

Progressive Era Influence on West Coast Political Reform, 1937-1942

BY

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For many years after the almost proximate Progressive and New Deal eras, historians accepted strong 'continuity' between these reformist periods. However, in 1955 Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* advanced a hypothesis of 'discontinuity.' He emphasized backward-looking morality in the Progressive era and the forward-oriented pragmatism of the New Deal. My thesis challenges this discontinuity school of thought, and is a contribution to scholarship because Hofstadter's theory established a dominant paradigm about these eras. Historians as diverse as Graham Jr., Weinstein, Worster, and Katznelson have further stressed the differences between the Progressive and New Deal eras.

Yet, while the discontinuity message articulated many truths, it obscures an alternative vision of the New Deal. This work demonstrates on the West Coast during the later New Deal, 1937-1942, Progressive era influence was substantial. General chapters focus on: the Progressive era; the 1920s; the early New Deal. Detailed chapters about the West Coast, 1937-1942, look at three policy areas, and include: conservation and national parks; monopoly reform and distribution of electricity from West Coast dams; social justice and responses to Dust Bowl migration. An ideological re-appraisal of the West Coast in the late New Deal is attempted.

Firstly, from a Progressive era ideological viewpoint, issues conventionally judged peripheral in the three policy areas are re-conceptualized as significant policy successes. Secondly individuals and organizations shaping and implementing policies locally and nationally were either survivors of the earlier era or steeped in its beliefs. Thirdly, events on the West Coast, 1939-1940, which reproduced conditions in the Progressive era, tested whether New Dealers had learned from their predecessors' mistakes. Consequently, the West Coast region is particularly apposite in a considered questioning of Hofstadter's philosophical divide between the two reform eras.

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Forward

The present is always a negotiation with the past. Even when a person apparently reacts spontaneously to a situation he or she brings to bear experience or inexperience from the past. If a politician in an earlier incarnation of their career lived through a previous era, or comes from a familial and/or political tradition established then, that is a back story which informs their present day thought processes and patterns of behaviour. No more, I believe, are these reflections of relevance to US history than over individuals from the Progressive era, or those influenced by that era, who played a significant role on the West Coast in the later New Deal. It is the intention of this thesis to show how, in the years 1937-1942, they sought to re-energize areas of policy found in the Progressive era, or learn by the mistakes of earlier progressives or take their actions a stage further.

Introduction

At the end of 1932, an obscure politician from the Mid West coveted a top job in the US cabinet. When he was invited to President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt's imposing New York City town-house on 65th Street for a political gathering, he had 'little hope in his heart', though, of securing the appointment. After all, he was a 58 year old, unelected politician, and unlike the Democrat Roosevelt, a Republican, whose experience in politics was characterized by failure, not success. Frances Perkins, the future Secretary of Labor, who saw him at Roosevelt's home, thought he was an incongruous figure, lacking New York elegance and style. In truth, he must have been out of place, and said nothing to the others present. He had never met Roosevelt before. Perhaps, it came as a surprise then that, as he was about to leave, Roosevelt called him into his study and addressed him thus: 'Mr. Ickes, you and I have been speaking the same language for the past twenty years. I am having difficulty finding a Secretary of the Interior...and I have about come to the conclusion that the man I want is Harold L. Ickes of Chicago.' With this unexpected announcement, Ickes was handed one of the most prestigious cabinet positions in Roosevelt's government.¹

This episode creates a deceptively straightforward link between two great reform periods in American history, the Progressive era (1900-20), and the New Deal (1933-40). In effect, on the eve of the New Deal, FDR viewed Ickes as a political soul-mate, because of common beliefs, which dated back to the heyday of progressivism. They would implement their Progressive era beliefs in the next seven years, while FDR worked with others who held similar beliefs, although not necessarily veterans of the Progressive era. For many years, historians broadly accepted this interpretation of the New Deal. The historian Arthur S. Link, for example, who specialized in the Progressive era, understandably championed his chosen period as the inspiration for New Deal liberalism.² Henry Steele Commager, though, was equally emphatic that progressivism,

¹ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1939* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), IX; Graham White and John Maze, *Harold Ickes of the New Deal: His Private Life and Public Career* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 98.

² Arthur S. Link, *American Epoch: A History of America Since 1900* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955)

with its near-contemporary movement Populism, spawned the New Deal. Commager wrote: ‘After the lapse of a decade and a half, Franklin Roosevelt took up once more the program of the Populists and Progressives and carried it to its logical conclusion.’³

In 1955 Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform* transformed understanding of the Progressive era, and the New Deal.⁴ Never again would historians or political scientists breezily assume an affinity between the two periods. Hofstadter employed highly persuasive, polemical prose to argue that ‘the spirit of the Progressive era was quite different from that of the New Deal.’⁵ According to Hofstadter, Progressives were essentially conservative reformers, who wanted to restore an old morality to American life. They urged action to combat wrongs which they saw as emerging from late 19th Century society: endemic poverty, unfair competition in business, and wastage of American land. In Hofstadter’s phrase, Progressives ‘traffic(ked) in moral absolutes’, allowing them to occupy the intellectual ‘high-ground’ against their opponents.⁶ Conversely, for Hofstadter, New Dealers should be viewed as more radical, modern reformers, because they were experimenters with American society, who did not want to restore a *status quo ante*. Indeed, their opponents accused the ‘innovative’ New Deal of immorality.⁷ New Dealers were flexible ‘pragmatists’ driven by a desire to deliver practical results benefiting the American people, and themselves. The influence of Hofstadter was profound in academia, colouring the opinion of subsequent generations of historians. As he was a product of the New Deal, it perhaps follows that he wished to stress its uniqueness, and repel any suggestion that the New Deal was in large part derivative.

It is Hofstadter’s ‘discontinuity’ school of thought about the Progressive and New Deal eras which I wish to challenge in this thesis.⁸ Naturally, in the light of more recent research, Hofstadter’s argument has been modified, but its main message, that a disjunction exists between the Progressive era and New Deal, because the former was backward-looking while the latter

³ Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 337.

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955)

⁵Ibid., 19.

⁶Ibid., 315.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Otis Graham suggested the designation ‘the discontinuity school’ for historians who supported Hofstadter on the disconnect between the Progressive era and the New Deal, Otis L Graham Jr., *An Encore For Reform: The Old Progressives and The New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 227.

looked to the future, remains ‘conventional wisdom’. Clearly, I would be over-ambitious in attempting a wholesale challenge to the ‘discontinuity’ argument, and, of necessity, my aim is more limited. This thesis does aim to show continuity between the Progressive era and the New Deal at a national level, but its main purpose is to demonstrate that process in a more localized setting, using primary and secondary source material. Therefore, the issues of conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice, which connect strongly to the Progressive era, will be considered during the later New Deal on the West Coast, with a view to showing continuity.

To begin with, we need to consider the literature that has built up from Hofstadter onwards, which has established and entrenched the ‘discontinuity’ argument. In doing so, a number of misconceptions and confusions that impede understanding of continuity between the two eras are going to be discussed, along with the rationale behind this thesis, especially why particular issues have been chosen, in a specific region, during the final years of the New Deal. Relevant works from the ‘continuity’ school of thought about the Progressive era and New Deal are reviewed, in opposition to discontinuity arguments, to bring out salient points about the minority viewpoint, which I hope to build on. By covering important findings of both the ‘discontinuity’ and ‘continuity’ traditions in the historiography, I want to establish where my thesis will be situated in the literature. Afterwards, the methodology of the thesis is explained. Finally, a brief digest of the PhD is included to show the way forward for the reader.

Ever since Hofstadter’s pronouncements on the Progressive era and New Deal, historians of these periods have tended to be devotees of his ideas, or worked in their shadow. Otis Graham was a disciple of Hofstadter, and in *An Encore for Reform* demonstrated that by the mid 1930s surviving old Progressives mostly disapproved of the New Deal. As he put it: ‘To find this preponderance of progressive sentiment against the New Deal is to become conscious of considerable differences between the two reform movements of the first half of this (20th) century.’⁹ The two most celebrated general narrative histories of the New Deal, which established a ‘benchmark’ for later works on 1930s US politics, further reinforced Hofstadter’s thesis. Successively, books by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., including: *The Age of Roosevelt: The*

⁹ Ibid., 178.

Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933, and William Leuchtenburg's *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-40*, bolstered Hofstadter's 'discontinuity' argument.¹⁰ Leuchtenburg gave explicit support for discontinuity, while Schlesinger showed that the Progressive era background to the New Deal was far removed from its ideological atmosphere.¹¹ Later, Kenneth Davis carefully chronicled FDR's Progressive era background, but made no attempt to show his Progressive era ideology and morality carried through to the New Deal.¹² Conversely, Frank Freidel acknowledged the early New Deal included a significant Progressive era input.¹³ However, Freidel judges New Dealers, and their leader FDR to have been ultimately pragmatic innovators rather than holding to the beliefs of old Progressivism.*

Unsurprisingly, Hofstadter's views have been challenged as a result of further research, but even where writers appear to be making new departures in progressive or New Deal historiography, their work frequently bears the imprint of Hofstadter's thinking. New Left historians, like Gabriel Kolko, seemed to be re-casting understanding of the Progressive era, with the concept of 'political capitalism', whereby business used politics to attain its goals.¹⁴ James Weinstein's description of 'corporate liberalism' presented a more nuanced version of the same line of thought.¹⁵ Yet, on closer inspection, the work of these historians is an elaboration of ideas found in Hofstadter. The moral thrust of Progressivism, in Hofstadter, ultimately was defensive, fighting to reclaim the past, not making way for the future. Progressives, often from the old monied class, felt threatened by emerging socio-economic groups, like *nouveau riche*

¹⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-40* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) chapter XIV.

¹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (London: Heinemann, 1957)

¹² Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928* (New York: Random House, 1979), 225-237, 344-349.

¹³ Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 64, 65, 71, 163, 304, 340, 429.

* Freidel arrives at this conclusion, (pages 434 to 435), because he sees the Progressive era as producing two ideological strands – New Nationalist regulation and New Freedom trust-busting, associated with Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson respectively. He notes that from the outset of the New Deal FDR was not wedded to either approach. As FDR pragmatically fluctuated between these two ideological strands Freidel considers he was neither a Progressive era-inspired follower of Wilson nor Theodore Roosevelt. Yet, it will be argued that in practice Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson both pursued regulation and trust-busting, making FDR's behaviour consistent with Progressive ideology.

¹⁴ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperback, 1967), 3.

¹⁵ James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), XV.

industrialists, and socialistic labour. To contain this ‘status revolution’, Progressives called for consensus across classes, and reforms in society, which would limit the power of big business, and remove the need for a powerful labour movement.¹⁶ New Left historians refined this argument, to incorporate big business as part of a defensive alliance with Progressive politicians, which aimed to render a labour movement unnecessary, and recognized that while controls on big business were unavoidable, they did not necessarily involve disadvantaging big business against their smaller competitors. Wiebe further widened this defensive alliance to include the family and professions.¹⁷

Therefore, Hofstadter’s views have significantly shaped the thinking of historians of the Progressive and New Deal eras, either obviously, or in a more subtle manner, as with Kolko. Indeed, Hofstadter’s ‘discontinuity’ argument achieved such a dominant historiographical ascendancy from the 1960s onwards that many historians of the two reform periods have accepted its assumptions by default. Whether writing about old Progressives or New Dealers, they use the intellectual framework of keeping the two periods separate, with dissimilar preoccupations, and do not explore commonalities, even where strikingly apparent. Increasing specialization by academics encouraged this trend, assisted possibly by their reluctance to become entangled in thickets of controversy concerning whether the two eras are linked, when each can be regarded as satisfactorily self-sufficient. In the 1970s the study of progressivism became conspicuously inward-looking. Peter Filene’s article, ‘An Obituary for “The Progressive Movement”’, denied the reality of a Progressive ideology, obviating its applicability to other eras.¹⁸ As a result, researchers became less interested in the ideological aspects of progressivism, and more concerned about the varied experiences of different groups within the Progressive years defined by race, gender, and class. In the next two decades biographers John Milton Cooper, Kendrick Clements, and Lewis Gould indicated the importance of ‘pragmatic’, as opposed to ‘moral’, behaviour among Progressive era presidential leaders.¹⁹ However, none of these historians has used his work to argue that, by demonstrating the Progressive era was

¹⁶ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 135-166.

¹⁷ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)

¹⁸ Peter G. Filene, ‘An Obituary for “The Progressive Movement”’, *American Quarterly* Vol. 22 No 1 (Spring 1970)

¹⁹ John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983); Kendrick A Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1992); Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lawrence, Kansas : University of Kansas Press, 1991)

more pragmatic than Hofstadter alleged, the Progressive era deserves re-location closer to the ‘pragmatic’ New Deal.

Nevertheless, at the outset, it is sensible to acknowledge the force of Hofstadter’s original argument. The weight of historical opinion has accepted his opinion as the correct interpretation of the Progressive era and New Deal, even allowing for major qualifications. Clearly, moral certainties, especially overtly Christian ones, were more pronounced in the Progressive era, in conformity with Hofstadter’s arguments. FDR’s speeches, unlike Theodore Roosevelt’s in 1912, were not announced to the accompaniment of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’. Even so, there was a strong moral aspect to the New Deal. It did not merely consist of objective experts, as Hofstadter suggested, running bureaucracies according to pragmatic principles.²⁰ Indeed, the Progressive era, arguably, gave the New Deal a ‘value system’ that equated to an ideology. In the New Deal, the need to protect American soil in conservation had a definite moral and ideological dimension, as did the rectitude of improving the lot of economically desperate small farmers and industrial workers in social justice reform. Likewise, monopoly reformers in the New Deal still possessed more than the embers of moral fire that burned fiercely against exploitative big business during the Progressive era.

Conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice are the central issues which will be considered in this study, to illuminate understanding of continuity between the Progressive and New Deal eras. The choice of these policy areas is not random, or tendentious, and the reason for their selection deserves some comment. In the Progressive era there were many other reform areas which had great significance in changing America. Progressive moves to increase democracy provide a good example. The introduction of the initiative and power of recall at a state level were all attempts to make democracy more direct. Similarly, direct election of US senators, and primaries, came about during the Progressive era. The crowning achievement of this process of democratization was the winning of women’s suffrage towards the end of the Progressive age. Yet the New Deal paid little attention to increasing political democracy in America, and, in the Supreme Court dispute (1937), and executive re-organization, critics of the New Deal argued FDR was seeking to stifle democracy. In certain cases, the New Deal

²⁰ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 320-322. Hofstadter on page 322 contrasts ‘the pragmatic and opportunistic tone of the New Deal with the insistent moralism of the Progressives.’

indisputably reversed Progressive reforms, as with Prohibition – implemented by Progressives in 1919, repealed by New Dealers in 1933. Therefore, the three issues being used to connect the Progressive era to the New Deal are justified as being fundamental tenets in the thinking of both eras. Of course, the old Progressives and New Dealers introduced ‘era-specific’ reforms, but these are not my concern.

Misconceptions and confusions perpetrated by Hofstadter and his followers, about the Progressive and New Deal eras also demand adequate discussion; otherwise they seriously impede understanding of linkage between the 1910s and 1930s. Misconceptions relate especially to Hofstadter’s ‘segregation’ of historical periods. His fixation on the separateness of the two historical periods, such a prominent feature of *The Age of Reform*, is a flawed concept. Historical periods are surely not discrete entities, but should be regarded as a series of imbrications, where one era is partially overlapped by its predecessor, and, in turn, partially overlaps its successor. Of course, each era has distinctive features, but these are a synthesis of old and new influences, rather than a free standing product of the era in question. Consequently, the Progressive era may have been moralistic, but its defining characteristics, as with any age, were a complex mixture of the old and new. Progressive behaviour exhibited palpable traces of 19th century morality. However, the Progressive era both accepted and rejected 19th century ideas. One could argue that Progressives defiantly refused to acquiesce in the 19th century status quo, both the corruption of the Gilded Age, and, despite its moral certitude, the exaggerated individualism of older American society, which precluded government intervention. While Progressives invoked the morality of the past, having broken free of traditional party political beliefs, they looked to the future with a more flexible mind. In this way, Progressive reforms were as much focused on future possibilities as past certainties. From this state of affairs, we might expect old Progressive morality to have lived on into the New Deal, and it should hardly surprise us if New Deal pragmatism originated in the Progressive era.

A confusing aspect of Hofstadter’s work relates to periodization, because he actually expands and contracts the boundaries of the Progressive era to suit the discontinuity argument. At one stage, Hofstadter argues that Wilson’s internationalism, especially his desire for America to participate in the League of Nations (1919-20), brought to a close the Progressive era. Wilson’s moral crusade for Americans to abandon their narrow self-interest, in favour of internationalism,

stretched the progressive impulse to breaking-point.²¹ Hofstadter's judgement, that the Progressive era finished in 1920 seems eminently reasonable, as it coincides with the end of progressive presidential rule, and Wilson's defeat over a recognizably progressive foreign policy issue, albeit one that bitterly divided Progressives themselves.

However, at another stage, in *The Age of Reform*, Hofstadter decides to back-date the end of the Progressive era to before America entered World War I, April 1917. He presents an argument that the 'business self-government' of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) in the First New Deal, where big business attained considerable autonomy, was not inspired by Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism campaign. Previous writers argued that the New Nationalism policy of 1912 had been the inspiration behind the NRA, because it tolerated regulated monopoly capitalism. Instead, Hofstadter contends that the NRA stemmed from Wilson's World War I organization of big business (1917-18).²² As he now judges that America's participation in World War I fell outside the Progressive era, Hofstadter has apparently disproved continuity between the Progressive era and the New Deal.²³ In fact, he has arrived at this outcome merely by changing the end date of the Progressive era from 1920 to before April, 1917. To question further Hofstadter's argument, many historians argue that Wilson's World War I organization of the economy was itself derived from New Nationalism.²⁴ In these circumstances, it makes most sense to use the years 1900-1920 for the Progressive era, thereby avoiding Hofstadter's premature termination of the period, which was imposed, in part, perhaps to serve his discontinuity argument. By making this logical extension of the Progressive era, a number of continuities between the 1910s and 1930s become readily apparent.

Although misconceptions and confusions are clearly discernible in *The Age of Reform*, they have not decisively affected the standing of the book. Hofstadter's desire to emphasize the uniqueness of the New Deal, and his success in pointing it firmly to the future, still resonate strongly with current writers concerned with the 1930s. To many liberal historians and political scientists, FDR is, very often, at the very pinnacle in a pantheon of political heroes. When an historian as respected as Arthur Schlesinger Jr., designates Roosevelt 'one of the immortals' of

²¹Ibid., 277-279.

²²Ibid., fn, 304.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cooper, *The Warrior and The Priest*, 212.

US presidential history, we have a right to feel uneasy at this reverential judgement.²⁵ Like Hofstadter, Schlesinger's formative years spanned the New Deal, and, understandably, FDR's remarkable project became integral to Schlesinger's identity and very being. However, academics who are products of more recent decades should be receptive to hypotheses that might challenge the uniqueness, and superiority of Roosevelt's New Deal. There may be a case for saying that much of the New Deal derived from the Progressive era, even if, at times, Roosevelt seemed to be straying from an ideology of consensus to one tending towards a polarization of American politics. In the end, though, FDR does not require intellectual bodyguards. The New Deal's social justice or environmental reforms, its emergency unemployment measures, which helped restore belief in democracy, and Roosevelt's wartime leadership, secure the importance of his presidency in American history. The understandable desire to protect the political reputation of FDR and the New Deal by some liberal academics should not come at the expense of devaluing the Progressive era.

The recent trend by a cohort of academics to focus on the significance of the later New Deal to post World War II America – both politically and economically – while providing a fresh perspective, at the same time, conforms to Hofstadter's paradigm of a forward-looking New Deal. As the later New Deal is the time period of my study, their work merits close scrutiny. Alan Brinkley has shown in a thought-provoking book, *The End of Reform* that the later New Deal began to re-orientate the relationship of interventionist government to big business.²⁶ This process finally resulted, after World War II, in government and business recognizing the mutual advantages of a welfare state and deficit spending to create an affluent mass consumer society.²⁷ Hopes, dating from the Progressive era, of regulating, or re-shaping, the economy, Brinkley maintains, became obsolete in this new economic atmosphere.²⁸ Interestingly, and indicating that Brinkley's argument is not straightforwardly pro-discontinuity, he seems to imply that the New Deal's gradual renunciation of the economically reformist progressive agenda was a long-

²⁵ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., 'Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton', *Political Science Quarterly* 112, 2 (1997): 179-190.

²⁶ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995)

²⁷Ibid., 268-269.

²⁸Ibid., 6-7.

term loss to American liberalism.²⁹ Reviewers have criticized Brinkley for underestimating the lasting legacy of New Deal anti-trust powers, curtailing big business, which one reviewer described, in the context of the mid 1990s, as still ‘a potent gun behind the door’.³⁰ In reference to the easing of regulation in the late 1990s and the financial disaster of 2008, these matters have a new and resounding relevance. Nonetheless, as New Deal monopoly reform powers were influenced by Progressive era values, and Brinkley argues later New Dealers neglected them his work tends to strengthen the discontinuity argument.

In the same vein as Brinkley, and more recently published, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* contains chapters that emphasize the New Deal’s future significance, to the detriment of the ‘regressive’ Progressives.³¹ Morton Keller writes: ‘The New Deal, and not Progressivism, came to be the true watershed dividing the American political and governmental past from the regime under which we live today’.³² Keller cites the core New Deal voter constituency composed of ethnic groups and organized labour, developed after 1937, as being a crucial point of departure, carrying enormous import for post-war pluralist society.³³ Crucially, he ignores Progressive era precedents, though, and while he might consider them unrepresentative, they should be taken into account.

