYT*, June 28, 1936.

List of Abbreviations

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Act.
AFL	American Federation of Labor.
ASCP	Archibald Stinson Coody Papers, Louisiana State University Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.
BMC	Bronson Murray Cutting.
BMCP	Bronson Murray Cutting Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
CC	Charles Coughlin.
CH	Covington Hall.
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations.
CWA	Civil Works Administration.
DNC	Democratic National Committee.
DNCP	Democratic National Committee Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
EHP	Emil Hurja Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
ERAA	Emergency Relief Appropriation Act.
FCA	Farm Credit Administration.
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration.
FET	Francis E. Townsend.
FDR	Franklin D. Roosevelt.
FDRL	Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
GLKS	Gerald L.K. Smith.
HML	Louisiana State University Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.
JAF	James A. Farley.
JAFP	James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LOC	Library of Congress.
OARP	Old-Age-Revolving-Pension Organisation.
NYA	National Youth Administration.
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act.
NIRA	National Industrial Recovery Act.
NUSJ	National Union for Social Justice.
NYT	<i>New York Times</i> .

NPL	Non-Partisan League.
NTW	<i>National Townsend Weekly.</i>
PNC	Progressive National Committee.
POF	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers, President's Official Files, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
PPF	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers, President's Personal Files, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
RBLP	Russell B. Long Papers, Louisiana State University Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.
RFC	Reconstruction Finance Corporation.
RNC	Republican National Committee.
SJ	<i>Social Justice.</i>
SMP	Sheldon Marcus Papers, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University.
SoW	Share-our-Wealth Movement.
TCOB	Thomas C. O'Brien.
THWP	T. Harry Williams Papers, Louisiana State University Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.
WAW	William Allen White.
WAWP	William Allen White Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
WEB	William E. Borah.
WEBP	William E. Borah Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
WL	William Lemke.
WLP	William Lemke Papers, Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, University of North Dakota.
WPA	Works Progress Administration.
WS	William Skeeles.

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- Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers, President's Personal Files, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
- Gerald L.K. Smith Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
- William Allen White Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- T. Harry Williams Papers, Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Newspapers and News Magazines

- Bend Bulletin.*
- Chicago Defender.*
- Chicago Tribune.*
- Dubuque Telegraph-Herald.*
- Hartford Courant.*

Iowa Telegraph Herald.

Literary Digest.

Milwaukee Journal.

Nation.

National Townsend Weekly.

New Republic.

New York Times.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Pittsburgh Press.

St. Petersburg Evening Independent.

Social Justice.

Southeast Missourian.

Spartanburg Herald.

Time Magazine.

Washington Reporter.

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