

The verdict of history about the New Deal has not been all favorable. Some critics of the New Deal charge that it expanded the authority of the federal government by taking away powers of state governments. They point out that the New Deal programs greatly increased the national debt. Critics also argue that the Roosevelt administration helped labor unions to become much too powerful.

John T. Flynn was one of these critics who believed that Roosevelt's New Deal policies were disastrous for the nation. Flynn was particularly worried about the growth of the government bureaucracy and its increasing power. In this selection from his book *The Roosevelt Myth*, written in 1948, Flynn also bitterly attacked Roosevelt himself as well as his policies.

Many good people in America still cherish the false idea that Roosevelt performed some amazing achievement for this country. They believe he took our economic system when it was completely broken down and restored it to vitality. They think he took over our political system when it was weakest and restored it to its full strength. He put himself on the side of the underprivileged masses. He transferred power from the great corporation executives to the simple working people of America. He controlled the adventurers of Wall Street, and gave security to the humble men and women of the country.

But not one of these claims is true. He did not restore our economic system to vitality. He changed it. The system he so stupidly moved us into is more like the bureaucracy of Germany before World War I than our own traditional order.

Before his regime we lived in a system which depended for its expansion upon private investment in private enterprise. Today [1948] we live in a system which depends for its expansion and vitality upon the government. This is a prewar European importation. And it was imported at the moment when it had fallen apart in Europe. In this system the government takes by taxes or by borrowings the savings of all the citizens and invests them in non-wealth-producing undertakings in order to create work.

Behold the picture of the American economy today. In America today every fourth person depends for a livelihood upon employment either directly by the government or indirectly in some industry supported by government funds. There is a public debt of \$250 billion, compared to a pre-Roosevelt debt of \$19 billion, and a government budget of \$40 billion instead of \$4 billion before Roosevelt. Inflation has doubled prices and reduced the lower-paid employed workers to a state of poverty as bad as that of the unemployed in the depression. More

people are on various kinds of government relief than when we had 11 million unemployed. Bureaucrats are in every field of life. And the President is calling for more power, more price-fixing, more regulation, and more billions. Does this look like the traditional American scene?

No, Roosevelt did not restore our economic system. He did not construct a new one. He substituted an old one which lives upon permanent crises and an armament economy. And he did not by a process of orderly design and building, but by a series of mistakes. He moved one step at a time, in flight from one problem to another. Now we have a state-supported economic system that will continue a little at a time to destroy the private system until it disappears altogether.

Roosevelt did not restore our political system to its full strength. One may like the shape into which he battered it, but it cannot be called a repair job. He changed our political system with two weapons—blank-check congressional appropriations and blank-check congressional legislation. In 1933 Congress gave up much of its power when it put billions into his hands. It gave him a blanket appropriation to be spent at his own will. And it passed general laws leaving it to him, through great government bureaus that he set up, to fill in the details of legislation.

These two mistakes gave Roosevelt a power which he used ruthlessly. He used it to break down the power of Congress and concentrate it in the hands of the executive. The result of these two betrayals—the smashing of our economic system and the twisting of our political system—can only be the planned economic state. This, in the form of either communism or fascism, dominates the entire continent of Europe today. The capitalist system cannot live under these conditions. Free representative government cannot survive a planned economy. Such an economy can be managed only by a dictatorial government. The only result of our present system—unless we reverse the drift—will be the gradual disappearance of the system of free enterprise under a free representative government.

There are people who honestly defend this change. They at least are honest. They believe in a planned economy. They believe in a highly centralized government operated by a powerful executive. They do not say Roosevelt saved our

system. They say he has given us a new one. That is logical. But no one can praise Roosevelt for doing this and then insist that he restored our traditional political and economic systems to their former vitality.

Roosevelt's star was sinking sadly in 1938 when he had 11 million unemployed and when Hitler made his first war moves in Europe. The cities were filling with jobless workers. Taxes were rising. The debt was soaring. The war rescued him and he seized upon it like a drowning man. By leading his country into the fringes of the war at first and then deep into its center all over the world he was able to do the only things that could save him—spend billions to spread the hot flames of war hysteria and put every man and woman into the war mills. Under the pressure of patriotism, he could silence criticism and work up the illusion of the war leader.

On the moral side, I have barely touched that subject. It will all still be told. But go back through the years, read the speeches and platforms and judgments Roosevelt made, and consider them in the light of what he did. Look up the promises of thrift in public office, of balanced budgets and lower taxes, of honesty in government, and of security for all. Read the speeches he made promising never, never again to send our sons to fight in foreign wars. He broke every promise. He betrayed all who trusted him.

The figure of Roosevelt exhibited before the eyes of our people is false. There was no such being as that noble, selfless, hard-headed, wise, and farseeing combination of philosopher, philanthropist, and warrior. It has been created out of pure propaganda. A small collection of dangerous people in this country are using it to advance their own evil purposes.

READING REVIEW

1. (a) Name two myths about Roosevelt. (b) What evidence did Flynn offer to support his conclusion that these were untrue?
2. Describe the changes Roosevelt made in our economic and political systems.
3. According to Flynn, what was the result of a "planned economy"?
4. Why do you think Roosevelt provoked such strong feelings?
5. What do you think of Flynn's criticism of President Roosevelt?