In particular, Keller disregards the work of Michael Rogin, the political scientist, on Hiram Johnson’s election campaigns in California during the 1910s. Analyzing voting patterns, Rogin discovered, at least in California, Johnson had created a voter coalition composed of non-WASP labour unionists. Johnson achieved this voter coalition by introducing social justice reforms. Rogin’s finding challenges the discontinuity argument about the Progressive era and New Deal, and argues for continuity. Tellingly, he suggests: ‘The incorporation of workers into a liberal,

²⁹Ibid., 271.

³⁰ Thomas K. McCraw, Review of ‘The End of Reform,’ *Journal of American History* Vol. 82 No 3 (December 1995)

³¹ (Ed) Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Miller, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002)

³² Ibid., chapter by Morton Keller, ‘The New Deal and Progressivism: A Fresh Look’, 315.

³³Ibid., 319-320.

middle class American politics, a major achievement of the New Deal, may have had its beginnings in the Progressive era.³⁴

Another chapter from *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, by Sidney Milkis himself, supplies a sophisticated supplement to the discourse on Progressive-New Deal discontinuity. Milkis, a political scientist, is by no means a partisan opponent of continuity. Indeed, he has written an article previously, with David Tichener, about the importance to the American future of Progressive era social justice ideas, during the 1912 election campaign.³⁵ In *The Triumph of Liberalism*, Milkis explains how FDR was able to embed New Deal social reforms into American society during the later New Deal, and create conditions for further reform.³⁶ He shows that FDR was responding primarily to a particular set of circumstances in the 1930s, and whatever the influence of the Progressive era in his thinking – which Milkis allows for – it was finally of peripheral importance in his decisions to transform presidential power and the Democratic voter base. FDR sought to increase presidential power after bruising encounters with Congress and the courts, over First and then Second New Deal legislation, 1935-37. Although defeated in the first instance, a compromise version of Roosevelt’s highly controversial Executive Organization Bill was passed during 1939, enhancing presidential powers in elections.³⁷ The Ramspeck Act (1940) helped preserve New Deal values in a more politicized civil service.³⁸ Essentially, successful elections created a reform momentum, carried out without civil service opposition. In agreement with Keller, Milkis shows Roosevelt cultivated a partisan labour union and non-WASP voter base, which gave reformist Democrats a permanent, and growing, constituency for their beliefs. That constituency became the basis of the Democratic Party’s future after 1945.

Brinkley, Milkis, and Keller point the New Deal towards the future, not the past. Most recently, Ira Katznelson has produced perhaps the apotheosis of Hofstadter’s forward-looking

³⁴ Michael Rogin, ‘Progressivism and the California Electorate,’ *The Journal of American History* Vol. 55 No 2 (September 1968): 313-314.

³⁵ Sidney M. Milkis and Daniel Tichener, “‘Direct Democracy’ and Social Justice: The Progressive Party Campaign of 1912’ *Studies in American Political Development* 8 (Fall 1994): 282-340.

³⁶ Milkis and Miller, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, chapter by Sidney Milkis, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Economic Constitutional Order, and the New Politics of Presidential Leadership’

³⁷Ibid., 42-45.

³⁸Ibid., 46-47.

New Deal. He has re-envisioned the New Deal as effectively sustaining itself deep into the post war world, up to 1953.³⁹ Arguably, Brinkley's consumer-driven society, inspired by the New Deal, and Milkis' self-perpetuating liberal state, forged by FDR, forced a liberal consensus on even right-wing Republicans after World War II. Milkis and Brinkley also accentuate that hugely significant changes wrought during the later New Deal, and World War II, occurred almost entirely because of what happened in those years, in which the Progressive era was largely irrelevant. Katznelson shows the New Deal bestriding Twentieth Century America. In this way, these writers re-state, yet again, the discontinuity school of thought for a new generation of scholars and general readers.

In line with the discontinuity argument, it is necessary to concede that partisan behaviour on the part of FDR, partly prompted by an embittered opposition, ran counter to Progressive era values. For instance, western Progressives favoured an evenly balanced voter base of rural and urban groups. However, the Progressive era had ended in defeat, and progressives had been forced to stand by while many of their policies were reversed during the 1920s. In this context, we can speculate that FDR, originally a Progressive era politician, had time to ponder for over a decade how far he would go to prevent another reformist era from finishing in disappointment. Moreover, although a similarly counter-factual point, Progressives in the 1910s might have resorted to FDR's tactics, if confronted with the difficulties he faced. Setting aside these conjectures, though, we can say with absolute confidence that progressivism was opposed to polarized politics. At the heart of the new politics of progressivism was a desire to place public trust in 'disinterested leadership', 'a neutral government', within a 'general framework of "classless politics"', indeed, 'a consensus... across competing political...movements'.⁴⁰ Progressivism believed in uniting, not dividing, Americans. In this new environment, government should not pander to 'special interests' or one economic group or social class, but take action, maximizing benefits and prosperity for all the American people.

³⁹ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: WW Norton, 2013), 4-5.

⁴⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1920), chapter eleven, 'The West and American Ideals'; Rogin, 'Progressivism and the California Electorate'; Ibid; Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists and Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1900-1926* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.

Finally, FDR granted preferential treatment to certain groups, and enhanced his own power, so that he possibly threatened the balance of power in American governance. However, FDR's new progressive developments were taken out of political logic. They insured the survival of New Deal advances, and created the conditions for further reform, even if these actions were anathema to certain progressive beliefs. Yet, these facts do not imply, because FDR, on occasions, ignored Progressive era beliefs, that he rejected all the lessons of old Progressivism, especially its core policy values.

Conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice are identified in this work as the core policies connecting the Progressive and New Deal eras. Therefore, it is sensible at this juncture to ask whether others from the continuity school have focused on these issues. Significantly, in the first major challenge to Hofstadter's discontinuity hypothesis, Andrew Scott, as far back as 1959, discussed these policies. In an article that concentrated on the Progressive Party Platform of 1912, Scott argued that it laid the intellectual and policy foundations for the New Deal.⁴¹ He made two important points. First, Scott implied that Hofstadter's over-concentration on New Deal 'pragmatism' rested on a misconception. Hofstadter observed that the New Deal produced a paucity of political thought compared with the Progressive era, because New Dealers were more interested in practical results than theorizing.⁴² However, Scott argues: 'It was because the basic thinking had been already done (in the Progressive era) that the general approach to the (1930s) crisis, as distinct from particular programmes, could be agreed upon so quickly.'⁴³

Second, Scott interprets the Progressive era as being forward-looking, not merely harking back to the past. In his words: 'The Progressive era...opened the door to the present; the Progressives blazed the trail, the New Dealers turned it into a thoroughfare.' In fact, regarding the three core policies, Scott considers the 1912 Platform as radical as the New Deal, perhaps more so. He writes, '(In) the section on "Social and Industrial Justice" which bristles with (social justice) demands for positive action, a variety of other demands can be seen: establishment of a federal commission to supervise ... (monopolistic) corporations engaging in interstate commerce...and (federal control of) conservation.' In connection with the latter, he

⁴¹ Andrew Scott, 'The Progressive Era in Perspective' *Journal of Politics* Vol. 21 No 4 (November 1959)

⁴² Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 316-317.

⁴³ Scott, 'The Progressive Era in Perspective': 697.

quotes the 1912 Platform as saying: ‘Natural resources, whose conservation is necessary for the National welfare, should be owned or controlled by the Nation.’⁴⁴

Scott’s article, vigorously attacking the discontinuity school, was largely dismissed by pro-Hofstadter academics like Otis Graham. He argued that the 1912 Platform was unrepresentative of Progressive era thinking, and therefore Scott’s work had been misplaced - a moot point.⁴⁵ Perhaps as damaging to the article’s reputation, Scott ended it by discussing his ideas on progressivism in a very diffuse way.⁴⁶ Had he written a more incisive conclusion, and followed up his article by a book on Progressive era continuity in the New Deal, fellow academics may have been won over by his otherwise persuasive ideas.

Hofstadter’s misconceptions and confusions, no less than the insistent emphasis of his followers on a unique, forward-looking New Deal, perhaps can best be counteracted by looking at the West Coast in the later New Deal. Continuity academics, like Andrew Scott, would have done well to consider this geographical region to demonstrate the enduring relevance of the Progressive era to the New Deal. The three tenets of progressivism, which arguably constitute its core policy values, were of crucial importance there, and this thesis will remedy a significant lacuna in the research, relating to ideology in the later New Deal on the West Coast.

Yet most previous historians have never considered the West Coast states as a region. Richard Lowitt, amongst others, created an historical ‘template’ for West Coast states by maintaining that California was fundamentally different from other western states, which immediately presents difficulties when grouping California, Oregon, and Washington State together.⁴⁷ However, in taking the West Coast states as a unit, valuable comparative work can be pursued for the core Progressive era policy areas, revealing commonalities. In many respects, Lowitt’s analysis was valid, but has created artificial constraints for researchers. California was certainly distinct from other western areas because of its agricultural wealth, population density, and large-scale ‘factory farms’. Nonetheless, in the policy areas being focused on during the later New Deal the three West Coast states showed marked similarities. Consequently, a pre-

⁴⁴ Ibid., 688-689.

⁴⁵ Graham, *An Encore For Reform*, 222.

⁴⁶ Scott, ‘The Progressive Era in Perspective’: 700-701.

⁴⁷ Richard Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), chapter on California.

condition for embarking on my research is an acceptance that California can be integrated into a Pacific Coast regional identity, something recent historiography is addressing.⁴⁸

Following Hofstadter, the broad swathe of historians looking at the West Coast in the last years of the New Deal have concentrated principally on the pragmatic organizational challenges faced by New Dealers, rather than ideology. Regarding conservation policy, Progressive era values afford an invaluable perspective on events in West Coast states during the late 1930s. Three issues dominated conservation on the West Coast for Ickes' Department of the Interior: water, forestry and national parks. As in the Progressive era, federal government action became severely conflicted over conservation because the government's ideological instincts were cross-pressured by the pragmatic need to avoid alienating economic sectional interests. Rich corporate farmers wanted to tap into life-giving water in the arid Far West from New Deal dam reservoirs, and irrigation was a central concern in all three West Coast states, even in water-rich Washington State east of the Cascades. Yet, Progressive era-inspired New Dealers preferred to utilize water resources to help the wider community, specifically smaller farmers. Forestry was partly under the jurisdiction of Ickes, or supervised by the Department of Agriculture, for example Washington State's economically vital timber industry. Big corporate lumber interests resisted federal government controls and wished to expand production commensurate with market demand. Against them, Progressive era-influenced New Dealers supported 'sustained yield' production, to protect forest stocks. Corporate interests pressed for national parks to allow mining, timber felling, and exploitation of electricity potential. Progressive preservationists believed in barring American corporations altogether from national parks as places of recreation. These confrontations and the resulting accommodations arising out of Progressive era values provide the most illuminating way of understanding what happened in conservation on the West Coast in the later New Deal.

Conservation has been a big problem area for the discontinuity school. Significantly, Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* omits to discuss conservation for the Progressive and New Deal eras, perhaps a tacit admission that the discontinuity argument would not be best served by such a discussion. Otis Graham, Hofstadter's follower, sidestepped the problem, by saying that

⁴⁸ Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

‘conservation meant many things’, and therefore, presumably, its amorphous nature somehow presented an obstacle to useful analysis of continuity between the 1910s and the 1930s.⁴⁹ Graham returned to conservation in his bibliographical essay, and appears fleetingly to support continuity in conservation, saying this view ‘seems relatively invulnerable’, but then proceeds to undermine it.⁵⁰ He quotes Samuel Hays, alleging that, unlike New Dealers, Progressives were more interested in efficient use of resources than defending the public against logging, mining, and grazing interests.⁵¹ Interestingly, this argument portrays Progressives as more pragmatic than New Dealers in conservation, and probably its deployment by Graham represents an inadvertent contradiction of Hofstadter’s overall theory. Graham also references Donald Swain’s *Federal Conservation Policy, 1921-33*, to show that the size of the rudimentary progressive conservation bureaucracy that existed in the 1920s needed to be increased drastically, before ambitious New Deal plans for conservation could be attempted.

Despite the contradictions in the Hofstadter school of thought about conservation, its stance can be summarized as sceptical about continuity between the old Progressives and New Dealers, because the former were more conservative reformers. In the end, the rich often benefited from the reforms, and old Progressives failed to create an adequate bureaucracy for implementing far-reaching conservation policies. However, it is legitimate to suggest that the ability of the rich to benefit from conservation reforms applies also to the New Deal, and, as in the Progressive era, was complicated by economic sectionalism - in fact more so, because of Great Depression economic realities.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, as in other areas, historians writing about conservation have taken forward the research. Perhaps the most radical re-interpretation of western history in the 1930s is associated with ‘new western’ historians. Donald Worster’s *Rivers of Empire*, published in the 1980s, was the ground-breaking work which launched this movement, and it remains highly controversial history. His work ‘foregrounds’ water - the overriding concern in West Coast conservation, and the vital pre-requisite for this region’s rapid development during and after World War II. In an audacious argument, Worster holds that the New Deal’s Bureau of

⁴⁹ Graham, *An Encore For Reform*, 207-208.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵¹ Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959)

Reclamation, part of Ickes' Department of the Interior, sought 'environmental domination' of West Coast water supplies.⁵² In a possibly prescient forecast, Worster believes the resultant water depletion will finally bring about environmental catastrophe on the West Coast. However, for all its originality, Worster's 'hydraulic society' theory can be categorized as a variation of Hofstadter's ideas. Yet again, a bold new interpretation, when scrutinized, operates within Hofstadter's intellectual framework.

Worster views the Bureau of Reclamation and corporate farmers as being intent on 'empire building', deploying the resource of water to establish economic power. Accordingly, the Bureau of Reclamation acquired an organizational identity in which 'it wanted first to survive, and then to augment its power'.⁵³ Its irrigation schemes were admittedly inspired by 'the spirit of the old Progressive reclamation movement' and, indeed, the blueprint for the vast Central Valley Project went back to 1919, the end of the Progressive age.⁵⁴ However, while the Progressive era might have supplied moral and conceptual impetus, it was Ickes' Bureau of Reclamation which realized these water projects through practical solutions and pragmatic responses. In the end, and agreeing with Hofstadter, Worster regards New Deal decisions as overwhelmingly pragmatic.

My thesis seeks to show that an ideological analysis of conservation discloses strong continuities in reclamation, forestry, and national park policies. For example, regarding national parks, recent research by Robert Righter needs to be assimilated.⁵⁵ The Progressive era environmentalist, John Muir, who wielded much influence with policy makers, is often portrayed as a typically idealistic preservationist. However, Righter shows Muir made politically astute compromises – proposing limited tourism in the Yosemite National Park – to convey the message that, despite his stand against the Hetch-Hetchy dam development, he recognized the need for economic benefits from national parks. Accordingly, Righter strengthens the continuity argument, proposing that Progressive era preservationists, like modern environmentalists, appealed to wider interests as well as idealism. In my work, New Deal preservationists are

⁵² Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire, Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (New York: WW Norton, 1985), 256.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 270, 236.

⁵⁵ Robert W Righter, *The Battle over Hetch-Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

shown making similar strategic compromises about establishing West Coast national parks. Over reclamation New Dealers are revealed, notwithstanding Worster, as staying true to a consistent Progressive era ideology.

From the mid 1930s, New Deal monopoly reform was increasingly preoccupied with large private utility companies. They were regarded with the type of suspicion that railroads had provoked in the Progressive age. When the New Deal was forced to abandon the NRA, and initiated its Second New Deal anti-trust phase, private utilities became a prime target for New Dealers. On the West Coast during the late 1930s, the place of private utilities became particularly prominent because a series of New Deal dams was nearing completion. These giant dam projects were transformative, revolutionizing energy supply in the West Coast states. The Grand Coulee Dam complex in Washington State became the world's largest man-made structure.⁵⁶ Arizona's Boulder Dam, generating electricity to California, was proclaimed 'the greatest power project in the world'.⁵⁷ Several others, like the Bonneville Dam, in Oregon, added to the New Deal's hydro-electric power (HEP) portfolio. As they came on-stream for electricity supply, the New Deal was positioned to pursue an anti-monopoly policy over distribution rights. As Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, was in charge of dam construction, and the awarding of electricity contracts, he brought Progressive era zeal to his task.

Generally-speaking, historians have interested themselves only in the 'organizational behaviour' of the New Deal in the dam projects, rather than matters of Progressive ideology. Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval*, for example, regarded dam construction, and electricity distribution in West Coast states, alongside the Tennessee Valley Authority in the South, as primarily about federal organization of administrative agencies.⁵⁸ In both regions, he recognized the New Deal's anti-private utility thrust had a Progressive era origin, but does not investigate the way that tradition shaped policy. Richard Ficken's chapter, in *Politics in the Post-war American West*, notes Progressive era influence on local appeals for lower electricity prices to help poor farmers near the Grand Coulee Dam, but ignores a Progressive era factor in the New Deal's final decision on electricity supply from the

⁵⁶ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 377.

⁵⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1939

⁵⁸ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval*, 376-379.

Washington dam.⁵⁹ Instead he views the decision as pragmatic, whereby the New Deal averted the risk of inadequate demand for electricity from Grand Coulee by organizing power supplies to large urban centres.⁶⁰

Missing in the historiography is a strongly emphasized ideological explanation which shows Progressive era influence on the beliefs and behaviour of New Deal protagonists in the main West Coast dams during the later New Deal. Again the continuity argument is buttressed by looking at monopoly reform on the West Coast in the late 1930s. Rather than agreeing with Brinkley that anti-monopoly policy was ‘inconclusive’ at this time, I will argue that the bitter battles fought between private utilities and public providers during the Progressive era and Hoover years came to a crescendo in the New Deal.⁶¹ Nowhere were those battles more intense than on the West Coast in the late 1930s, partly because of the earlier legacy of conflict, which was still ongoing, but also on account of the public power realities created by federal dam projects there. Public power advocates – on a state, regional and national basis – ‘brought to the table’ hardened ideological beliefs at the end of the 1930s born of their earlier experiences, further complicated by the Republican presidential candidature of Wendell Willkie, a former private utility head.

In the social justice field, the late New Deal La Follette Civil Liberties Committee, for example, investigated the migrant farm labour problems of California. Several issues relating to social justice came to a head in this enquiry (1939-40). It was prompted by the plight of small farmers, who having fled the catastrophe of the Dustbowl became badly exploited farm labourers and food processing workers across the West Coast. Although the majority of them migrated to California, sizable numbers settled in all three West Coast states. This momentous crisis, even for Americans today, still emphatically defines the rural Great Depression, largely as a result of *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck’s fictionalized account of their ordeal. Historians have viewed the La Follette Committee on the West Coast as a failure. According to Jerold Auerbach’s monograph on the La Follette Committee, the committee’s lack of success was

⁵⁹ (Ed) Richard Lowitt, *Politics in the Post-war American West*, chapter by Richard Ficken, ‘Grand Coulee Dam, the Columbia River, and the Generation of Modern Washington’ (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 281-283, 285-287.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 174.

caused by organizational deficiencies.⁶² Patrick Maney, La Follette's biographer, followed Auerbach's approach.⁶³ Both argued that the committee had lost momentum mainly due to work fatigue and funding shortage. In the 1990s, Kevin Starr judged La Follette's Californian investigation a failure because it was reduced to 'temporary irrelevance' by the outbreak of war in Europe, which caused a re-organization of Roosevelt's government away from domestic concerns to foreign policy.⁶⁴ Neither Auerbach, nor Starr, nor even Maney has looked at the Progressive era ideological thrust of the La Follette Committee on the West Coast, an especially surprising circumstance given that La Follette was the scion of a 'founding father' of progressivism, the redoubtable 'Fighting Bob' La Follette.

I will contend that pressures on the West Coast related to unionization, especially concerning the communist issue and the Progressive era farmer-labour alliance brought about an ideological re-appraisal of the La Follette Committee's activities, but its new consensus approach was an authentic facet of progressive ideology. New Deal unionization appears to mark a departure in progressive social justice policy, but, in reality, the affinities between the eras were pronounced. The La Follette Committee was a success in California, if viewed through an ideological prism. In fact, on account of the committee's repositioning La Follette was able more effectively to expose the iniquities perpetrated by reactionary forces in California.

Having outlined the challenge of this thesis to the prevailing discontinuity school, that it seeks to consolidate certain continuity arguments, and dispense with Lowitt's approach to West Coast states, how will I realize these aspirations? Previous research provides helpful precedents regarding methodology. Russel Nye's book *Midwestern Progressive Politics* tackled a larger region than the West Coast, and, though tentative about Progressive-New Deal continuity, demonstrates the feasibility of such regional studies.⁶⁵ Paul Silver's PhD 'Wilsonians and the New Deal', assessed Wilsonian Progressives, and supported the discontinuity school.⁶⁶ Silver's

⁶² Jerold Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty: The La Follette Committee and the New Deal* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966)

⁶³ Patrick J Maney, 'Young Bob' La Follette: *A Biography of Robert M La Follette Jr.* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 218-221.

⁶⁴ Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 269.

⁶⁵ Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951)

⁶⁶ Paul L. Silver, 'Wilsonians and the New Deal', (PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 1964)

evaluation of six people is a manageable number for a doctorate, and although I have chosen nine individuals, they are spread across three policy areas.

Like Silver, I will look at individuals directly connected to the Progressive era, who were still politically active in the New Deal, for example, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harold Ickes. At state level, the work will look at cross-era Senators Hiram Johnson and Homer Bone of California and Washington respectively, together with Oregon-born public power leader, JD Ross. Likewise, Governor Culbert Olson of California will be assessed. Unlike Silver, I will be under no obligation to confine myself to old Progressives, because I am seeking Progressive era beliefs and behaviour in the later New Deal, not necessarily their presence among veterans of the Progressive era. Accordingly, some old Progressives had renounced progressive ideology by then, while other individuals, not from that era had taken up the progressive cause. La Follette Jr. of the New Deal Civil Liberties Committee was a politician imbued with Progressive era beliefs, but not significantly active in that era. The 1930s communist Howard Costigan, nominally a Democrat in Washington State, will be discussed because notwithstanding his revolutionary Marxism up to 1940, he pursued progressive aims. The radical preservationist campaigner, Bob Marshall is also considered as he drew inspiration from the Progressive era, and exerted political influence during the later New Deal.

In the Papers of these progressives I will explore the instances on the West Coast where they demonstrated Progressive era beliefs or behaviour in the core policies, and also situational similarities between the two eras, 1937-1942. Often progressives were interested in more than one of the three policy areas, and their interaction across party and state lines is a feature of the work. The politicians in the list were under electoral pressure in the 1938, 1940 or 1942 elections. The 1940 election is pivotal in the study, as it ensured the survival of the Roosevelt government, and prolonged the New Deal on the West Coast. Leading up to the 1940 elections, crises arose in each of the policy areas which tested Progressive era-inspired reformers. Those elections give a chronological focus to the work, and the doctorate's concentration on a limited number of individuals, in three policies, constitutes a realistic prospectus.

The PhD is set out as follows:

Chapter one: 'The Progressive Era Background, 1900-1920, to the Later New Deal on the West Coast,' considers ideological influence from two perspectives. Firstly, the frontier thesis is shown as an intellectual treatise for both eras regarding conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice. Secondly, when we look at these policy areas individually, influences from the Progressive era significantly shaped the West Coast New Deal.

Chapter two: 'The Republican Resurgence, 1920-1933,' views 'Hoover's decade' in these ways. One, Hoover, as a progressive provided a 'bridge' between the Progressive and New Deal eras. Two, his actions, or inaction, helped radicalize the New Deal.

Chapter three: 'Progressive era influence in the New Deal, 1933-c1937,' 'unpacks' the concept of an ideological New Deal. It challenges the historiography which portrays Franklin Roosevelt as a pragmatic politician to the exclusion of other attributes, and makes the case for an ideological Roosevelt. The links between the eras are explained and key figures are introduced who will be looked at in subsequent chapters.

Chapter four: 'Conservation on the West Coast, 1937-1942,' focuses on Progressive era policy influence during the later New Deal. It shows the interaction of progressives at a federal and local level in the areas of forestry, national parks, and reclamation. The way Progressive era preservationist thinking gained an ascendancy over forest wilderness and park policy is discussed. It also shows reclamation policy as more consistent with the Progressive era than current historiography concedes.

Chapter five: 'Monopoly Reform on the West Coast, 1937-1942,' compares the monopoly reform issue of public power in the Progressive era with the years 1937-1942. The main areas covered are: the inter-state, and federal-local, dimensions of West Coast public power; how the Progressive era hardened the ideological resolve of individuals associated with this movement in the New Deal; and its momentum into war.

Chapter six: 'Social Justice on the West Coast, 1937-1942,' looks at how social justice beliefs among individuals and groups in the later New Deal conformed to a Progressive era ideology. The chapter revolves around unionization, and interrogates the resulting weaknesses in

progressive social justice policy relating to communism, the farmer-labor alliance, and the status of the small farmer.

‘Progressive Era Influence on West Coast Political Reform, 1937-1942’ seeks a new understanding of developments that were seminal to West Coast states during the late New Deal. Regarding conservation, it gives attention to preservationist views, which were to have a lasting influence on the West Coast right up to the present day. Over monopoly reform, it focuses on decisions about HEP dams that changed the standard of living forever in West Coast states. About social justice, it emphasizes the La Follette Committee investigation into Dustbowl farm labour, whose migration began the surge in the West Coast’s population. I believe that looking at these events in the later New Deal through the lens of Progressive era behaviour and beliefs provides the most satisfactory way of comprehending them. As such, this PhD will strengthen the continuity argument between the Progressive and New Deal eras, encourage further study of the three West Coast states as a unit, and demonstrate the vital role of the core Progressive era policy areas for maintaining FDR in power at the end of the New Deal.

Chapter One: The Progressive Era Background, 1900-1920, to the Later New Deal on the West Coast

‘Panic in the New York Stock Exchange.’ ‘Panic...rocked the nation’s economy.’ ‘Scores of businesses and industries closed their doors.’ These descriptions do not refer to the financial crisis that began in September 2008, and resulted in the so-called ‘credit crunch’. Neither do they allude to the notorious Wall Street Crash of October, 1929, which arguably led to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Instead, they refer to an earlier economic catastrophe, the Panic of 1893, when stock exchange prices plummeted, leading to a prolonged depression.⁶⁷ Unemployment after 1893 stayed at more than 10% for over a decade, and judged against the rest of US history the depression of the 1890s is considered ‘second only to the Great Depression of the 1930s in severity and duration.’⁶⁸ As with 1929, and the still-unfolding crisis of 2008 onwards, the seismic shock of 1893 resulted in serious questions being raised about capitalism, leading to popular revulsion against ‘business as usual’ in politics and finance. The ‘progressives’, who exerted influence in both the Republican and Democrat parties, emerged out of this questioning of the 1890s status quo. Indeed, two leading historians of the Panic of 1893, and its aftermath, assert: ‘The Progressivism of the new century was rooted in the business crisis of the 1890s.’⁶⁹ The subsequent ‘Progressive era’, 1900-1920, produced a profound and long-term effect on American history and politics. When economic disaster returned with a vengeance during the 1930s, progressivism’s relevance re-asserted itself anew.

Historians have recognized that the origins of progressivism were complex. A single, or first, cause hardly suffices to explain the genesis of the movement, notwithstanding the significance of the Panic of 1893. However, a case can be made that a number of factors came together in the 1890s to generate progressivism. More than that, it can be contended that each of those factors was expressive of a fundamental tenet of progressivism, which endured right through to the New Deal era, and perhaps beyond that later crisis. Therefore, the Panic of 1893 helped instil in many

⁶⁷ Norman A Graebner, Gilbert C Fite and Philip L White, *A History of the American People* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), 784.

⁶⁸ Douglas Steeples and David O Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation: The Depression of 1893* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 120.

⁶⁹ Steeples and Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation*, 141.

progressives a visceral dislike of irresponsible high finance and monopolistic business, with the potential to jeopardise America's prosperity. Even so, the 1890s represented more than just a business crisis, severe though it was.

Agriculture had been in depression for over twenty-five years before 1893. This agricultural depression, as in the 1930s, pre-dated the business slump. By the 1890s, it resulted eventually in the formation of a political movement among farmers- the Populist party (1892) - led by James B Weaver of Iowa, with a voter base in the agricultural West and South. This early 'third party' experiment, as ephemeral as the later Progressive party, and inchoate in its policies, survived only until 1896. In important respects, though, the Populist party was a precursor of progressivism. While it manifested antipathy towards big business, especially over the exorbitant prices imposed by large railroad companies in rural areas, the Populists had a wider significance for the future of progressivism. The Populists proposed to make common cause among poverty-stricken farmers, facing foreclosure, and exploited industrial workers, often struggling to survive in the teeming urban slums. Although the Populists failed and faded into history, 'social justice', derived from many sources, aiding the urban and rural poor, became a key objective of progressivism. In particular, the Populists' aim of a farmer-labour alliance, developed into a strong feature of the progressive movement, notably in the West.⁷⁰

A momentous event for the West, and America in general, occurred in 1890 and bequeathed another influence on progressivism. The Director of the Census announced the frontier was closed. Up to that date, Americans had the option of going west to occupy productive farmland. Afterwards, they knew that the best land had been settled, and, for the most part, only semi-arid and arid land remained. The era of restless migration to new farming territory in the West was over. The importance of the frontier assumed great significance when Frederick Jackson Turner, reacting to the findings of the 1890 census, contended in his 'frontier thesis' that the western movement of Americans had been the decisive formative experience in American democracy and identity.⁷¹ Academic opinion has subsequently judged that he exaggerated the importance of that western movement of population, and its supposed abrupt ending, which arrived with the 'closed frontier'. However, his frontier thesis still maintains its impact when applied to the sobering

⁷⁰ Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900* (Boston: Twayne, 1991)

⁷¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1920)

effects of the closed frontier on the American imagination, and the narrowing of prospects for indigent farmers, no longer able to find with ease new land in the West.⁷² From then on, Americans needed to learn to exploit, and perhaps more significantly conserve, existing fertile land more efficiently. Infertile land, which could be made productive, had to be improved, while some land of unusual merit could be preserved in its natural state. The urge towards conservation was intrinsic to progressive thinking, and had particular practical application in the water-hungry Far West. In the Progressive era, and during the 1930s New Deal, Turner's insights legitimized government intervention to improve or protect the finite resources of American land.⁷³

Therefore, the decade of the 1890s had shaped progressive thinking decisively. Progressives believed there was a need for government action aimed at: curbing monopolistic business, furnishing social justice to a farmer-labour alliance, and intervening to make land productive or for its protection. These aspirations would be converted to concrete legislation and projects during the Progressive era- the period of moderate reform in American history 1900 to c.1920. The progressive reforms formed the basis of future attempts by government - especially in the New Deal - to create a more equitable society.

The purpose of the present chapter is to point out continuities between the Progressive era and New Deal. Hofstadter used the designation 'Populist-Progressive age' to indicate that the Progressive era should be regarded as arising from the Populist age. This work agrees with that conclusion. However, historians have been far more cautious about attributing the New Deal to the Progressive era, after Hofstadter largely rejected that premise.⁷⁴ It will be shown here that the two eras were closely connected. Firstly, they derived from the same intellectual source. Secondly, there was strong linkage between these reforming eras over the three central tenets of conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice. Beliefs, behaviour, and situations, especially concerning the West Coast, 1900-1920, were mirrored in the later New Deal. Therefore, ideological continuities were marked. Equally, Progressive era presidents, and other participants

⁷² Murray Kane, 'Some Considerations of the Safety Valve Doctrine' *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 23 No 2 (September 1936); Alan C Beckman, 'Hidden Themes in the Frontier Thesis,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (April 1966):363.

⁷³ Gerald D Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), chapter one.

⁷⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955)

in reform, often demonstrated pragmatism when pursuing ideological objectives. Accordingly, Hofstadter's contention that the Progressive era lacked pragmatism seems as open to dispute as his arguments that Progressive era ideology did not extend into the New Deal.

The Frontier Thesis

Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis was a major intellectual influence on the Progressive era.⁷⁵ His relevance, though, to the New Deal is far more problematic. Perhaps a first step, in re-connecting the two eras, should be to demonstrate the importance of the frontier thesis, a quintessentially Progressive era tract, to the New Deal. For progressives, Turner's work raised a number of fears, but, at the same time, was a call to action. His closed frontier concept communicated a fear of regression. Without the stimulus of an ever-changing frontier, Americans would lose their enterprising character, responsible for building a civilization in the West from a wilderness, and see their economy go into decline. However, if new frontiers could be created, for example, by government improving the country internally, or expanding externally, America would continue to progress by means of individualism. The government could help sustain 'rugged individualism's' buoyant optimism and soaring self-belief for the demands of the new century. Of course, in important respects, government interventionism and individualism were opposed philosophically, so Turner's progressive aim to make them work together always represented a formidable task. Nonetheless, at a practical level, the frontier thesis was a catalyst in domestic policy, because it gave impetus to the general progressive urge for improving society – socially, economically, and environmentally.

Later, in the New Deal, the closed frontier concept appeared to have a renewed application. New Dealers used it to legitimize their bold interventionist policies combating the Great Depression. Gerald Nash, the leading Turnerian scholar of the present day, writes: 'The perception that the closing of the frontier had transformed the US into a closed society with limited potentials for further growth appealed to New Dealers, because it rationalized their advocacy of government compensatory programmes, in the absence of the frontier.'⁷⁶ Indeed, during the 1930s, one of the most prominent US economists, Alvin Hansen, advocated a

⁷⁵ Nash, *Creating the West*, 11., for a reference to the influence of the frontier thesis on Progressive era thinkers, Herbert Croly and Walter Weyl.

⁷⁶ Nash, *Creating the West*, 41.

permanent regime of high government spending, to redress the pessimistic prospect of ‘secular stagnation’, which Turner’s closed frontier had implied.

Therefore, the Progressive and New Deal eras seemed strongly connected by virtue of Turner’s intellectual influence. However, contradicting this evidence, new interpretations were finally super-imposed on Turner’s work, which effectively invalidated its relevance to the New Deal. Around the time of Turner’s death in 1932, and increasingly so after it, his work was heavily criticized, querying its applicability to the New Deal, and denying the factual basis of the frontier thesis, and within it, the closed frontier.⁷⁷ The geographer Isaiah Bowman demonstrated that frontier conditions had not ended in the 1890s, and still persisted into the 1930s.⁷⁸ This finding undermined the intellectual integrity of the frontier thesis. As damagingly, Turner’s lauding of rugged individualism was construed by informed opinion in the 1930s, as implicating him in the disaster of the Wall Street Crash (1929). Ruthless individualism had created a selfish society of mal-distributed wealth where eventually in 1929 supply generated by wealthy businessmen and large farmers overwhelmed demand among poorer consumers. Far from being the making of America, as Turner had contended, rugged individualism had been its undoing. The historian, Charles Beard bluntly stated: ‘The individualistic creed, (associated with Turner), ‘of everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost is principally responsible for the distress which Western civilization finds itself.’⁷⁹ By the end of the 1930s, the connection between Turner and the New Deal had been significantly weakened. The frontier thesis was indicted not simply as an obsolete, factually unsafe text, but - in championing unrestricted individualism - the antithesis of New Deal values, which had stressed rugged individualism’s dangers, and Americans’ interdependence.

Only in the last couple of decades, has the frontier thesis been shown to be more nuanced about rugged individualism than Turner’s detractors give him credit for. Notably, John Mack

⁷⁷ For challenges to the frontier thesis, consult: Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., *Rise of the City, 1878-1898* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933); Paul Wallace Gates, ‘The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System’, *American Historical Review* Vol. 41 No 4 (July, 1936); Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America* (New York: Viking Press, 1939). For challenges to the ‘closed frontier’ specifically see: Isaiah Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1931); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains: A Study in Institutions and the Environment* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931), 8-9.

⁷⁸ Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe*, 139.

⁷⁹ Charles A. Beard, ‘The Myth of Rugged Individualism,’ *Harper’s* (December 1931)

Faragher states: ‘In the essays he wrote during and after World War I, Turner began to argue that the new era called for a new spirit⁸⁰...His original frontier essay...had celebrated the spirit of individualism...A quarter century later however he wrote... “The national problem is no longer how to cut and burn away...the forest; it is how to save and wisely use the remaining timber.”’⁸¹ If Turner’s doubts about rugged individualism can be shown as more widely-based than Faragher suggests – in fact relevant to all three core policy areas that link the Progressive era and the New Deal – Turner deserves re-categorization as an intellectual linchpin between the two reformist eras.

The frontier thesis was enunciated originally in a lecture entitled *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, delivered to the American Historical Association during 1893. In 1920 Turner published *The Frontier in American History*, his assembled ideas on the theory amassed between 1893 and 1920, with the 1893 work forming chapter one of the book. Critics of Turner, and more neutral commentators on the frontier thesis, have not given adequate recognition to how his different versions of it provide a fully balanced account of Turner’s theory. Indeed, they reveal an evolution of his views throughout the Populist-Progressive age. Turner, ‘always sensitive to contemporary events’, was skilled at evolving his thesis in the light of new trends, for a generational period exceeding twenty-five years.⁸² In a Darwinian manner, he adapted the frontier thesis, partly to ensure its survival, infusing it with the lessons of the Populists and Progressives.

Although the ending of the frontier was not as abrupt as Turner portrayed in 1893, even so by then new fertile land was in short supply. Consequently, Turner’s closed frontier immediately recognized limitations on the exercise of rugged individualism. Stemming from Turner’s closed frontier was a doubt that large-scale internal migration, stimulated by economic problems, and imbued with individualism, could discover new productive farmlands, as in the past. During the Progressive era, Turner’s ideas inspired government to provide social justice measures to small farmers, constricted by poverty and the closed frontier. The essential accuracy of the closed frontier was confirmed when large numbers of Mid West farmers fled the 1930s Dust Bowl and

⁸⁰ John Mack Faragher, *Re-reading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994 and 1998) 8-9.

⁸¹ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chapter eleven- ‘The West and American Ideals’, 293.

⁸² Nash, *Creating the West*, 17.

failed to find new land in the Far West. Appreciation of their plight, in the context of the closed frontier, informed New Deal policy responses.

Faragher, of course, points out Turner's doubts about the unalloyed advantages of individualism concerning forest conservation. However, more extensively and earlier than Faragher suggests, Turner in the frontier thesis envisaged a role for government intervention when the limits of individualism became apparent. For example, in 1909, Turner praised Henry Clay for 'breaking the Allegheny barrier by a national system of roads and canals.'⁸³ During the 1830s federal government undertook, or aided, large-scale civil engineering projects, cutting through mountain barriers, to facilitate the sale of the West's farming surplus in the Eastern states. Turner had understood that westerners had sought, and would seek, recourse to national government financial resources, which alone could overcome the harsh physical and climatic problems of the West.

In 1903, and doubtlessly influenced by the work of John Wesley Powell, Turner applied this same rationale to the Far West.⁸⁴ He asseverated: 'When the arid lands...of the Far West were reached, no conquest was possible by the old individual pioneer methods. Here expensive irrigation works must be constructed, co-operative activity was demanded in utilization of the water supply, capital beyond the reach of the small farmer was required. In a word, the physiographic province itself decreed that the destiny of this new frontier should be social rather than individual.'⁸⁵ Applied to West Coast conservation policy specifically, Turner's views were as much an agenda for future government interventionism – during the Progressive era, and, even more so, in the late 1930s – as a record or explanation of the past.

A work of Turner's from 1910, which eventually he used in *The Frontier in American History*, articulated growing fears about the power of monopolistic capitalism – whose rugged individualism was a danger to democracy. Turner stated: 'Is there... evolving such a concentration of economic and social power in the hands of a comparatively few men as may make political democracy an appearance rather than a reality?'⁸⁶ In 1910-11 Turner entered into

⁸³ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chap. five, 'The Ohio Valley in American History', 172.

⁸⁴ John W. Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado and Its Canyons* (New York: Dover Press, 1875)

⁸⁵ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chap. nine, 'Contributions of the West to American Democracy,' 258.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

the contemporary debate on monopoly reform about federal government regulating big business. He passed judgement on proposed progressive reforms, by saying that the supporters of 'ex-President (Theodore) Roosevelt' demanded 'increase of federal authority to curb the special interests, the powerful ... monopolies, for the sake of the conservation of our natural resources and the preservation of American democracy.'⁸⁷ Significantly, Turner identified the voice of the 'insurgent west' as being behind demands for government action against big business. Like Progressives and New Dealers after them, he seems to have accepted that there was a case for federal government to re-order society. In Turnerian terms, the rugged individualism of the majority could be threatened by the rugged individualism of the few. It could not prosper if monopolistic big business stifled competition and shifted political /economic power irrevocably towards their special interests.

Turner's emphasis, in *The Frontier in American History* on the limits of rugged individualism, was, perhaps, every bit as significant as his laudatory comments on the merits of this attitude of mind. In his first lecture on the frontier thesis in 1893, he saw presciently that the closed frontier would curtail and place in jeopardy the rugged individualism of small farmers. The position of impoverished Progressive era small farmers and the experience of New Deal Dustbowl farmers in West Coast states bore out his argument powerfully, whatever academic criticisms were directed at the closed frontier theory. Turner expressed misgivings about the behaviour of monopolistic capitalism, with its ability to oppress and crush the rugged individualism of others, in the West and elsewhere. Furthermore, he concluded that the harsh conditions of the Far West necessitated co-operative effort by groups, or action by federal government, so that individuals could benefit from an improved environment. These issues - of help to small farmers, whose rugged individualism had been constricted by Nature or large operators, the politico-economic dangers of monopolistic capitalism, and the need to improve farming land and conserve forests, first assumed importance in the Progressive era. On the West Coast in the 1930s, in harmony with Turner's fully fledged frontier thesis, these social justice, monopoly reform, and conservation issues became leading political objectives for the New Deal.

⁸⁷ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chap. twelve, 'Social Forces in American History', 319.

Consequently, in this revised reading of the frontier thesis, over a particular set of issues, Turner's work can be seen as bestowing on the Progressive and New Deal eras a shared intellectual foundation. The frontier thesis was not the outmoded shibboleth that academics and politicians needed to strike down or disregard in the New Deal. Rather, Turner's thesis, in important respects, firmly underpinned the Progressive and New Deal enterprises, and acted as a harbinger for FDR's New Deal on the West Coast.

The Progressive era (1900-20), which helped qualify Turner's views on individualism, was dominated by two politicians- the Republican, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson. Through government action, during this period, at a federal and state level, progressivism aspired to bring greater fairness, democracy, and prosperity to American society. An early history of the progressive movement considered William Jennings Bryan, in the 1890s, to have been a proto-progressive, because he had believed 'government is to be used, not for the few, but for the many.'⁸⁸ However, at the time, Bryan failed to achieve high office, whereas in the new century progressives attained the presidency, and implemented far-reaching reforms. Theodore Roosevelt was a man of charisma, impulsiveness, and, in his own words, "'strenuousness" on the subject of improving American society.'⁸⁹ He occupied the White House between 1901 and 1908. Woodrow Wilson, ex-history professor and erstwhile President of Princeton University, combined scholarly ability, with a strong instinct for political survival, which, at times, perhaps called into question his high moral stance. He was US president in the years 1913-21.

Under these reformist presidents America faced severe social, environmental, and economic problems. As late as 1919, non-unionized US Steel workers laboured an 84 hour, seven-day, week.⁹⁰ In 1901, environmental damage had become so widespread that Roosevelt was prompted to devote one quarter of his first annual Congressional Address to this subject.⁹¹ The

⁸⁸ Benjamin P De Witt, *The Progressive Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1915)

⁸⁹ J Leonard Bates, *The United States, 1898-1928: Progressivism and a Society in Transition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 65.

⁹⁰Ibid., 231-232.

⁹¹Ibid., 82.

push towards monopolies, meant over 4,200 US companies, in the seven years after 1897, were transformed into 257 corporations, considerably reducing competition.⁹²

Progressive action was inevitably circumscribed by the presidents' own beliefs about the limits of government in a capitalist society, as well as pressure from Congress, business, and states, opposed to federal interference. Nonetheless, 'reformers believed that a moderate amount of government intervention...would adjust the inequities of society, without disturbing the fundamental balance of a free economy.'⁹³ However, during the Progressive age, what appeared moderate reform to one group of politicians seemed extreme to another. Therefore, the period 1900-20, initiated a debate about government intervention- especially regarding where, and how far, it was appropriate for federal government to reach- which has continued until the present day. That debate took on added significance during the New Deal, the next period of major reform in American history. In both periods presidents needed to weigh ideological considerations carefully against pragmatic factors.

Conservation

In the Progressive age, Theodore Roosevelt vigorously championed government intervention over conservation. He believed America confronted a critical situation where long-term economic security was being jeopardized. For more than a century, in pursuit of quick profit, Americans had profligately despoiled the country of raw materials, timber, land, and water resources. The individuals involved often paid little heed to the threat their actions posed to the future prosperity of America. Roosevelt took the strategic decision to end the policy of indiscriminately selling, or giving away, government land. The old policy had resulted in huge tracts of forest being felled and left as wasteland. American water resources had largely passed into the hands of private monopolies which were able to charge the consumer inflated prices for water supplies and power. Oil, and other mineral, extraction from former government land brought vast wealth to some individuals, but the general public received few direct benefits. Roosevelt decided that, in future, highly productive government land would only be leased to those who wanted to log, farm, extract minerals, or supply water and power. Revenue from

⁹² Lewis L Gould, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1914* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 25.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 39.

leased public land the president intended to spend on the needs of the American people. Essentially, Roosevelt wanted to stop, wherever possible, damaging exploitation of land, recognizing it as a finite and valuable resource.

In the course of his presidency, Roosevelt adopted three approaches to conservation. He intervened to reserve from irresponsible exploitation mainly forested public land, but then, pragmatically, often allowed it to be used in a regulated manner.⁹⁴ Roosevelt withheld land for national parks, a non-‘utilitarian’ approach. Americans would be able to enjoy, not exploit, this national resource. Finally, in his reclamation schemes, a by-product of conservation policy, Roosevelt improved land for the use of westerners. These decisions were characteristic of Roosevelt’s ‘stewardship’ theory of presidential rule, in which he intervened to further the best interests of American people, including land that Washington held in trust for them.⁹⁵ Although the theory was most clearly enunciated in speeches during 1910, and covered several types of policy, it had been a *leitmotif* of Theodore Roosevelt throughout his presidential rule.⁹⁶ The stewardship theory strongly influenced the ideological stance of his cousin Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose ambitious plans during the late 1930s on the West Coast, while partly exemplifying this approach to government rule, also strove to learn by its mistakes. The example of forestry, demonstrates the political dangers inherent in Theodore Roosevelt’s conservation policy. It is particularly apt because ‘FDR’, in the 1930s, would be inspired, like ‘TR’, by the arguments of forestry expert, Gifford Pinchot.

At the outset of the Progressive era – 1900 - four fifths of US standing timber was in private hands, and supplies were being rapidly depleted.⁹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt maintained that only ‘sustained yield production’ in forestry could preserve the forests as a viable industry, and for the recreation of future generations. Although there were responsible operatives in the lumber industry, TR and the Chief Forester- Gifford Pinchot- felt justified in placing vast tracts of forest under federal government control, on behalf of the American people. Accordingly, in his two presidential terms, Roosevelt withdrew almost 150 million acres of forest from further

⁹⁴ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 85.

⁹⁵ Gould, *America in the Progressive Era*, 32.

⁹⁶ John Milton Cooper., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 147.

⁹⁷ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 76.

unrestricted private use. The forests were, almost without exception, in western states, and Roosevelt's actions, although well-intentioned, produced an understandably fierce reaction from many westerners.⁹⁸ These critics of Roosevelt marshalled their arguments partly within the framework of Turner's frontier thesis. They feared that a combination of the closed frontier, and federal government withdrawals of land, would halt economic growth in under-developed western states. During Roosevelt's administrations, this 'economic sectionalism' gathered strength among western politicians- in both political parties- despite politically pragmatic assurances from Pinchot that he was very prepared to be flexible about access to, and use of, government land.⁹⁹

In 1907 relations between the president and some western politicians reached a crisis-point. Congress was poised to pass an appropriation act, which forbade presidential action to create new forest reserves, without Congressional consent. Audaciously, before Congress had time to enact the legislation, Roosevelt, supported by Pinchot, rushed forward the creation of new forest reserves in six Pacific Northwest states, through an executive order.¹⁰⁰ Although Roosevelt's opponents had focused their anger, in this instance, on the setting up of forest reserves, a wider criticism was also directed at Roosevelt's incursions into agricultural and mineral-rich lands. Over his two terms, Theodore Roosevelt withdrew, in all, 234 million acres of land for various purposes.¹⁰¹ Economic sectionalism involved many western politicians who considered themselves progressives. The fact opposition was not confined to reactionary politicians proves that sectional, or state, progressive perspectives could frequently clash with Washington's views on the reach of federal government, whether in the Progressive era or the New Deal.

On the West Coast during the New Deal, federal government needed to take economic sectionalism into account, and avoid provoking it, as Theodore Roosevelt had sometimes been guilty of. The New Deal administration had to be sensitive about local interests, when it pursued sustained yield production, and youth employment schemes in Washington State's forests, bearing in mind the timber industry was crucial to the state's economy.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 85., 83.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p85.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Sometimes, TR was able to carry through conservation policies in the West that seemed relatively non-controversial. Reclamation projects, which formed part of his overall conservation agenda, were particularly popular in the Far West. They legitimized government intervention, because they brought tangible economic benefits, permitting the government to unite pragmatism with progressive ideology in the parched Far West. By Theodore Roosevelt's National Reclamation Act (1902), revenue from any future government land sales in the West would be channelled towards irrigation purposes. Of great significance, access to water from these federal irrigation schemes would be confined to small farmers. As a direct result of the Reclamation Act, the Roosevelt Dam was built on the Salt River in Arizona. It transformed a desert into one of the most fertile farming regions in the world, thereby giving a huge boost to the local economy.¹⁰² TR had even more ambitious plans for federal funding of a multi-state scheme on the Colorado River, to provide irrigation for states such as California, but Congress refused him funds because of the high costs involved.¹⁰³ During the 1930s, the Colorado River scheme was realized, and other irrigation schemes, like California's vast Central Valley Project, became crucial features of the New Deal.

Perhaps TR's treatment of national parks- including the Yosemite National Park in California- raised the greatest potential for sectional controversy and opposition. John Burroughs and John Muir had won Roosevelt over to withdrawing land permanently for recreational purposes.¹⁰⁴ In this case, Progressivism was interested in providing Americans with prosperity of a spiritual, rather than material, kind. It was, in some ways, surprising that an unsentimental man of action, and keen hunter, like Theodore Roosevelt, believed people needed spiritual enrichment from being in the presence of nature. However, a powerful motivational force in Roosevelt's politics was directed towards developing the character of his fellow Americans, and character was developed by spiritual, as well as material, experience.¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, FDR strongly subscribed to TR's overtly moralistic stance. Although there was a constituency for such views in the West, associated with the 'wilderness cult', a more dominant western trait favoured practicalities. Land should be used, not contemplated. Accordingly, TR's

¹⁰² Graebner, Fite and White, *A History of the American People*, 1059.

¹⁰³ David Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 178.

¹⁰⁴ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 81-2.

¹⁰⁵ John M Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954).

attempts to wean westerners away from an exclusively material attitude to land soon ran into difficulties.

In 1907 San Francisco municipality planned to build a dam at Hetch-Hetchy in the Yosemite National Park.¹⁰⁶ After the devastating 1906 earthquake, the city required an additional source of water and power, in order to recover, and grow. Initially, Roosevelt supported the plan. He then turned it down, persuaded by the environmentalist argument of keeping national parks intact. Finally, Frank Lane, the Secretary of the Interior under President Wilson, gave government backing to Congressional legislation allowing the dam in 1913. Wilson and Lane were convinced the economic interests of San Francisco, and political realities, should take precedence over any other considerations. Ultimately, for these Progressive era policy makers, pragmatic concessions to sectional interests won out over rigid adherence to the national park ideal.

Moreover, as the environmental historian Roderick Frazier Nash showed, the Hetch-Hetchy controversy created a ‘schism in American conservationism.’¹⁰⁷ ‘Wise users’, like Gifford Pinchot, a major influence across the two periods at a national level, and William Kent, a progressive Republican in California, stressed the need to satisfy the economic and social demands of the majority in San Francisco, North California’s major population centre. ‘Preservationists’, including John Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson, argued that, barring exceptional circumstances, national park land should be protected from development *ad infinitum*. They felt passionately that Americans had a moral duty to preserve the remaining endangered wilderness inviolate as a spiritual space, of the beautiful or sublime. The defeat of the preservationists by the more utilitarian wise users over Hetch-Hetchy created two strands of progressivism in conservation policy which carried over into the 1930s.

Until the last few years, historians have regarded the battle over Hetch-Hetchy as a binary struggle consisting of wise users allied with economic sectionalism, opposed to preservationist idealism.¹⁰⁸ A recent book by Robert Righter, though, has shown preservationists, like John Muir, broadened their appeal to the public and federal government. He was prepared to make

¹⁰⁶ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 146.

¹⁰⁷ Roderick Frazier Nash, *American Environmentalism: Readings in Conservation History* (Third Edition) (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), 90.

¹⁰⁸ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 146.

pragmatic concessions – proposing development of tourist infra-structures, including roads, in the national park – to demonstrate national parks brought quantifiable economic benefits.¹⁰⁹ Muir’s pragmatic compromises were an attempt to influence policy-makers against the Hetch-Hetchy dam development. The Hetch-Hetchy controversy, therefore, indicates Progressive era preservationists were strongly committed to preserving national parks against economic activity and for the public’s recreation, but recognized appeals to conservation alone would not suffice. Therefore, they presented a convincing economic counter-narrative against resource developers, although they lost the argument in this particular instance. Over the creation of two West Coast national parks in the late 1930s, the New Deal similarly followed a preservationist approach, tempered by economic compromises.

During the New Deal preservationists pursued ideological aims in forestry and national parks, but, to be successful, made pragmatic concessions. Likewise, over reclamation policy they limited water access from government irrigation schemes to small farmers. Therefore, New Dealers exercised a conservation policy based on Progressive era ideology, despite coming under severe pressure to emphasize short-term economic solutions. Their achievement was in some ways more impressive, during the hard times of the Depression, than Progressive era reformers who were not under the same economic pressures, because the US economy grew almost continuously, 1900-1920.

Monopoly Reform

Monopoly reform followed a common ideological path during the Progressive era and the later New Deal on the West Coast. Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt shared serious misgivings about the unbridled power of monopolies in American society. In both the Progressive and New Deal periods, big business endangered US prosperity by absorbing smaller companies, to create a ‘seller’s market’, where the monopoly could dictate prices, having eliminated potentially cheaper competitors. One historian has noted- in connection with Wilson’s decision to endorse Congressional support for the building of a dam at Hetch Hetchy by the San Francisco municipal power company: ‘If the Pacific Power and Electric Company’ (a

¹⁰⁹ Robert W Righter, *The Battle over Hetch-Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 106-107. Muir and the preservationists proposed summer and winter tourism in Hetch-Hetchy, and a road into, and leading from, the valley.

private utility monopoly) ‘had been the initiating party responses would have been more hostile.’¹¹⁰ Aside from monopolistic practices in banking, primary industries, food processing and manufacturing, progressives were concerned about private utilities which controlled supplies of water, gas, and electricity, to the consumer. Many of these ‘natural monopolies’ over-charged the public, in towns, and the countryside. Regional monopolies, particularly railroads, also received considerable attention from progressives, because they often set exorbitant rates for passengers and freight. On the West Coast, Governor Johnson of California stopped a further abuse – Southern Pacific Railroad corrupting his state’s political system. Theodore Roosevelt made his name as a ‘trust buster’, by breaking up a large railway monopoly in the Pacific Northwest (1904) - Northern Securities Company- which the House of Morgan financial empire controlled.¹¹¹

The trend towards monopoly during the Progressive era caused government to confront this growing problem. Gabriel Kolko disputed this opinion in a boldly-written book that takes an altogether different perspective.¹¹² He formulated the idea of ‘political capitalism’, amounting to a ‘conspiracy theory’ whereby monopolists in the Progressive era utilized national politics to attain their business goals. In Kolko’s view, the House of Morgan, especially, is portrayed as the *éminence grise* of Progressive politics, desiring government regulation of business in order to achieve stability in the market, and the elimination of its competitors. However, Kolko’s interpretation, in which TR colluded with the House of Morgan, is probably a misreading of the overall situation, although it identifies an important truth, that big business detected advantages in government regulatory devices. A more plausible explanation for Roosevelt’s motives would concede that he was suspicious of ‘the huge swollen trusts,’ yet he also displayed pragmatism in his behaviour towards them.¹¹³ If possible, TR preferred to work with, rather than against, the largest monopolies, so long as they abided by the law, because of their sheer strength. For example, the House of Morgan by 1912 controlled \$22 billion of capital across the US economy, including banks, steel, electrical industries, merchant shipping, farm machinery, and insurance.

¹¹⁰ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 146.

¹¹¹ Gould, *America in the Progressive Era*, 26., 33.

¹¹² Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967)

¹¹³ *Bull Moose on the Stump: The 1912 Campaign Speeches of Theodore Roosevelt*, Edited by Lewis L Gould (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 43. Speech delivered by TR at St. Johnsbury, Vermont, August 30, 1912

In fact, the House of Morgan was ‘the largest single factor in (the) American economy, not excepting the US government.’¹¹⁴ Roosevelt’s pragmatic approach that avoided dislocation of the US economy by merely placing Morgan’s company within the bounds of the law, as achieved in the Northern Securities Company case, accorded well with progressive ideology, which believed in consensus rather than confrontation in US society. It is reasonable to assume, having ‘crossed swords’ with TR over Northern Securities, somebody as shrewd as JP Morgan decided to co-operate with the US government, rather than allow any repetition of conflict, and, moreover, derive benefits from that co-operation. Significantly, co-ordinated financial intervention involving the House of Morgan alongside the US government averted an economic catastrophe during the Panic of 1907, often compared in gravity to the Panic of 1893.¹¹⁵ Whether through Elihu Root, earlier in his presidency, or George Perkins, one-time Morgan partner and later Chairman of the Progressive Party National Executive Committee, TR kept a valuable line of communication with the House of Morgan. A reciprocally beneficial working relationship between TR and Morgan did not imply that TR was subservient to the interests of the House of Morgan, or that he viewed their prodigious power with equanimity.

Significantly, the policy preferences of progressive presidents regarding monopoly reform were not consistent with their presidential practice. The policy preferences of the two progressive leaders had been defined in the keenly-contested 1912 election, where they vied for control of America. Roosevelt presented himself to voters as a proponent of negotiating with, and ‘regulating,’ monopolies, rather than destroying them. Indeed, his New Nationalism (1912) was aimed at that objective, but New Nationalism remained an untried programme, because of Roosevelt’s election defeat in that year.¹¹⁶ Fundamentally, Roosevelt felt that large corporations had become a *fait accompli* of American business life. However, earlier, during his presidency, the Northern Securities Company case was the most famous example of a monopoly being destroyed in the Progressive era. In contrast, the victor in the 1912 election, Woodrow Wilson, was committed electorally to breaking up monopolies i.e. ‘trust-busting.’ Undoubtedly,

¹¹⁴ John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1990), 12.

¹¹⁵ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 113.

¹¹⁶ Gould, *America in the Progressive Era*, 57-58.

Wilson's New Freedom policy of 1912 did promote that aim.¹¹⁷ Wilson advised by Louis Brandeis, viewed monopolies, inaccurately perhaps, as inefficient. Yet, eventually during his presidency Wilson allowed regulated monopolistic cartels to control US industry during World War I.

The self-evident sizable discrepancy, between the policy preferences of the Progressive leaders and their presidential practices, is puzzling, and merits an explanation. To some extent, the discrepancy is explained by political realities. For example, the 1912 election caused an exaggeration of policy differences between Roosevelt and Wilson over monopolies, as they sought to present voters with clear alternatives. They 'strained to accentuate their differences,' to create 'issue space' or, in modern political parlance, 'dividing lines'.¹¹⁸ Even so, in office, the two presidents discovered inevitably that Congress acted as a major constraint on presidential power. Although TR developed his ideas on New Nationalism between 1910 and 1912, he maintained he was merely re-stating the policies he had expressed 'again and again' as president.¹¹⁹ Therefore, his stated preference for regulation, rather than destruction, of monopolies should be clearly discernible in his presidential years, 1901-1908. However, trust busting was the most prominent feature of monopoly policy during his two terms in office. In that time, apart from the Northern Securities Company case, TR's government attempted similar actions, often using the anti-trust Sherman Act (1890), against forty-four corporations.¹²⁰ George Mowry has argued convincingly that Roosevelt used anti-trust measures in default of a recalcitrant Congress granting him the regulatory or supervisory powers over monopolies he wanted. 'There was something almost contrapuntal, in Roosevelt's use of the Sherman Law and his demands for federal supervision.'¹²¹

Similarly, despite Wilson's pronouncements on trust-busting during the 1912 election campaign, and, as president his prosecution of an anti-trust programme, he was not able to translate his electoral commitments into successful action in his presidency.¹²² Once more,

¹¹⁷Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁸ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 208.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 147.

¹²⁰ George E Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 134.

¹²¹ Ibid., 133.

¹²² Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 211.

Congressional political realities, as with TR before him, prevented Wilson from following his chosen anti-monopoly path.¹²³ In 1914 Congressional amendments to the Clayton anti-trust law greatly weakened the legislation.¹²⁴ Therefore, President Wilson switched from backing this act to promoting government supervision of monopolies- by setting up the Fair Trade Commission.¹²⁵ Later, this regulatory trend was accelerated during World War I, which caused federal government co-operation with regulated big business to deliver increased production during the national emergency.

It is accurate to say that whatever their policy preferences over monopoly reform, (as stated, re-stated, or perhaps over-stated, in the 1912 election), the Progressive presidents were prepared, admittedly under duress, to use the diametrically opposite policies of trust-busting and regulation of monopolies when in office. During the New Deal, FDR, a Progressive era-inspired leader, followed a similar pattern, switching emphasis in monopoly reform, from regulation to trust-busting between the First and Second New Deals, in the manner of his Republican and Democrat Progressive predecessors, as political pragmatism dictated. Franklin D Roosevelt's dramatic *volte face*, from co-operation to confrontation with quasi-monopolies can only be properly understood in the context of an ideological framework inherited from the Progressive era.

Therefore, TR, WW, and FDR showed wide policy fluctuations in monopoly reform- from collaboration with regulated monopolies to destruction of trusts. In order to make sense of their behaviour, which allowed them to adapt so readily to political realities, it is important to emphasize the ideological flexibility of progressivism. As progressivism was not confined within the constraints of traditional Democratic or Republican orthodoxies, it could exhibit greater innovation and opportunism. As a consequence, many of its practitioners displayed a commensurate flexibility in policy. Before reaching the White House, the progressive leaders had been prepared to change with the times. In power, they continued to adapt to prevailing conditions, unlike traditional Republicans and Democrats, who progressives considered to be ossified in their views. Theodore Roosevelt, like Frederick Jackson Turner, was greatly influenced by Social Darwinism, and the need for adaption to changing conditions. Woodrow

¹²³ Gould, *America in the Progressive Age*, 48.

¹²⁴ Lewis L Gould, *Reform and Regulation: American Politics, 1900-1916* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), 158.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Wilson, often portrayed as a donnish professor, was, in truth, a shrewd politician with an ‘openly avowed regard for expediency.’¹²⁶ In July, 1916, he uttered a maxim on political survival: ‘I am sorry for any President of the US who does not recognize every great movement in the Nation. The moment he stops recognizing it, he becomes a back number.’¹²⁷ FDR showed a similar regard for adaptability and political survival.

There was a rising demand in American society, at the start of the 20th Century for checks to be placed on monopolies, which threatened economic and democratic freedoms. TR and Wilson were prepared to respond to that demand, but were flexible on the means to achieve it. That demand was renewed with the onset of the Great Depression. TR was a man of action, favouring workable solutions, instead of formulaic responses to problems. Wilson, from his university years, had been less interested in theory, than ideas which were rooted in reality and practical application.¹²⁸ This progressive cast of mind applied equally to FDR, and partly explains his eclectic approach to monopoly reform, and much else in government. Like his two predecessors, he was prepared to deploy several policies to deal with monopolies, some concurrently, emphasizing what was most politically practicable. Research about progressivism has probably not placed sufficient stress on the policy flexibility of progressive presidents, across the Progressive and New Deals eras- notably in monopoly reform. That policy flexibility indicates a progressive ideology interwoven with pragmatism. As regulation of monopolies and trust-busting both formed part of the ideological lexicon of progressivism, Progressive era politicians could flexibly respond in a pragmatic way to changing realities.

Notwithstanding Kendrick Clements attempts to minimize inconsistencies in Wilson’s position, several historians have noted the discrepancies between the policy preferences of progressive presidents in monopoly reform and their presidential practice.¹²⁹ George Mowry focused on the discrepancy in relation to Theodore Roosevelt.¹³⁰ Kenneth Davis and John

¹²⁶ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 253.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹²⁹ Kendrick A Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 51-52.

¹³⁰ Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt*, 134.

Milton Cooper made the same observation about Woodrow Wilson.¹³¹ They concentrated exclusively on political realities – Congressional opposition and World War I – to explain presidential policy fluctuations and inconsistencies. However, progressivism’s ideological flexibility over monopoly reform provides an additional explanation. It enabled these presidents to deploy radically different policies, with apparent ease, in response to political realities. Therefore, although cross-pressured by Congress or war-time conditions, progressive presidents were able to employ a pragmatic ideology in monopoly reform, which FDR re-produced on the West Coast in the later New Deal.

Like the Progressive presidents, FDR’s monopoly reform policy had been diverted by political realities – in FDR’s case, the action of the Supreme Court in striking down the monopoly-friendly National Recovery Administration. In a Progressive era manner, he was able to change course, with apparent ease, towards an anti-trust approach. As well as regulation, and ‘trust-busting’ in his Second New Deal, he also used the ‘countervailing power’ method with conspicuous success in monopoly reform against private utilities. For example, it was implemented in decisions over HEP distribution to West Coast states from the vast New Deal dams in the late 1930s. The concept of countervailing powers is very much associated with the later New Deal, and has continued to be a popular option available to policy-makers after World War II. However, its beginnings go back to the Progressive era, and it was a typical product of progressive thinking. The term countervailing power was coined by the economist JK Galbraith in the 1950s, but this doctrine originated with Theodore Roosevelt, and Herbert Croly, his major intellectual collaborator.¹³² Countervailing powers were employed when federal government actively encouraged growth in other sectors of the economy, as a counter-weight to monopolistic corporations. By attempting to equalize the influence, for instance, of corporations, labour unions, and public bodies, progressives were consciously following their ideological aim of creating a balanced society where no group would predominate.

Consequently, the Hetch-Hetchy controversy (1913) was not exclusively related to conservation, or the needs of San Francisco. Certainly, it became a *cause célèbre* on account of

¹³¹Kenneth S Davis, *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928* (New York: Random House, 1979), 345-346; Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 211-212, and 261.

¹³² John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952)

its environmental impact on a National Park. Looked at from the perspective of San Francisco, Hetch-Hetchy was always a water and hydro-electric power project. From the viewpoint of Wilson's government, though, there was an additional dimension to Hetch-Hetchy. It represented an opportunity to encourage countervailing powers. By supporting the San Francisco municipal power company, Wilson was helping to make the public body an economic force against over-mighty rivals, the private utility, Pacific Power.

Therefore, in monopoly reform, continuity between the Progressive era and the later New Deal on the West Coast is clearly apparent. In the Progressive era governments followed a flexible ideology in monopoly reform, allowing a range of pragmatic policy responses to political realities. That ideological flexibility was to continue in the New Deal, but it had the unwavering objective of reining in monopoly practice. In this manner, regarding monopoly reform, pragmatism was written into Progressive ideology. Indeed, between 1937 and 1942, on the West Coast, FDR may have completed a policy paradigm reminiscent of Progressive era president Wilson, in moving from trust-busting, through countervailing powers, conspicuously over public power, to full co-operation with regulated monopolies, producing abundantly for a war-time emergency. The Progressive era's use of public power as a countervailing ideological device began a process that was greatly expanded as a result of the New Deal's ambitious West Coast dams, 1937-1942.

Social Justice

Strong parallels exist between the Progressive and New Deal eras in conservation, and monopoly reform, so what of social justice policy? In this area, especially, a note of caution should be sounded, as comparative history, even for two closely-related eras in one country, can sometimes indulge in strained comparisons, to serve tendentious outcomes. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge clear differences between 1900-1920 and the 1930s, where they are apparent. Over social justice, with some notable exceptions, the aim of Progressive era presidents to provide Americans with social justice, in furtherance of a fairer society, remained largely an aspiration. Rather, it was Franklin Roosevelt's Democrat government in the 1930s which gave substance to social justice aspirations, by passing federal laws and creating New Deal agencies to carry them out. For example, the calamitous economic blizzard following 1929 forced politicians to come up with relief measures on a hitherto unimaginable scale to help the unemployed. FDR's

government also turned to social justice reform in the mid 1930s to effect a long-term restructuring of society and the economy.

The issue of unionization amply demonstrates the limitations of Progressive presidents. Faced with a business culture that believed unions would stifle capitalism's rugged individualism, federal government found itself unable to bring into being labour unions, which could apply sustained pressure on employers to improve pay and conditions for poverty-stricken industrial workers. In the Pennsylvania coal strike (1902), for instance, President Theodore Roosevelt had failed to persuade employers that trade unions should be recognized. His dramatic intervention, an early illustration of Roosevelt's 'personalized presidency' – inviting the coal miners and management to Washington, as equal parties, for talks with him - did, though, help to win the coal miners concessions.¹³³ Yet, it was only after Roosevelt's Secretary of War, Elihu Root, met financial titan JP Morgan on his luxury yacht, *The Corsair* - a world away from the grime and conflict of the anthracite mines – that the financier prevailed upon the coal owners to agree on mediation.¹³⁴ As a result, eventually, the coal miners secured short term gains – reduced hours and an increase in pay, but the greater prize of being able to join a union eluded them.¹³⁵ Similarly, Woodrow Wilson's major gesture on unionization, in the anti-trust Clayton Act (1914), was equally ineffective. By section 6, the act exempted unions from 'restraint of trade' provisions of the Sherman Act.¹³⁶ However, in practice, the new legislation hardly altered the position of labour unions, which remained banned throughout much of US industry.¹³⁷

In contrast, Roosevelt's Second New Deal enacted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, giving industrial workers the right to unionize, and empowering them to negotiate legally binding agreements, including on pay. In the same manner, the Social Security Act (1935), the other major component of Roosevelt's Second New Deal went well beyond the tentative steps of the Progressive era, towards realizing social justice goals. It provided industrial workers with welfare payments when unemployed, and in old age. Taken together, the NLRA and the Social Security Act represented significant progress towards social justice. They

¹³³ Lewis L Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1991) 71, 67-69.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁶ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 143.

¹³⁷ Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson*, 48-49.

permitted many poorer groups to achieve a degree of financial security throughout their adult lives – in and out of a job, and when old. It is clear these bold New Deal laws surpassed anything that Progressive era presidents had attempted, to assist, or empower, industrial workers. The differences are real between Progressive era personal intervention by TR, on behalf of coal miners, or Wilson’s ineffective pro-union legislation, and the New Deal’s far-reaching interventionist laws, under FDR, to help industrial workers. Even so, there were strong similarities between the two periods over social justice, which, if investigated more deeply, reveal weaknesses in the practice of progressive ideology. They relate to: communism, the farmer-labour alliance, and the status of the small farmer.

Both during the 1910s and 1930s, communism presented a major problem to administrations and those attached to them. At a surface level, progressivism seemed to be an answer to communism, because of its commitment to social justice. In Kolko’s interpretation, progressives brought about moderate reform to avert more radical reforms by socialists or communists.¹³⁸ Likewise, in the 1930s, the New Deal acted, to some extent, as a bastion of democracy. The Great Depression demoralized American capitalism, and, in the resultant power vacuum, communism or fascism might have flourished, had it not been for FDR’s New Deal. Electoral support for the far left was small in the two periods, but communism, and its nemesis, anti-communism, nonetheless, posed a multitude of dangers to reformist progressive governments, 1900-1940.

In the Progressive era, reformist governments took initiatives and passed reforms which perhaps lessened the need for more extreme political solutions. For instance, Theodore Roosevelt declared that an important motive behind his reforms was to head off political extremism.¹³⁹ Obversely, the actions of the progressive presidents whetted the appetite among many working class people, and their supporters, for further change in American society. Instead of calming society, through righting genuine grievances, progressives may have inadvertently stirred up feeling for more thoroughgoing change, and a re-structuring of America. While Republican and Democrat progressives in the 1900-1920 period and New Dealers in the 1930s, often sought to stop injustices and heal class divisions in furtherance of ‘classless’

¹³⁸ Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism*

¹³⁹ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 146.

progressive ideology, their actions might have achieved the opposite result. In the Progressive era, presidential demonizing of monopolists, seizure of land by federal government on behalf of ‘the people’, and government-sanctioned enquiries revealing dire living and working conditions among the exploited working class – all served to foment antagonism towards capitalists. While radical working class responses were largely a result of the anti-union work-place environment during the Progressive era, they were also, almost certainly, stimulated by a political climate which raised expectations for sweeping change in American society. In the same way, the New Deal tried to prevent political extremism, but, whether through federal action or government-sponsored enquiries, New Dealers often exacerbated class animosities.

In the Progressive era, it was no coincidence that radical working class organizations emerged. During 1905, partly as a result of the atmosphere engendered by the Progressive era, a ‘socialist’ union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), broke away from the American Federation of Labor, (AFL), rejecting its ‘conservative’ and free enterprise values. During 1905 and 6 the IWW became associated with violent strikes, and after World War I, extreme IWW activity with communist objectives, on the West Coast, resulted in civil disorder. Likewise, during the turmoil of New Deal reform, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, (CIO), representing unskilled workers, broke away from the craft-oriented AFL, and staged violent strikes. These culminated, prior to World War II, in civil strife on the West Coast, involving communist-led CIO unions.

Notwithstanding these facts, the leaders of the IWW and CIO held very different political convictions and aims. ‘Big Bill’ Haywood of the IWW, who had begun work in a Utah silver mine at the age of seven, was a committed communist. He later emigrated to the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰ Firebrand CIO leader, John L Lewis, of the coal miners, despite his willingness to use confrontational communist activists, believed strongly in free enterprise, and, indeed, for most of his working life was a Republican. Undeniably, though, both union leaders heightened class tensions during their respective periods, which produced fraught situations on the West Coast.

In 1919, America experienced the largest number of strikes, before or since, in its history.¹⁴¹ A combination of events caused this industrial unrest, including a spirit of change fostered by the

¹⁴⁰ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 231.

¹⁴¹ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 322.

Progressive era, the ending of war-time restrictions, and the example of communist revolution in Russia at the end of 1917. Appalling long-term working conditions also helped generate the strikes and violence. E.g. In the Progressive era, approximately 20,000 American workers per year died because of accidents at work, in heavy industry and the transport system – a further half a million per annum were injured or maimed.¹⁴² During 1919, the biggest strike took place in the steel industry, centred on Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). Only a small proportion of the strikes of 1919-1920 involved the IWW. Yet employers widely condemned all strikers as communists. Wilson's government responded to the 'Red Scare' in a draconian way. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer launched the Palmer Raids after a bomb, planted by a political extremist, had exploded in front of his home, (April, 1919).¹⁴³ J Edgar Hoover, head of the newly-formed (Federal) Bureau of Investigation, in the Justice Department, used the General Intelligence Division to round up thousands of communists. Often suspects were held without regard to their constitutional rights.

With conditions verging on mass hysteria, a succession of serious incidents occurred on the West Coast. In February, 1919, a shipyard dispute in Seattle (Washington State) escalated into a general strike, led by the IWW-dominated Central Labor Council, which brought the city to a standstill. The mayor of Seattle called it an attempt to 'duplicate the anarchy of Russia', and called in federal troops.¹⁴⁴ Lumber owners in Washington State's key timber industry lobbied the Wilson government to deport foreign-born IWW leaders – especially the so-called 'Red Finns' – under the terms of the Immigration Act (1917).¹⁴⁵ The law had given the federal government authorization to deport any alien who advocated destruction of property or overthrow of the US government. State authorities in Washington State and California closed down the offices of extreme left wing organizations, while vigilante violence against communists and socialists became widespread in the West during 1919. In the most infamous incident at Centralia, (Washington State), four members of the American Legion, a right wing veterans' organization, were shot dead trying to storm Centralia's IWW headquarters.¹⁴⁶ When Wesley Everest, one of the IWW 'murderers,' was put in Centralia's jail, a vigilante mob arrived at night,

¹⁴² Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*, 35.

¹⁴³ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 326-329.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁴⁵ Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson*, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Bates, *The United States, (1898- 1928)*, 233.

and cut the town's electricity supply. In the darkness, they seized Everest, drove out of town, and lynched him from a bridge over the Chehalis River. They then riddled his body with gunfire.¹⁴⁷ Two days afterwards, in Oakland, California, rioters, emboldened by events in Centralia, demolished several buildings owned by left wingers.¹⁴⁸

Commentators on the Red Scare have found Wilson's behaviour an enigma. He had a track record of moderation in labour matters. Yet he allowed the extreme response of the Palmer Raids, and vigilantism. Admittedly, Wilson was largely incapacitated because of a stroke by 1919. However, John Milton Cooper, an historian otherwise sympathetic to Wilson, found this explanation inadequate. He writes: 'Wilson's failure to stop Palmer or rein him in is not fully explicable even by the severity of his illness or the distraction of other events.'¹⁴⁹ Surely the explanation lies elsewhere? Before the Palmer Raids, Theodore Roosevelt had praised vigilante actions against the IWW, and advocated a government campaign against Bolsheviks – in anticipation of the Palmer Raids.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps both Wilson and Roosevelt felt communism, encouraged by the success of the Russian revolution, posed a threat to American values, and approved of vigilantism, *in extremis*, to defend them. Turner had written supportively of 'frontier justice', in defence of American values, as a manifestation of rugged individualism, when discussing earlier American history.¹⁵¹

Almost certainly, TR's and WW's anti-communist stance was partially linked to the upcoming US elections of 1920, in which both hoped to be presidential candidates.¹⁵² In the event, Roosevelt died before the election, and Wilson was too ill to consider a third term.¹⁵³ Between 1918 and 1920 a wave of anti-communist sentiment was gripping the American public, one of the first of many such examples in the 20th Century. Therefore, TR's forthright remarks (1918-1919) against communists, and Wilson's studied non-involvement in the Red Scare (1919-20), need to be seen against the backdrop of anti-communist feeling among the public, and the

¹⁴⁷ Tom Copeland, *The Centralia Tragedy of 1919: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 53-54.

¹⁴⁸ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 328.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁵⁰ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 329.

¹⁵¹ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chapter three

¹⁵² Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 329-330.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 334.

forthcoming presidential election. Roosevelt and Wilson could derive political advantage in the imminent election from their stances on the extreme left. In that sense, both progressive leaders responded to the Red Scare pragmatically. For example, Wilson's politically expedient non-involvement in the Red Scare neither jeopardized his liberal credentials, nor condemned the popular Palmer Raids – which he hoped would redound to his advantage in the 1920 election. Meanwhile, Roosevelt's conspicuous nationalism over 'un-American' communists could be interpreted as pragmatic, and certainly went down well with the patriotic American public.

Of course, the two progressive presidents were also ideologically opposed to communism. Progressivism preached a classless democratic politics, communism accentuated class divisions. However, there were disquieting affinities between progressivism and communism. Both progressives and communists had contributed to class tensions (1900-1920). Progressivism had attacked the abuses of capitalism, and raised expectations among the working class; while Marxists consciously inflamed class divisions. Possibly Roosevelt and Wilson were content to keep a safe distance from communists, who, after all, espoused some of the views that earlier they had first helped popularize about the misdeeds of capitalism. A final outrage, by anarcho-communists, the tragic bombing of JP Morgan's offices on Wall Street (1920), in which 43 people died, neatly, but uncomfortably, united earlier Progressive censure of the House of Morgan, with this late murderous communist 'direct action' against it.¹⁵⁴

Cooper has noted that the anti-communist environment of 1919 caused a change of behaviour by progressive leaders. He observed that for Progressive era politicians the Red Scare made their indictments of capitalism, in the years before America's entry into World War I, politically unfashionable.¹⁵⁵ However, there is scope for further development of this point, in a Progressive era *and* New Deal context, which shows how anti-communism caused federal government and its representatives to modify their policies and behaviour. In both eras, progressives needed to balance their ideological beliefs about helping the struggling working class – against political pragmatism and electoral survival.

¹⁵⁴ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 330.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p322; Cooper makes this comment on 1919: 'The kinds of criticism of private enterprise and property rights that (Theodore) Roosevelt, La Follette (Snr.), and other progressives had mounted before 1917 now diminished in respectability and attractiveness.'

A subsequent chapter will explore how Progressive era-inspired politicians on the West Coast in 1939-40 reacted to a set of circumstances which strongly paralleled 1919-20. They too faced foreign policy pressures involving Communist Russia, an imminent presidential election, and an anti-communist movement combating unionization. Certainly, FDR's New Dealers, in addressing these realities, were forced to modify their policies and behaviour, but we will discover in due course whether they also forswore their enlightened political positions, as happened with progressives during the Red Scare. Undeniably, periodic bouts of anti-communism among the American public seemed to cause great difficulties for progressive politicians in both periods, and threw them onto the defensive. Progressives held a profound sympathy for impoverished working class people, and willingly addressed their grievances, so there was a danger the public would conflate them with other pro-worker groups, like socialists, or even communists. That danger could be intensified through malicious anti-communism, which sought to bracket all reformist politics together. Nevertheless, whatever their reservations, progressives believed in capitalism, while socialists were sceptical about it, and communists antagonistic.

In truth, progressivism was always at a disadvantage because it never created a permanent third party alternative, or seized enduring control of the Democratic or Republican Party. Progressivism remained an ideology in search of a party. Therefore, its views could not be clearly delineated to the electorate over time, or intellectual tensions resolved among progressives themselves. In the reductive language of American politics, where parties polarized before elections, progressivism was always in danger of being labelled extremist by reactionary forces.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, as Lipsett and Marks make clear, the creation of a third party might have been disastrous for progressive aims, by permanently splitting the reformist vote and preventing the election of liberal presidents.¹⁵⁷ During 1939-1940 on the West Coast, New Dealers faced another wave of anti-communism, but they had the distinct advantage of being able to apply the lessons of the years 1919-1920, which enabled them to help FDR – a progressive president – survive the 1940 elections.

¹⁵⁶ Clyde Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform: the Republican Party in the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 199-200.

¹⁵⁷ Seymour Martin Lipsett and Gary Wolfe Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: WW Norton, 2000), 53.

The farmer-labour alliance, originally derived from the Populists, was a social justice belief strongly associated with progressivism. During the Progressive era and New Deal, the farmer-labour alliance also suffered from the absence of a party to embed this concept in the public's political consciousness, and clarify its ideological complexities to progressives themselves. Perhaps over-optimistically progressives believed they could unite people from different classes, and groups within classes.

Progressive politicians (1900-20) had prided themselves on their classless politics. In social justice reform, they contended it was perfectly possible to create a wide voting base, supporting a fairer society, composed of the middle and working class, farmers *and* industrial workers. Hiram Johnson, a pivotal Republican progressive, was governor of California, 1911-1917, and California senator, 1917-45. He personified these beliefs. His political career spanned the Progressive and New Deal eras, and, arguably, shows that he adhered to the fundamentals of progressivism across the eras. The historian George Mowry viewed the maintenance of Johnson's complex farmer-labour voting coalition on the West Coast, in the Progressive era, as a fallacy.¹⁵⁸ However, Michael Rogin, the political scientist, persuasively showed that Johnson was able to convert a largely rural Californian voting base in 1910, into a predominantly urban one in 1914, while by 1916 he created the farmer-labour voting alliance, which would have been his ultimate aim.¹⁵⁹ He held together that alliance during the 1920s. Like the Populists before him, with their core farming voter base, Johnson wanted to broaden his appeal to urban working class voters, partly, no doubt, because he believed they deserved social justice provision. Additionally, he understood that US society was moving inexorably towards urbanization. In that context, Johnson recognized there was a mutuality of interest between farming and industrial groups, based upon their impoverished status. As a consequence, in his first gubernatorial administration, 1910-14, Johnson passed a series of laws to benefit the urban working class, including workmen's compensation legislation for work-place accidents, and a child labour statute.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ George E Mowry, *California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951)

¹⁵⁹ Michael Rogin, 'Progressivism and the California Electorate' *The Journal of American History* Vol. 55 No 2 (September 1968): 302, 307, *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁰ Rogin, 'Progressivism and the California Electorate:' 313.

A corresponding farmer-labour voter base was developed in other western states during the Progressive era. For instance, ‘Fighting Bob’ La Follette Snr., another seminal progressive figure, established the same type of voting alliance in the Mid West state of Wisconsin, which his son, Senator Robert La Follette Jr., inherited (1925-47). The La Follette political dynasty, once again, as with Johnson, straddled the Progressive and New Deal ages, providing continuity between the two eras. However, regarding the farmer-labour concept, while small farmers and industrial labour could co-exist amicably, if they worked in discrete areas of the economy, e.g. Wisconsin steel workers and dairy farmers, there was always scope for conflict if their interests clashed. During the Progressive age, the interface between farmers and industrial workers was already causing problems in the area of social justice. Industrial workers were vital for processing and transporting food from farms. Yet, if they improved their pay or conditions, through strike pressure or state legislation, farmers feared that farm incomes would suffer, as would the food supply to consumers. This situation presented a conundrum to Progressive era politicians, namely how to satisfy the needs of the industrial worker and farmer, where their interests over-lapped.

An example from the Progressive era, involving Franklin Roosevelt, typifies the quandary that confronted politicians. While Roosevelt was a New York state senator in 1912, a bill was presented in the state legislature limiting to 54 hours a week the work of boys aged 16-21 in canning sheds, and regulating the work of children in food processing industries. FDR was ‘slow to support it’, because the bill had the potential to interfere with the processing of farm goods, which would harm economically weak small farmers.¹⁶¹ Ironically, he was prompted to back the legislation by Frances Perkins, who was then Executive Secretary of the Consumers’ League, and later, during his presidency, the US Secretary of Labor.¹⁶² However, the ambitious young State Senator Roosevelt relied heavily on upstate farmer votes. Subsequently, secretary to the president, Louis Howe, re-wrote the history of this event, realizing it projected a less-than-perfect image of Roosevelt. He invented the story that the bill needed one more vote to pass, and FDR had filibustered heroically until the vote was found. The reality showed a far more

¹⁶¹ Frank Freidel, *Franklin D Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 20-21.

¹⁶² Frances Perkins to Roosevelt, undated, box 14, file 272, Franklin D Roosevelt Papers, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY

intriguing state of affairs – the future president grappling with the difficult choice of assisting the social justice needs of small farmers, or those of badly exploited industrial workers, including children below age ten working ‘long hours at night.’¹⁶³ As a representative Progressive era politician, FDR was torn between pragmatism and ideology. Support for the small farmers was the pragmatic choice to secure votes, but progressive ideology about the farmer-labour alliance, and his social conscience dictated he should aid the industrial workers. It is unclear whether FDR, in the event, identified with the apprehensions of the small farmers, or if he sought to persuade them that there was an alternative perspective on their problem. Certainly, the complex progressive argument - that creating harmonious working conditions for food processing workers would help guarantee farmers’ food supplies – was difficult to communicate.

Even during the Progressive era, California possessed the largest food processing industry in America. In the 1910s, West Coast politicians faced a similar dilemma to FDR, on the East Coast, when the interests of farmers and food industry workers were in perceived opposition. By the late 1930s, however, across the West - for example, in Mid West states like Wisconsin, conflict between farmers and industrial groups had multiplied several-fold due to changes in farming and the transformation of unionization. As will be described later, Progressive era-inspired politicians discovered that what had been embryonic problems, causing divergence between farmers and industrial workers in the Progressive age, had reached a critical juncture by the late New Deal, especially on the West Coast. The stratagems and subterfuges that Progressive era-inspired politicians employed at that time in order to protect the farmer-labor alliance in the West, reveals how close to breaking-point this concept in progressive ideology had come.

The status of the small farmer was the third factor that caused progressivism difficulties. Small farmers were of immense importance to western progressivism, and their predicament deserves attention, when considering a region like the West Coast, in both eras under consideration. The small farmer, since the founding of the American republic, was presented as the central figure in American democracy. Certainly, in the Jeffersonian tradition, with its emphasis on ‘states’ rights’ and the agricultural sector, the small farmer had acquired a special

¹⁶³ Ibid.

mystique, which endured into the 1930s. At the birth of US democracy, Thomas Jefferson viewed the ‘industrious husbandmen’, who would open up the West, and bring prosperity to America, as the most valued sector of society. Jefferson declared, in an exalted manner: ‘Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God.’ While progressives, of the 1910s and 1930s, did not hold them in quite such high esteem, nonetheless, small farmers occupied a special place in western progressive ideology, as supposed paragons of Turner’s rugged individualism, and independent American democracy. Their western values could be contrasted with the Hamiltonian tradition of powerful central government, and Eastern business capitalism.

The standing of the small farmer suffered as America changed from a rural to urban society. By 1900, if the South is excluded, the US was already a predominantly urban society. From 1920, for the first time, the majority of Americans lived in urban environments. Politicians pragmatically sought votes from this numerically dominant group, which became economically more powerful e.g. through unionization. The success of American agriculture in the 20th Century also told against small farmers. As the problems of US farming were connected to over-production, the small farmer with lower yields was viewed as an almost expendable element in the American economy. In these circumstances, small farmers, 1900-1940, struggled to compete with the expanding production of large farmers, and they were increasingly displaced by them. After the Progressive and New Deal eras the prestige of the small farmer was further eroded by Hofstadter, who wrote in *The Age of Reform* a devastating critique of the small farmer in American culture and politics.¹⁶⁴ By doing so, he demolished the ‘agrarian myth’, Jefferson’s vision of small farmers as self-sufficient, incorruptible, ideal citizens, who shaped US society. Hofstadter reveals commercial farming dominated US agriculture by the end of the Civil War, making the small farmer tantamount to a businessman.¹⁶⁵ Late nineteenth century settlers in the West generally purchased land, rather than being granted it free in 160 acre lots, as stipulated under the Homestead Act.¹⁶⁶ Land speculation, not raising crops or livestock, became their prevailing way of life. Even when the small farmer approximated to Jefferson’s ideal,

¹⁶⁴ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Hofstadter unsparingly concludes: ‘The isolated farmstead ... encouraged that... suspicious and almost suicidal individualism for which the American farmer was long noted.’¹⁶⁷

Hofstadter provides a refreshing corrective to over-sentimentalizing small farmers, and tears apart the factual foundation of the agrarian myth. However, once Hofstadter’s argument is dissected, and his *quondam* Marxism, which preached hatred of the *petit bourgeois*, is discounted, a less unsympathetic interpretation of the small farmer can be constructed. The fact that the 19th Century small farmer was forced to buy land rather than receive it free hardly tells against his reputation. He may have indulged in land speculation himself, but the scope to do so greatly diminished after most fertile land had been occupied by the Progressive age. Finally, the evidence indicates that in politics during the Populist-Progressive age and New Deal era the small farmer was prepared to temper his hard-working individualism with collective action – the farmer-labour alliance.

The small farmer’s worth is of great importance when considering the West in the 1900s or 1930s. For progressive politicians, though, in Mid West states like Wisconsin, or throughout areas of the West Coast, the small farmer was part of their everyday experience, not a mythic figure or an outmoded concept. He was a significant presence in states like Oregon, Washington, and even parts of California, where small farmers struggled to make a living. Moreover, in the 1930s, the Turnerian nightmare of destitute farmers, unable to find land, had materialized on the West Coast, especially in California, where thousands of landless, dust-driven small farmers arrived from the southern Great Plains. Their arrival created a socio/economic and humanitarian crisis.

Hofstadter’s attack on the agrarian myth effectively de-valued the worth of small farmers, as had socio-economic developments contemporary to these periods. Moreover, according to Hofstadter, the small farmer interest – which exerted considerable pressure for reform in the Populist-Progressive age – was irredeemably reactionary, and therefore, by association, so was the Progressive era. Hofstadter’s opinion of small farmers served his discontinuity argument. Although Hofstadter delivered some incisive truths about the small farmers’ proclivity towards reaction, he omitted to mention their involvement in progressive reform across the Progressive

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 45.

and New Deal eras. As will be explained in chapters four, five, and six, where comparisons are made between small farmers on the West Coast during the Progressive era and New Deal, their progressive capacities were very real. They vigorously backed irrigation schemes which conserved or improved farming land, were often the drivers of public power policy in monopoly reform, and pushed for social justice provision.

In fact, presidents in both eras viewed them as fellow progressives. TR framed his National Reclamation Act of 1902 in a blatantly ideological way so that water from federal irrigation schemes would only go to small farmers. The radical social justice intent of this act has been largely overlooked regarding the West Coast, where land engrossing in California, for example, was more advanced than any American state. Roosevelt's irrigation law expressed undisguised support for small farmers by saying: 'the aim (of this law) is to ... disintegrate the monopolistic holdings of land that prevail on the Pacific Coast.'¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Wilson could only take action to back small farmers when pragmatism allowed, challenging again Hofstadter's notion of an un-pragmatic Progressive era. Lack of capital was a root cause of the problems small farmers confronted in trying to compete with large operators. Gould has observed that, as president, Wilson acted on his ideological beliefs about assisting small farmers, only when the need for western votes became imperative.¹⁶⁹ For instance, in 1916, an election year, and the year before America's entry into World War I, Wilson's government provided help to small farmers by the Federal Farm Loan Act, and the Federal Warehouse Act. These laws facilitated credits to farmers, for crops and farm improvements.¹⁷⁰ In the New Deal, FDR continued to expand credit to small farmers. For example, the Farm Security Administration 1937 onwards helped small farmers to avoid foreclosure, and tenants in buying their farms.

If small farmers are viewed as progressive, we can see how the fall of the Progressive Party (1912-1916) impacted negatively on them and progressivism generally. Similarly, during the 1910s, the rise of the large farmers' organization – the Farm Bureau – adversely affected small farmer interests. The importance of the Progressive Party should be considered first, before assessing its specific consequences for small farmers.

¹⁶⁸ John Opie, *The Law of the Land: Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 143.

¹⁶⁹ Gould, *America in the Progressive Era*, 77.

¹⁷⁰ Bates, *The United States, (1898-1928)*, 144.

Not long after Hofstadter established the paradigm of discontinuity between the Progressive era and the New Deal during the 1950s, Andrew Scott challenged his hypothesis. He claimed that the Progressive Party's Platform of 1912 anticipated the New Deal.¹⁷¹ Otis Graham Jr., a Hofstadter adherent, dismissed Scott's criticism of the discontinuity school by saying the Progressive Party Platform in 1912 was unrepresentative of Progressive era beliefs.¹⁷² This judgement is a prime example of an *ipse dixit* argument. The evidence is substantial for saying that the 1912 election platform and, naturally the Progressive Party, voiced Progressive era ideology.

After TR refused a third presidential term, the Republicans led by Taft ruled between 1908 and 1912. Taft was a more activist trust-buster than Roosevelt, but was accused of failing to maintain a progressive policy momentum. Therefore, TR stood during 1912 as leader of the new 'Progressive Party' – formed from dissident Republicans and Democrats – against Taft, and Wilson, the Democrat progressive. Significantly, TR's vice-presidential candidate was Hiram Johnson, the Californian governor, who brought together a farmer-labor alliance in California. The Progressive Party Platform cannot be viewed as the manifesto of a fringe party. In the presidential election, Roosevelt actually won more votes than the Republicans, and only narrowly lost to Wilson.

The Progressive Party Platform was not an aberration in Progressive era thinking. In fact, it constituted current, and future, plans for progressive presidents. The Progressive Platform is often considered a blueprint for the progressive reforms of Wilson's first term as president, 1912-1916.¹⁷³ It also envisaged social security legislation that looked forward to the New Deal.¹⁷⁴ In content and popular appeal the Progressive Party Platform was representative of Progressive era thinking. Furthermore, as the Progressive Party was short-lived, 1912-1916, there is a temptation to judge its significance as transitory. Ickes was on the National Executive of the Progressive Party in those years, and therefore had an 'insiders'' view of the party's workings. Even after Progressive Party members had suffered defeat in the 1912 elections, Ickes

¹⁷¹ Andrew Scott, 'The Progressive Era in Perspective' *Journal of Politics* Vol. 21 No 4 (November 1959)

¹⁷² Otis L Graham, *An Encore For Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

¹⁷³ Arthur S Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 239-240.

¹⁷⁴ Gould, *America in the Progressive Era*, 64.

conveys their great expectations: 'Believing that they already constituted one of the two major political parties of the country, they were confident that in the elections of 1914 and 1916 the Republican party would be swept completely off the map, leaving ... the Democratic and Progressive parties to contest for ... national office.'¹⁷⁵

In Ickes' 1941 account of the Progressive Party's collapse he still felt anger about what had happened, and believed the party's demise was not inevitable. Western progressives like Ickes never forgot this traumatic experience, and he was still re-living it at the end the New Deal. In Ickes' opinion, the Progressive Party disbanded in 1916 due to a series of blunders. Firstly, after the 1912 election, Roosevelt repeated a pattern of behaviour when faced with a personal impasse. He impulsively sought solace in action, on this occasion an expedition to Brazil, which wrecked his health and the future prospects of his nascent party.¹⁷⁶ Secondly, without their inspirational leader, the National Executive became largely an East Coast organization, disastrously failing to keep lines of communication flowing with the West.¹⁷⁷ This development represented a serious setback for the small farmer interest. TR was highly attuned to the West, having lived and worked there. He had led the rebellion against the Republican party in thrall to Eastern business interests. His cousin FDR was intellectually engaged with western social and environmental problems. TR would probably have sustained the party's western organization, and the interests of small farmers. Thirdly, leading up to the 1916 election, Progressive Party members became internally divided, and were eventually re-incorporated into the other two parties.¹⁷⁸ Had a series of errors not occurred, progressivism might have had its own enduring party, which might have given small farmers a higher priority in policies. With its 1912 platform the Progressives had wide appeal, rather than as Graham contended expressing periphery views. Franklin Roosevelt remained with Wilson's progressive Democrats in 1912. He learned by the new party's collapse, and the Progressives' failure to hold together their urban/rural and western/eastern components.

Without a national party to represent small farmers adequately, they were at the mercy of federal government's shifting political priorities in the Progressive and New Deal eras. The

¹⁷⁵ Harold L Ickes, 'Who Killed the Progressive Party?' *The American Historical Review* Vol. 46 No 2 (January 1941)

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 309-310.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 313-315, 321, 327-328, 333-334.

Democratic and Republican parties, between 1900 and 1942, were complicated coalitions of voters and interests. The Democratic party, for example, in the two eras, relied heavily on the support of southern states. As a consequence, Wilson, a southerner, but also a Democrat non-southerner like FDR, had to give prominence in policy to large-scale southern farmer interests. Both the Democrats and Republicans also recognized the economic power of western corporate farmers. Expressing their views, the Farm Bureau was formed in the years 1911 to 1919. This Progressive era organization exerted enormous political leverage during the New Deal, and demanded large farmers should be given the highest priority in agricultural policy. Therefore, it is instructive to bear in mind the lack of an enduring Progressive Party in the 1910s and 1930s. Political realities often precluded small farmers being given a high priority in agricultural and social justice policy, and certainly they were not *primus inter pares*. Overall, regarding problems about communism, the farmer-labour alliance, and the small farmer interest, a Progressive Party might have provided a surer defence against these ideological weaknesses.

More than the historiography shows, Turner's frontier thesis established an intellectual foundation for the Progressive era and New Deal over the three tenets of progressivism. Regarding conservation, in practice, Progressive era presidents encouraged wise user sustained yield forestry production, but were generally sympathetic to preservationist thinking over national park policy. However, preservationists, like Muir, were prepared to make pragmatic concessions when attempting to attain ideological goals over Hetch-Hetchy. During the late New Deal, preservationists, concerned with the West Coast repeated this pattern of behaviour, as reclamation followed Progressive precedents. In monopoly reform, during the Progressive era, regulation and trust-busting were not considered ideologically opposed, and the flexible ideology of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson was reproduced by FDR, along with countervailing powers. In the later New Deal, the West Coast public power movement provided particularly strong cross-era ideological continuity. Over the social justice policy of unionization, the Progressive era was less ambitious than the New Deal. However, during the Progressive era governments contended with businessmen possessing overweening self-confidence at a time of economic prosperity. The New Deal government helped impose unionization on capitalists still reeling from the effects of the Depression. Nonetheless, progressives in both eras faced severe

problems stemming from communism, the farmer-labour alliance, and the status of the small farmer, which might have been alleviated had an enduring 'Progressive Party' existed. The anti-communist violence of 1919-1920 exemplified by the Centralia episode returned on the West Coast, 1939-1940, and tested whether New Dealers had learned from the mistakes of their ideological predecessors.

Chapter Two: The Republican Resurgence in the New Era, 1920-1933

In 1920 progressivism, internationally and domestically, seemed a spent force. Negative imagery abounded, about the unwise Carthaginian peace against Germany at Versailles, where the possibility of mutuality among nations had soon given way to narrow vested interest, and regarding the waning of idealism within America. The English economist, John Maynard Keynes, from the progressive wing of British politics, remarked that after Versailles, ‘We are at the dead season of our fortunes’.¹⁷⁹ In the US, Hiram Johnson, looking at the post-war situation from another perspective, stated: ‘the war has set back the (American) people for a generation. They have bowed to a hundred repress ... (ive) acts.’¹⁸⁰ One outstanding individual appeared, though, to offer progressives a way out of this impasse, and even regeneration – Herbert Hoover.

Hoover represented, in many ways, the very best of the old and new in American life. Orphaned at a young age, he had become a world-renowned mining engineer, amassing a fortune in the process, by dint of individual talent and hard work. During World War I, he showed another side of his personality – a capacity for public service and a strong conviction that co-operation rather than selfish conflict was the answer to the problems of America and Europe. At the start of the war he had headed the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, which saved German-occupied Belgium from starvation. By the end of the war he was in charge of the American Relief Administration that similarly averted mass starvation - this time across the length and breadth of war-ravaged Europe. In between these tasks, he performed impressively in America itself, organizing agricultural production and distribution as Wilson’s wartime Food Administrator.¹⁸¹ He played an active part at Versailles too, on the world stage, and because of his ‘magnanimity and disinterestedness’ Keynes considered him the sole participant who emerged from the conference with an enhanced reputation.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe Incorporated, 1920), 297.

¹⁸⁰ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order* (London: Heinemann, 1957), 48.

¹⁸¹ Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 46-47.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

When the ‘Great Engineer’ returned to America in 1920 progressives looked upon him as the great hope for the future. Progressive journals like *The New Republic* urged him to become a presidential candidate. Intellectuals who had helped shape the Progressive era – Herbert Croly and Louis Brandeis – lent their support, while Ickes’ Chicago ally, the social worker Jane Addams championed Hoover, as did past and future progressive political luminaries – Franklin Lane, Wilson’s Secretary of the Interior, and FDR himself.¹⁸³ Although Hoover alienated some progressives when he entered the race for the White House as a Republican, and soon dropped out of contention, the new Republican President Warren Harding in 1921, hardly a progressive, was keen to capitalize on Hoover’s popularity by offering him a cabinet position. Hoover accepted the post of Commerce Secretary. During the unrivalled prosperity of the New Era in the 1920s he not only made his department a signal success, both under Harding and Calvin Coolidge, but was so governmentally energetic that one observer called him ‘Under-Secretary of all other departments’¹⁸⁴. Furthermore, Hoover set out his own political creed in the book *American Individualism*, published during 1922. It elaborated what one historian has called ‘co-operative individualism’, or ‘independent progressivism’, and Schlesinger Jr. termed ‘progressive individualism’.¹⁸⁵ Essentially, Hoover believed that individualism should be tempered by social responsibility, and a commitment to the wider community. Responding to Hoover’s book at the time, Frederick Jackson Turner enthusiastically endorsed it as ‘the platform on which all genuine Americans can stand, a noble statement of the fruits of our past and the promise of our future.’¹⁸⁶ The seemingly unstoppable upward trajectory of Hoover’s career culminated in his gaining the ultimate US political prize, the presidency, 1929-33, after a victorious election campaign, which saw the New Era Republicans win a third successive presidential election.

Posterity records that soon afterwards, the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Great Depression broke Hoover’s government, his political reputation, and perhaps even Hoover’s steely self-confidence. It also presented FDR with a unique opportunity. Later, in 1937 when a

¹⁸³ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order*, 84, and Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 74-75.

¹⁸⁴ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 78.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 57, 123; Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Richard Norton Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 98.

firmly ensconced President Roosevelt began the late New Deal on the West Coast, Hoover pleaded pitifully in a letter to the wife of a celebrated 1920s author; ‘*Please* do not use me as a whipping boy for the “New Era.”¹⁸⁷ I was neither the inventor nor the promoter nor supporter of the destructive currents of that period. I was the “receiver” of it when it went into collapse’. Therefore, were Hoover’s words a futile attempt to extricate his tarnished reputation from the disasters of the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression? Or, alternatively, do they reveal a misunderstood man whose brand of progressivism was discredited by the capricious march of events, and the machinations of FDR, an adversary who possessed a superior political brain? In answering those questions, this chapter will establish whether Hoover was a link between the Progressive era and the New Deal, or their antithesis.

In pursuit of that objective, the New Era years 1921 to 1933 will be surveyed in order to arrive at an understanding of what Joan Hoff Wilson has called the ‘Forgotten Progressive’. Hoover’s record over conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice is going to be assessed for whether a continuum in enlightened policy and ideology exists between the Progressive era and the so-called ‘Entr’acte’ of the 1920s.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps Hoover was judged harshly by proponents of the New Deal, and he has a claim in the three policy areas to providing an ideological link, but, at times, Hoover adhered to ideas which the New Deal later rejected. Therefore, Hoover’s place in the continuity argument will be discussed in two ways. Firstly, Hoover represents a ‘bridge’ between the Progressive and New Deal eras, whereby he continued or developed Progressive era policies that found expression also in the New Deal. Secondly, Hoover’s brand of progressivism sometimes proved inadequate, and helped radicalize progressive thinking in the New Deal, leading to a greater degree of federal government intervention.

Conservation

In 1912 Hoover, the businessman was a ‘Bull Mooser’ who had donated money to TR’s Progressive party electoral campaign. That fact is a useful starting-point in any consideration of Hoover’s later political career during the 1920s. In 1920 Hoover went so far as to announce his resolve to turn the Republican party into the kind of Progressive party Theodore Roosevelt had

¹⁸⁷ Hoover was writing to the wife of Sinclair Lewis, October 22, 1937, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, quoted in David Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1979), 330.

¹⁸⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 280-300.

once envisioned.¹⁸⁹ As a consequence, over certain policy areas – notably conservation – continuity between TR and Hoover is clearly apparent, and virtually unmediated by other influences, although often Hoover had to wait until he assumed the presidency in 1929 before he could act effectively on his ideological beliefs. Then, for example, in conservation, Hoover achieved considerable success. The environmental historian, Donald Swain judged Hoover to have been ‘the first conservationist president since TR’.¹⁹⁰ In relation to forestry, national parks and water reclamation projects in the West, Swain calls Hoover ‘a key conservation figure’.¹⁹¹

To a great extent, in conservation Hoover revived Roosevelt’s ‘stewardship’ concept of government. During his presidency, national parks and monuments, for the physical and spiritual enjoyment of the American public, increased by three million acres, or 40%, including a new National Park in Death Valley, California.¹⁹² The new president appointed Horace Albright, a leading conservationist, as Commissioner of the National Park Service. Hoover matched his ambitious expansionist progressive programme with a park service budget increase of 46% in the first three years of his administration, and numerous executive orders supporting national parks.¹⁹³ At the same time, and reminiscent of TR, but on a much smaller scale, Hoover appropriated forest land for the national preserve. Altogether, during Hoover’s presidency the national forests were expanded by over two and a quarter million acres.¹⁹⁴

However, Hoover was more than an imitator of Theodore Roosevelt’s progressivism. He showed, for much of his career, a formidable facility for seizing control of crises, and major problems, to solve them. Whether in the role of the Great Engineer or the Great Humanitarian, or a mixture of the two, during and after World War I, and in the 1920s, he was able to bring divergent people together in the best Progressive era tradition, for the purpose of reaching common goals. Some of his most successful work as a crisis manager occurred in conservation,

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*, 97.

¹⁹⁰ Donald G. Swain, *Federal Conservation Policy, 1921-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 165, quoted in Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*

¹⁹¹ Swain, *Federal Conservation Policy*, 161, quoted in Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*

¹⁹² Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), 242.

¹⁹³ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 228.

¹⁹⁴ Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, 241.

especially water projects in the West and elsewhere, where he followed in the footsteps of Theodore Roosevelt, but went further.

Hoover relied on the formula of trying ‘to awaken...the concerned parties to a common interest ... (and) suggesting a method for pursuing it – namely co-operation.’¹⁹⁵ The Colorado River Compact of 1922 exemplified the efficacy of that approach, and is especially relevant to this study because of its impact on California in the 1930s. The seven states of the Colorado River wanted to benefit fully from the water supply the river provided. Yet, any attempt by one state to tap into the river’s water by dam construction was rendered null and void because of narrow self interested opposition from the others. When Hoover was appointed by Harding chairman of the Colorado Commission, he showed an ability to take up innovative ideas that had previously been suggested, and the resolve to put them into practice. He was able to achieve the Colorado River Compact, an interstate co-operative agreement between the states, with only Arizona refusing to sign it, and an equitable 50/50% division of water supply among the Upper Basin, and the Lower Basin states. When he responded to the concerns of Hiram Johnson about specifications for the future Hoover Dam, construction on the dam began.¹⁹⁶

It is worth remarking that over such water schemes, which were especially needed in the Far West, Hoover’s beliefs, and past and future progressive ideology entirely converged. In reference to the past, at the turn of the century Theodore Roosevelt, as mentioned previously, had sought, but was refused, funds from Congress to develop the Colorado for irrigation, and other, purposes.¹⁹⁷ Hoover described his own Colorado River Compact as a perfect example of ‘constructive conservation’.¹⁹⁸ Like Turner, he recognized that capital projects for major dams were beyond the financial capabilities of individuals, and Hoover believed federal government expenditure was necessary for their completion, because even state funding would be inadequate. If Hoover accepted progressive government intervention for dams to irrigate the dry Far West, the harnessing of America’s rivers was also often directed towards flood prevention, and averting

¹⁹⁵ Kendrick A. Clements, ‘Herbert Hoover and Conservation, 1921-1933’ *The American Historical Review* Vol. 89 No 1, (February, 1984): 73.

¹⁹⁶ Clements, ‘Herbert Hoover and Conservation, 1921-1933’: 74.

¹⁹⁷ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 178.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the social distress flooding caused. In that respect, these projects appealed to Hoover, the humanitarian.

The Mississippi flood of 1927 in America's South gave an urgency to Hoover's water course schemes. It remains the most disastrous flood in American History. Hoover was galvanized into activity to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe as chairman of the Special Mississippi Flood Committee.¹⁹⁹ However, he saw beyond the immediate crisis, and used his position to exert leverage over a Republican Congress and presidency which had made low spending and small government in the 1920s their watchwords. Hoover succeeded in converting them to an expensive long-term flood control programme for the Mississippi. Significantly, he tried to press home his advantage in urging other long-range river projects – often on the West Coast – for the Columbia River Basin and California's Central Valley. His schemes 'all fell victim to ... parsimonious, and parochial attitudes within the White House and Congress'.²⁰⁰

However, significantly, only after the Mississippi flood did Congress pass in 1928 the Swing-Johnson law allowing the Hoover Dam. The extent the project was initiated by Hiram Johnson, the California senator, is worth discussing. The dam project originally arose from damaging floods in the Imperial Valley, 1905-1906, which resulted from dependence on a cross-border irrigation system with Mexico using Colorado River water.²⁰¹ Throughout the 1920s, Senator Johnson and Congressman Phil Swing, the former chief counsel of the Imperial Valley Irrigation District, attempted to pass a law giving the Imperial Valley a safer source of water from the Colorado River. In each of the four Congresses between 1922 and 1928 a Swing-Johnson bill was introduced. Senator George Norris commented that Johnson 'would rather pass the bill than anything else and would sacrifice anything for that end.'²⁰² Hoover's 1922 Colorado River Compact was vital for realizing the Swing-Johnson law, and construction on the Hoover Dam began during his presidency in 1930. Even so, Johnson, a politician from the Progressive era, should be acknowledged as the most dogged proponent of this project completed in the late New Deal.

¹⁹⁹ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 114.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰¹ Richard Coke Lower, *A Bloc of One: The Political Career of Hiram W Johnson* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 231.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 233-234.

If Hoover was forced to wait until he became president before launching such schemes, his *Memoirs* make it clear they attracted his notice partly because of the engineering feats they encompassed – for example, the Central Valley Project (CVP). After the death of his parents Hoover spent his childhood and teenage years in Oregon and California, where he was part of Stanford University's first intake of students.²⁰³ He describes as a young man doing vacation work for the US Geological Survey, and how he had been intrigued at the prospect of a vast civil engineering scheme to solve the irrigation and flood problems of California's Central Valley.²⁰⁴ In the early 1920s plans were deferred 'because Mr. Coolidge did not approve of the expenditure implied'.²⁰⁵ However, once in the executive office Hoover appointed Governor Young's Commission, which recommended the work should be undertaken under joint federal, state and private agencies.²⁰⁶ So, the Central Valley Project (CVP) was forwarded during Hoover's administration and, according to his version of events, the Columbia Basin scheme, based principally on a dam at Grand Coulee, would have been implemented had he been re-elected in 1932.²⁰⁷

Therefore, Hoover's conservation policy on national parks and forestry was derived directly from TR, while his flood and irrigation plans contain a greater element of his own progressive thinking. All of them indicate a high level of continuity between the Progressive age and New Era. Clearly, in the dam projects, Hoover's progressive ideology and humanitarian morality, worked with, not against, his pragmatic organizational concerns as an engineer. Hofstadter suggests that the idealistic morality of the Progressive era was somehow at variance with the pragmatic organizational traits he associates with the New Deal. However, in Hoover, at least regarding aspects of the conservation field, the two traits were not 'era discrete' or mutually exclusive, but mutually supportive. Consequently, perhaps these combined traits, as exhibited by Hoover, were not confined to the 'Entr'acte', but had a place among politicians of the Progressive and New Deal eras.

²⁰³Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 8-10.

²⁰⁴Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, 11, 118.

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 230.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 231.

²⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 120.

Finally, regarding conservation, in the years spanning 1900-1942, the limits of federal government need to be recognized. Despite Hoover's contribution to promoting national parks, events at a state level could determine the national debate. The Hetch-Hetchy controversy punctuates the Progressive, Hoover, and New Deal eras. During 1913 Wilson backed this dam development located in California's Yosemite National Park to benefit San Francisco. Wise users like Pinchot and the Californian progressive William Kent hoped that the O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch-Hetchy would become part of a water and power system under state ownership. However, after World War I, Kent's bill to achieve this objective failed in the California legislature.²⁰⁸ Worse still, in 1925 the San Francisco private utility Pacific Gas and Electric gained control of the dam.²⁰⁹ This development was beyond federal government control, but became inextricably linked with Hoover's decade, and radicalized conservation thinking. Wise users became more receptive to preservationist views. Preservationists, who had lost the argument in 1913, felt developments at Hetch-Hetchy vindicated them and were re-motivated to achieve their objectives in the future.

Monopoly Reform

The extent of continuity between Hoover's New Era and the preceding and succeeding eras is further demonstrated by the issue of monopoly reform. In order to understand Hoover's attitude towards business-government relations, the effect of his World War I experience on the home front must be fully appreciated. It was, after all, his political initiation. Hoover's role as Food Administrator during the period of 'war socialism' crystallized certain beliefs in him from which he never henceforward deviated. To begin with, he feared any repetition of Wilson's war-time 'leviathan' state would stifle individualism and enterprise in America. He stated, of the World War I years: 'Federal Government became a centralized despotism which assumed autocratic powers, and took over the business of citizens...However justified at the time if continued in

²⁰⁸ William Francis Deverell and Tom Sitton (Ed), *California Progressivism Re-visited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), Anne F Hyde chapter, 'The Puzzle of Progressive Conservationists,' 52.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

peace time it would destroy not only our American system but...our progress'.²¹⁰ At the same time, the war convinced Hoover that government campaigns could educate and shape public opinion towards good ends. For example, so successful was Hoover's campaign for conserving US food stocks during World War I that the term 'Hooverizing' was coined to describe America's voluntary rationing.²¹¹ However, Hoover was mistaken in thinking that government publicity could nurture in business during the 1920s the same sort of altruism which had delivered voluntary rationing during the war-time emergency.

In 1967, JP Guilford, the psychiatrist, identified two types of mind – the artistic and scientific. The artistic mind is characterized by 'divergent thinking', where several solutions to a problem are envisaged. A scientific mind tends to be convergent, so, as in mathematics, one solution to a problem is expected.²¹² Hoover, by all accounts, was an archetypal convergent thinker. Influenced by his engineering background he assumed that there were 'right' answers to questions, and then, making use of his war-time experience in disseminating ideas, it was just a matter of convincing essentially rational people of incontrovertible truths.

In relation to major crises Hoover employed this approach with conspicuous success pre-1929, because interested parties were pre-disposed towards consensus in order to achieve a single, over-riding objective. Consequently, Hoover's formidable organizational abilities as a crisis manager were deployed winning over acquiescent groups to deal with, for instance, America's war-time food crisis, or the 1927 Mississippi flood. However, in monopoly reform the groups involved had widely divergent interests and, crucially, 'rugged individualism,' during the boom years of the 1920s, confidently confronted 'progressive individualism.' In reality, large and small business was often in conflict, labour and management seldom agreed, consumers frequently viewed both business and labour as their foes, big business looked upon government with suspicion. Therefore, progressive consensus agreement which was possible over national and regional crises became a much harder task with the fractious elements connected to business. Nonetheless, Hoover, the convergent thinker and engineer, was convinced that the progressive strategy of consensus and the war-time tactic of government publicity could alter American

²¹⁰ Herbert Hoover, *The New Day Campaign Speeches of Herbert Clark Hoover* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), speech made by Hoover on October 22, 1928

²¹¹ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 61.

²¹² JP Guilford, *The Nature of Human Intelligence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967)

business norms. In Hoover's universe, 'rugged individualists' would readily give way to 'progressive individualists'. A more hard-bitten and seasoned politician would have been sceptical about using this approach as the mainstay policy to avoid the monopolization of the US economy. Certainly, it should have played a part in a variegated system aimed at curbing the worst effects of big business. Instead, Hoover's over-reliance on his business reform method was a hostage to fortune. It only stood a chance of succeeding in an unprecedentedly prolonged, benign economic environment, where gradual change could be sustained. When, with the onset of the Great Depression, Hoover's 'voluntarist' approach was found wanting, its failure helped radicalize New Deal thinking in the monopoly reform policy area.

Prior to becoming president, Hoover, when Secretary of Commerce, saw himself as a 'hidden catalyst' capable of influencing American business to evolve voluntarily towards progressive individualism.²¹³ At Commerce, and as president, Hoover organized three thousand publicity conferences designed to gain business support for progressive individualism, encouraging the pursuit of fairer competition, higher wages, lower prices, and efficiency.²¹⁴ Rather than government forcing laws on businessmen to control them, government campaigns would win over businesses to Hoover's 'associationalist' ideas, and, of their own volition, business could then reform itself through trade associations and local committees. The argument that the maintenance of America's consumer-driven prosperity depended on raising wages, through management-worker co-operation, and business combating predatory practices, Hoover believed was unanswerable.

Furthermore, he considered that, in any case, on account of joint stock companies America was evolving towards a more responsible capitalism.²¹⁵ As business was held increasingly accountable by shareholders, business was tending towards a co-operative exercise, rather than the ruthless individual struggle of yesteryear. Therefore, government had only to channel business along lines it was already starting to follow for progressive individualism to triumph.

However, far from Hoover's benign government propaganda diminishing the rise of predatory business, the 1920s accelerated that process. Power utilities had long been identified as a

²¹³ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 45.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, 82.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, 88.

looming monopoly threat to the American consumer because they were ‘natural monopolies’, providing electricity to whole population areas, due to the logistical impracticality of creating local consumer choice in this sector. Moreover, even during Progressive times, electricity was expected to be the dominant energy source in the future. Theodore Roosevelt warned that the prospect of power monopolies was ‘the most threatening that has ever appeared’ in America’s corporate history.²¹⁶ In line with expectations, during the 1920s electricity sales soared, (they more than doubled), and there was a concomitant engrossing of power companies by the largest concerns. In 1929 ten great utility companies controlled three quarters of US electricity.²¹⁷ These ten utilities were all holding companies, parent companies with numerous subsidiaries, and the type of big business that had stimulated the progressives’ original anti-monopoly drive. In this atmosphere, utility leaders should not have been seen as passive receptors of Hoover’s public relations campaigns, who would compliantly introduce government schemes promoting progressive individualism. Rather, they amounted to an oppositional bloc, engaged in a co-ordinated counter-campaign for the protection of their vested interests.

Significantly, Samuel Insull’s utility empire in the 1920s, based at Libertyville, Chicago raised the Progressive era hackles of Chicagoan Harold Ickes, regarding the utility chief’s widespread malpractices. He overcharged the public, bribed the Illinois utility commission, and helped corrupt the Chicago police. Moreover, Insull’s Illinois Committee on Public Utility Information became the model for an organization representing utility companies across America, the National Electric Light Association (NELA), which lobbied on behalf of the industry.²¹⁸ In these circumstances, Hoover was disingenuous to consider that the 1920s ‘state of the art’ public relations and advertising techniques he used to promote progressive individualism could not be employed with equal effect by those espousing unrestricted rugged individualism, to nullify his efforts. Consequently, the NELA won over, for instance, state legislators to reduce regulation of large utilities, and funded university research which argued in favour of commercial electricity distribution, rather than by municipal, state, or federal competitors.

²¹⁶Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 121.

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸Ibid., 123-124.

Hoover exaggerated the potential of his publicity campaigns to influence big business, at least in the short term. Ironically, post World War II, federal government-business co-operation and exchange of information were to become standard practice.²¹⁹ At the same time, Hoover should have expected recalcitrant opposition, for instance, among utility magnates, whose perspective on government-business relations was very different from his own. In summary, Hoover's utility policy gave too much scope for private power companies to extend their economic and political influence, although that is not to say Hoover was entirely 'Panglossian' in his attitude towards utilities.

Consistent with his view that federal government had accrued too many powers during World War I, Hoover began devolving decision-making in several policy areas to states. In monopoly reform, he encouraged state regulation of corporations, a clear divergence from TR. These initiatives were aimed at creating a middle way between intrusive and unresponsive federal control, and a situation where exploitative individualistic behaviour held sway. However, in the monopoly area Hoover underestimated the capacity of utility companies to corrupt local and state authorities. Senator George Norris, admittedly a partisan opponent of private utilities, remarked nonetheless accurately of the power trust, i.e. the private utility interest: 'It has bought and sold legislatures'.²²⁰ The issue of 'power trust' interference in politics reached a climax during the 1930s New Deal, and the corrupting influence of utilities was flagrant in California at the end of that decade.

Conversely, there is abundant evidence that Hoover was alive to the economic dangers of monopolies, including over-concentration by private utilities. As Commerce Secretary, Hoover set up an anti-trust division in the Justice Department in 1920.²²¹ Vivaly, after the 1929 Crash, Hoover continued to oppose trade associations advocating a relaxation of the Sherman anti-trust law.²²² Indeed, when he was president the US government pursued a number of high profile cases under the Sherman law, for example, against Hoover's friend Owen Young, owner of

²¹⁹ Clyde Weed, *Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party in the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 17.

²²⁰ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 127.

²²¹ Weed, *Nemesis of Reform*, 17.

²²² Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 181.

General Electric, a major supplier of electrical products to utilities and consumers.²²³ As several historians have made clear, Hoover, ‘true to the old Progressive spirit’, strongly opposed abandoning anti-trust legislation, because monopolistic corporations would be able to price-fix at will.²²⁴ Consequently, Hoover’s monopoly reform policies should not be seen as directly anticipating the New Deal’s National Recovery Administration (NRA), where government-business co-operation involved widespread suspension of the anti-trust laws to assist business recovery during the Great Depression.²²⁵

Hoover’s monopoly reform policy created the most polarized views about him, even more so than his response to the Great Depression – recognized as either misguided or woefully inadequate. In the eyes of some people, Hoover’s policy on monopolies helped cause 1929, and to others, his policy stance was enlightened. A number of factors, though, make a definitive judgement on Hoover and monopoly reform problematic. New Deal scholars, like Schlesinger Jr. were intent on portraying Hoover as one of three Republican presidents in the 1920s who allowed business to career out of control, providing a significant contributory cause of the 1929 Crash. Alternatively, progressives, like Charles Beard had a bias in favour of Hoover, who they considered true to their values in domestic and foreign policy. Meanwhile, Hoover’s assessment of himself in his *Memoirs* is sometimes how he wished to be remembered, rather than an objective chronicle of events.²²⁶

Views on Hoover’s relationship with the Federal Power Commission (FPC) amply demonstrate these contrary outlooks. The FPC was established by Hoover to regulate inter-state power company practice, while state regulation looked at intra-state utility matters. Schlesinger Jr. intimates Hoover made the FPC subservient to the private utilities.²²⁷ Charles Beard considered it impartial, staffed by ‘grey’ men not from the utility interests.²²⁸ Hoover unsurprisingly emphasises his enlightened statesmanship in this area. In a revealing passage from his *Memoirs* he describes how for three years, as Commerce Secretary, he prevented the

²²³ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 173.

²²⁴ Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*, 183.

²²⁵ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 173.

²²⁶ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 293.

²²⁷ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 160.

²²⁸ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 228.

FPC granting licences for private utility development of the Colorado River.²²⁹ Instead, Hoover persisted with his federal scheme, in the form of the Hoover Dam. In that role, Hoover used western progressive rhetoric to describe the ideological purpose of the dam: ‘All this power will belong to the people, developed by them, owned by them and for their benefit’.²³⁰

However, despite his rhetoric, Hoover’s progressive individualism did not allow him to go as far in utility reform as many western progressives wished. In monopoly reform, during the Progressive era, western progressivism had been most preoccupied with the issue of railroad companies which, across the states of the West, created captive markets for passengers and farm goods. Arguably, in the 1920s and 1930s western progressives were equally exercised by the ‘captive consumers’ that the large utilities could exploit. Understandably, these issues radicalized western progressive politicians, and, responsive to their electorate, many believed in a ‘statist’ solution to utilities. In 1912, La Follette Sr.’s Progressive League had committed Progressives to public control of railroads, before his more radical progressivism was largely subsumed by TR’s Progressive Party. In 1924, La Follette Sr. ran as an unsuccessful presidential candidate for a briefly reborn Progressive Party. A key feature of La Follette’s Progressive Party platform was public control of railroads and HEP generation.²³¹ As early as the presidential election of 1912 Wilson’s New Freedom anti-trust policy, stood in opposition to TR’s New Nationalist regulation of corporations and divided progressives. However, in 1912, another bifurcation occurred, between those progressives who favoured public ownership of vital economic activities, in which the public had been deprived of choice, and progressives who wanted to retain private enterprise wherever possible.

Hoover considered La Follette Sr.’s agenda on public ownership ‘pure socialism’, and his antagonism towards the concept is palpable in Hoover’s *Memoirs*.²³² He writes: ‘La Follette...raised the issue of government operation of utilities in the Presidential election of 1924. I, therefore, took a crack at the whole theory in a public address at the time’.²³³ Hoover’s words are indicative of his different vision of progressivism, but Hoover’s reaction also underscores

²²⁹ Ibid., 180.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 103.

²³² Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, 174.

²³³ Ibid.

how much progressivism had become a contested term, which it remains to the present day. As pointed out earlier, the absence of an enduring Progressive Party helped fragment progressivism. However, even within governments consisting of a single party during the Progressive age great ideological flexibility in monopoly reform was noteworthy, with fluctuations between trust-busting and business-government co-operation. Therefore, the disparity of policy between La Follette and Hoover is not unexpected, with one representing a ‘statist’, the other a ‘non-statist’ solution; of greater moment was whether these very different progressive visions could be reconciled.

Hoover’s antipathy to La Follette Sr.’s standpoint on utilities should be understood in the context of Hoover, a fellow westerner, being a long-time opponent of La Follette Sr., the leading western progressive. Moreover, public ownership, whether by state or federal authorities, ran counter to Hoover’s own fully evolved progressivism, his progressive individualism and associationalist views. Hoover wanted ‘a middle way between individualism and collectivism, between monopoly capitalism and socialism’. Quite clearly, Hoover stood in opposition to La Follette’s ‘socialist’ and ‘collectivist’ views on utilities. Could he, though, find a way of preventing monopoly capitalism in utilities triumphing over the interests of the American people?

Granted that Hoover’s dissemination of benign government propaganda about progressive individualism failed to supplant aggressive individualism among utility owners, he had other schemes for impressing on utilities their ‘mutuality’ with the rest of American society. Hoover proposed a ‘superpower project’, where the nation’s power systems would be joined together into a national grid.²³⁴ In order to make this a functioning entity, state regulations would become more uniform, giving the public greater electricity access, choice, and lower prices. Hoover believed such advancing technology ‘dissolves monopolies’.²³⁵ However, the expense of the superpower project federal government ruled prohibitive.

Nonetheless, discounting Hoover’s more tentative schemes, in the multi-issue Hoover Dam he achieved both tangible success curbing private utilities, and reached a compromise with La Follette Snr.’s progressivism. Hoover passed legislation for the Hoover Dam, whereby federal

²³⁴ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 141-142.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

government was committed to build the powerhouse at the dam site, but California municipalities would ‘install the necessary machinery and buy most of the power’.²³⁶ A prime beneficiary of this law was the Los Angeles Bureau of Power and Light, headed by Ezra Scattergood, which the House appropriating subcommittee approved of because its efficiency record compared favourably with any private sector concern. Therefore, as a pragmatic solution, Hoover’s proposal made political sense, against the backdrop of a strongly pro-business Republican Congress. In the end, 91% of the water power from the Hoover Dam was allocated to publicly owned corporations, demonstrating that this project was an outstanding example of countervailing powers.

Hoover’s attitude to public power has caused disagreement among historians. Burner considered Hoover was sympathetic to municipal public power. The most recent biography of Hoover by Kendrick Clements, however, judges that although he supported at the Hoover Dam a ‘limited application ... of public power’ involving municipalities, he ‘had little enthusiasm’ for it.²³⁷ Significantly, Clements decides Hoover had allowed public power, to win over Johnson. Another construction can be put on Hoover’s behaviour; that he wanted an agreement which permitted future flexibility, without being bound by Johnson’s public power solution. Johnson saw it as essential to create greater competition against private utilities which opposed the new dam with lobbying and political corruption. In the 1920s, he stated ‘We’re up against the most powerful ... and influential trust in the world, the electric power trust’.²³⁸

Over the Hoover Dam, Hoover both attempted a consensus solution in monopoly reform, and pointed the way for future federal government HEP schemes. He offered La Follette Sr.’s radical western progressives electricity distribution, which was locally controlled and publicly accountable, a compromise between his ‘statist’ plans and private utility domination. At the same time, federal and state government was excluded from the electricity market, enabling

²³⁶ Ibid., 229-230.

²³⁷ Kendrick A Clements, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Imperfect Visionary, 1918-1928* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 349.

²³⁸ Lower, *A Bloc of One*, 234-235.

Hoover to promote the progressive individualism of ‘community participation’, where, at a local level, individuals would co-operate to achieve prosperity.²³⁹

Thus, Hoover merited condemnation by New Dealers, and later commentators, for grossly over-estimating the willingness of business to reform itself in the ‘get-rich-quick’ climate of the 1920s. In other respects, though, he was a true and far-sighted inheritor of progressivism, as Turner realized. Regarding the practicalities of HEP distribution from West Coast dams – central to the monopoly question on the West Coast during the late New Deal – Hoover represented continuity between the Progressive and New Deal eras, by encouraging utility ‘countervailing powers,’ in the manner of Wilson. From a wider perspective, his associational beliefs have affinities with the Progressive era New Nationalism and even the First New Deal. However, despite the government-business co-operation of associationalism, Hoover was not prepared to suspend anti-trust laws, as FDR did in the NRA. Looking further into the future, Hoover’s innovative establishment of channels of communication involving government and business entailed a long-term contribution to progressivism that matured after World War II, and possibly mitigated some aspects of aggressive capitalism. In this respect, the New Era was forward-looking, indicating that the later New Deal, despite the characterization of Brinkley *et al*, was not exceptional in setting post-World War II trends. Lastly, it might be added that Hoover exhibited the same mixture of ideology and pragmatism over monopoly reform, in his case with utilities, which was strongly evident during the Progressive era – contradicting Hofstadter’s strictures about progressivism’s supposed inflexibility. Even so, that is not to say Hoover was invariably flexible in responding to policy choices and crises, as the Great Depression was to show with devastating consequences.

Social Justice

Hoover’s inability to respond adequately to the formidable challenge of the Great Depression eclipsed Hoover’s many positive, and progressive, achievements. Indeed, it rendered well-nigh impossible a dispassionate judgement of his record in office. In no area is this consideration more apparent than in social justice. After all, the Great Depression was the dominant social justice (and economic) issue in the inter-war years across the Western World. Hoover’s failure

²³⁹ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 281.

to supply the necessary leadership and massive aid for millions of Americans afflicted by debilitating unemployment and grinding poverty remains a major indictment of his presidency. It is the more ironic because, up to 1929, Hoover had excelled when confronted by major crises. In relation to the Depression, unlike previous crises, though, Hoover was trapped in the logic of his homespun progressivism, and he largely ignored wider progressivism's essential pragmatism and flexibility. For Hoover, massive federal government intervention to recover the economy would undermine progressive individualism among the populace, and inaugurate a tyrannical leviathan state. It mattered little to Hoover's permanently damaged reputation that, throughout the whole 1930s, 1931, during his presidency, was the year the US economy received the biggest injection of spending.²⁴⁰ Consistent with Hoover's policies, state, local, and federal expenditure shared the spending load.²⁴¹ Instead, to most Americans Hoover remained the man who had gratingly re-iterated that finding the path to economic recovery was their responsibility, while they looked in desperation to Washington for solutions. That view of Hoover had become prevalent in West Coast states too by 1933. It contrasted with Hoover's earlier positive image there, as a Californian leader, and, to the inhabitants of Washington State and Oregon, a sympathetic western president.²⁴²

In fact, during most of the 1920s Hoover was a true disciple of the Progressive era over social justice. He supported labour unions, and peaceful picketing.²⁴³ Throughout the Prosperity Decade he had opposed the use of injunctions to prevent strikes, and, as president, signed the Norris-La Guardia Anti-Injunction Act.²⁴⁴ When president he also reformed income tax, along progressive lines, whereby, over the head of Andrew Mellon, the reactionary Treasury Secretary, Hoover reduced income tax proportionately more for low earners than the wealthy.²⁴⁵ As Hoover's dam projects in the Far West looked forward to the New Deal, so his report on Recent

²⁴⁰Ibid., 146.

²⁴¹Ibid.

²⁴² Edgar Eugene Robinson and Vaughn Davis Barnet, *Herbert Hoover: President of the United States* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1975), 48.

²⁴³ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 42.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 131, 136.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 135.

Social Trends, according to Richard Norton Smith, ‘laid the groundwork for unemployment insurance, Social Security, and other reforms credited to the New Deal’.²⁴⁶

If Hoover was a progressive, and provided continuity, between the 1900s and 1930s in social justice generally, up to 1929, what of his record over specifics that we are focusing on for the Progressive and New Deal eras? Regarding anti-communism, Hoover learned by the mistakes of the Wilson government in 1919-20, as did the New Dealers after him. The wave of strikes which gripped America during 1919 was widely attributed to communists. As a result, Wilson’s government halted its progressive policies in social justice, and imposed oppressive measures over the allied area of civil liberties. Unequivocally, Hoover condemned the government reaction, and stated: ‘Bolshevism is not to blame for American unrest...We shall never remedy justifiable discontent until we eradicate the misery which ruthless individualism has imposed on a minority’.²⁴⁷ True to his words, Hoover subsequently took action for steelworkers, who had been in the vanguard of the 1919 strikes. As Commerce Secretary, Hoover used his information dissemination methods to expose the iniquities of the 12-hour day in the steel industry. The steel owners finally conceded an 8-hour day in 1923, after Hoover had kept the issue ‘boiling in the press’ for two years.²⁴⁸

Moreover, Hoover resisted the siren voices of far right wing commentators to re-launch Red Scares, so useful to American politicians in difficulties, who could divert public discontent onto left wing scapegoats. Hoover appreciated that America’s periodic spasms of anti-communism also posed a threat to progressive democratic values. Throughout 1929, during his presidency, Hoover refused to sanction federal government backing of planned ‘red hunts’ put forward by the right wing periodical *National Republic*, and, much later, in the 1950s, as a private citizen, he spoke out against McCarthyism.²⁴⁹

Nonetheless, like Wilson before him, Hoover was probably forced into Janus-faced politics, post-1929, because of progressivism’s desire to maintain electoral support from both the Left and Right. Official government policy under Hoover’s Secretary of Labor, William Doak, had been

²⁴⁶ Norton Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*, 181.

²⁴⁷ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 42.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁴⁹ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 213; Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 274.

to deport known Communist aliens, and such a policy headed off right wing accusations that the government was tolerating foreign undemocratic elements. As a result, in violation of their civil liberties, some communist aliens were held in Buffalo and Cleveland for as long as eighteen months *incommunicado*, while negotiations were pursued with their reluctant countries of origin to accept them back. When the story leaked out, Hoover expressed outrage about this illegal behaviour by the federal government. Just as there are strong doubts that Wilson, on account of illness, was unaware of the Palmer Raid's excesses in 1919, so Hoover's heavy work-load during the Depression probably does not sufficiently excuse his lack of knowledge about the incarcerated communists. David Burner, a pro-Hoover historian, writes nevertheless with scepticism: 'It is puzzling that Hoover did not receive information about the aliens in Cleveland and Buffalo – or, if he did receive it, it is disturbing that he failed to institute some kind of inquiry'.²⁵⁰

Over the position of small farmers – a crucial group in West Coast states – Hoover acknowledged that they had struggled economically since at least 1921. Significantly, many leading western progressive senators, veterans of the Progressive era, like Borah, Johnson and Nye, gave their support to Hoover in the 1928 presidential election. They did so even though they harboured reservations about Hoover who had struck hard bargains with farmers as Food Administrator during World War I. In return for farming support, Hoover, after his election, called a special session of Congress to discuss the agricultural problem, and social justice for farmers.²⁵¹ As a consequence, Hoover's government generously funded, to the tune of \$345 million, farm price supports between 1929 and 1931, and loaned farm co-operatives money to purchase basic crops.²⁵² However, like his progressive predecessors and successors, he did no more than alleviate conditions, especially among poorer farmers. He was working within the tradition of federal government furnishing farm credits, begun by Progressive era President Wilson, and later continued by FDR. Hoover's encouragement to farm co-operatives can be situated within western progressivism, which persisted into the New Deal. As Hoover put it himself, mindful of how the policy combined his beliefs in localism and countervailing powers: 'We supported the co-operative movement by farmers...I believed it to be one of the most

²⁵⁰ Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life*, 214.

²⁵¹ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 134.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

hopeful undertakings, for according to my social theories any organization of citizens for their own welfare is preferable to the same action by the government'.²⁵³

Nonetheless, despite Hoover's undoubtedly progressive attempts to help farmers in America, he was never as committed to the causes of western progressivism as the group of western progressive senators including La Follette Jr., who unequivocally supported the small farmer. In many respects, Hoover stood in the tradition of federal government leaders from the Progressive age and New Deal, whose support for small farmers was more qualified than western progressive politicians rooted in farming communities. Hoover's attitude, to some degree, was praiseworthy. He detected that the clamorous demand for increasing agricultural relief could be attributed to 'a radical fringe seeking special interest legislation'.²⁵⁴ The fragmenting of American society into jostling groups competing for preferential treatment ran counter to progressivism's philosophy of fairness and consensus. On the eve of the New Deal, Walter Lippmann, a political thinker much concerned with the future of democracy, had articulated similar sentiments to New Dealer Felix Frankfurter, saying that groups like farmers acted as a 'distorting influence' on government and were 'selfish and dangerous'.²⁵⁵

Yet, Hoover also served in Republican administrations that oversaw, *before* the catastrophe of the Great Depression, a severe decline in prospects for the farmer-labour alliance, and consequently the small farmer. Certainly, farm or union representatives were not indulging in spurious calls for federal government help. Although Hoover's support for labour unions is not at issue, between 1921 and 1929 union membership dropped from 5 to 3.44 million. So great was the fall in trade unionism that the growth of a farmer-labour movement was blighted, while 'union membership dropped to the point where organized labour could not function as a countervailing force in the economy'.²⁵⁶ At the same time, from 1921 up to, and beyond, the Wall Street Crash, agricultural income continued to fall. Hoover was certainly not responsible for these developments, and indeed opposed them, but with their intensification, post-1929, the New Deal was emboldened to renounce decisively this aspect of Hoover's progressivism.

²⁵³ Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, 110.

²⁵⁴ Weed, *Nemesis of Reform*, 22.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁵⁶ Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*, 97.

Accordingly, FDR's government embarked on radical intervention for struggling farmers, and eventually implemented major legislation to aid labour unions.

Although it would be unjust to question Hoover's integrity about desiring progressive fairness for American society - involving a balanced rural-urban population of small and large operators - on two counts he was subject to influences which were antagonistic to that aim. The reactionary Republican elements that held such a sway in federal government and Congress often sided openly with the large business interest over other competing groups. Additionally, as a Californian politician, he was drawn into the complicated politics of his home state. He received robust support from Harry Chandler, the union-hating publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*.²⁵⁷ Not only did Chandler vigorously champion Los Angeles' position as a non-union city where the 'open shop' operated, but as a Southern Californian Chandler defended the large farmer interest against the farmer-labour alliance. In these contexts, both Chandler and Hoover's close friend Chester Rowell, an old Progressive, opposed Hiram Johnson's progressivism – pledged to the small farmer, the farm-labour alliance, and the unionized city of San Francisco.²⁵⁸

Whereas Hoover did not subscribe to the anti-social justice beliefs of reactionary Republicans in Washington DC and Southern California, nonetheless, by proximity, he became identified with them. Furthermore, the business-oriented Republicanism of the 1920s must have exerted some effect on Hoover, for instance, in his attitude to small farmers. In summary, Hoover took a progressive approach in social justice over anti-communism, small farmers, and labour unions. However, he was not willing to use far-reaching enough interventionism to stop the decline of small farmers and labour unions, an attitude which proved his undoing during the Depression.

There were distinct continuities between the Progressive era, the Hoover decade, and the New Deal. In conservation, Hoover continued TR's policies over forestry, national parks, and reclamation, thus representing a 'bridge' between the Progressive era and the later New Deal.

²⁵⁷ Robinson and Barnet, *Herbert Hoover: President of the United States*, 47.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Regarding monopoly reform, Hoover followed Progressive era orthodoxy in anti-trust action, and, indeed, was more ideologically committed to litigation against monopolies than Wilson during World War I, or FDR over the 1930s NRA. At the same time, Hoover was wary of an intrusive leviathan state, but his associationalist ideas show he anticipated post-World War II developments. With countervailing powers, his support of municipal public power at Hoover Dam, which was re-named Boulder Dam in the 1930s, represented a bridge between the Progressive and New Deal eras, even if, unlike Johnson, he underestimated political and economic corruption among private utilities. Superficially, Hoover's social justice policy was also a bridge between the Progressive era and New Deal. He demonstrated Wilson-like behaviour over the Buffalo and Cleveland incidents, but eschewed Red Scares. He continued Progressive era support for labour unions, which fed into New Deal unionization policy, and improved on Wilson's credit facilities to small farmers. However, when the Depression hit America, the downside of Hoover's social justice views was exposed. Hoover's reluctance to use large-scale federal government intervention in the Great Depression was based on his fear it would deprive Americans of their progressive individualism, and to New Dealers formed a pattern of behaviour. They alleged that, in a similar manner, he failed during the New Era to reverse declining union membership, and the prolonged agricultural recession. Consequently, Hoover's decade ultimately radicalized the New Deal in social justice policy.

Chapter Three: Progressive Era Influence in the New Deal, 1933-1937

The magnitude of the financial and economic disaster that gripped America from 1929 onwards obscured Hoover's progressivism, and found wanting all those who attempted to overcome the crisis with conventional methods. Unlike the Panic of 1907, the house of Morgan was unable to reverse the Wall Street Crash of October, 1929, which occurred when a collapse in company profits led to a loss of market confidence. The intervention of Richard Whitney, Morgan's broker, on the New York stock exchange, bidding high for US Steel stocks in bulk, delivered only a temporary respite, and did not produce the hoped-for decisive halt to the downward spiral in shares.¹ Instead, without the lubricant of investor capital the US economy seized up, and unemployment soared. Two years later, with despair stalking the land, JP Morgan Jr. perceived the enormity of the Great Depression. In Progressive times, his father had seen no apparent contradiction in helping to end a prolonged and bitter coal strike while taking a cruise on his palatial yacht, *The Corsair*. However, in October, 1931, shaken by events, his son wrote to a friend with new-found humility, that he would not be sailing *The Corsair* in the immediate future, because 'it is wiser...not to flaunt such luxuriant amusement in the face of the public'.²

When the American people decisively rejected Hoover in the presidential election of November, 1932, Franklin Roosevelt was faced with the herculean task of restoring America to prosperity. The sheer scale of the socio-economic disaster that Roosevelt's incoming administration inherited – over a quarter of the workforce unemployed; national income in 1929 halved by 1933– and his response, involving federal government intervention on an unprecedented scale, conveys the exceptional nature of the New Deal era, at least superficially.³ Moreover, in the short-term, Hofstadter's argument, emphasizing discontinuity, has a surface validity. Roosevelt confronted in the Great Depression a supreme crisis that demanded immediate, practical responses. The New Dealers in 1933 did not have the advantage of being able to formulate policy unpressured by momentous events. At the same time, America's

¹ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933*, (London: Heinemann, 1957), 162-163.

² Tom H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 13.

³ Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 44.

political culture did not supply to government a ready-made remedy capable of curing the unparalleled economic malady afflicting the economy. In this charged atmosphere, of necessity, FDR's solutions were borrowed, improvised, and forged from expedient compromises. As a consequence, Hofstadter's observation that the New Deal was 'a chaos of experimentation' contains some truth, but also ignores a crucial determinant of FDR's behaviour.⁴ Roosevelt was not prepared to gamble with America's political and economic future by employing wild policy experiments. Rather, he stayed within the parameters of Progressive era interventionism, insofar as he emphatically upheld capitalism, and strove for a democratic consensus. New Deal political thought, although at times veering towards statism, was never socialist, let alone communist. Furthermore, the New Deal lasted seven years, and therefore an ever-clearer ideology had sufficient time to take shape. That ideological direction was naturally born of the New Deal finding methods of survival when confronted by economic, constitutional, legislative, sectional, and electoral difficulties. Arguably, New Dealers concerned with the three policy areas found Progressive era ideology most effective in meeting these challenges and, as significantly, that ideology dovetailed with their own political preferences.

This chapter sets out to 'unpack' the concept of an ideological New Deal. Firstly, Franklin Roosevelt is often portrayed as a prime example of a pragmatic politician, with little interest in ideology, especially one based on moral principles. It will be contended here that that viewpoint represents a misconception, and FDR's progressive ideology is explained and instances of it enumerated. Secondly, the chapter considers each of the tenets of progressivism being focused on: conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice. Connections with the Progressive era are discussed, with an eye to showing West Coast dimensions. Key progressives, who will be considered at greater length in subsequent chapters, are brought into the analysis: Bob Marshall in conservation, JD Ross over monopoly reform, Robert La Follette Jr. concerning social justice. Accordingly, the following chapter seeks to prove convincingly an ideological continuity between the Progressive era and the New Deal (1933-c1937).

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 305.

The Ideological Franklin Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt was born into a famous, old stock East Coast family – a branch of which also produced Theodore Roosevelt. He had a privileged upbringing at the family home in Hyde Park, above the forested Hudson Valley north of New York City. Two factors have doubtlessly predisposed opinion about the political beliefs of FDR, leading to the conclusion that he lacked intellectual and ideological depth, even though few historians doubt his talents as a prodigiously effective practical politician. Firstly, despite being a state senator at Albany, New York (1910-1913), during the Progressive era, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Washington DC (1913-1921), the young Roosevelt was as much playboy as politician.⁵ Secondly, raising even more serious questions about his ideological gravitas, the much-changed, mature Roosevelt who became president in 1933 presented an image of affable charm, but, it seemed to many people, manifested little constancy of belief or depth of knowledge. Keynes visited the White House in 1934 and witheringly remarked, ‘I don’t think your President Roosevelt knows anything about economics’.⁶ Indeed, along with Hofstadter, other historians frequently associate FDR with pragmatism rather than ideological resolve, and, moreover, judge him uninterested in theoretical matters. Therefore, quite clearly, in the interests of establishing him as a politician significantly shaped by progressive ideology, FDR’s presidential image needs to be further explored, because perhaps it masked unexpected profundities. Moreover, for his progressivism to become apparent, FDR’s beliefs must be pinned down, and distinguished from the New Deal ideas that were provided to him by his coterie of intellectuals, advisers, and speech-writers.

The impression widely held by historians and his contemporaries, that FDR lacked a clear moral and ideological purpose has misdirected thinking on the political complexion of the New Deal, especially Roosevelt’s contribution to it. It arose, in large measure, because those observing and studying Roosevelt have often mistaken image for reality in his character. FDR faced an uphill struggle if he were to lead the United States through the Great Depression. Another Western leader, Ramsay Macdonald, the British Prime Minister, facing the same

⁵ Patrick Renshaw, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), 15-17.

⁶ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 406.

economic catastrophe, described ‘the dread realities’ of the situation.⁷ Unlike Macdonald, though, Roosevelt was not overawed by these dire circumstances, so that he severely compromised his beliefs. Actually, the American president’s personal story had cruelly equipped him to cope with great crises. In 1921 Roosevelt was struck down by the grievous effects of polio, and lost the use of his legs. When president, leading New Dealers never ceased to be amazed at the extent of Roosevelt’s incapacity; that sometimes he required two burly men from ‘the Secret Service detail’ to carry him as they would an ailing infant.⁸ Roosevelt was able to withstand the Great Depression with a personal style which had served him well against the other daunting battle he endured – his crippling physical disability. Partly on account of that earlier battle, he had acquired an invincible *bonhomie*, to conceal the helpless vulnerability he must have been always in danger of conveying. The image FDR projected, honed by his earlier personal crisis, proved invaluable against the towering problems of 1930s America. It also meant that as a politician, FDR was difficult to take the measure of.

Even his wife, Eleanor, described FDR’s tendency to conceal his feelings. Roosevelt’s speechwriter, Robert Sherwood, found him impenetrable, and talked about his ‘heavily forested interior’.⁹ However, on rare occasions we see beneath FDR’s mask. For example, one misty day at Campobello,* a few months after Roosevelt had become president, a young reporter and his girlfriend came upon Roosevelt, by himself, hands held to his face, sitting on a tree trunk. FDR’s hands fell, and he is described as staring into space with a ‘kind of...grimace...like a man trying to see something in his mind and suffering’.¹⁰ FDR, in a later article written by the reporter, is called ‘The Enigma,’ a designation which contributed to the myth that Roosevelt was ultimately an unknowable political titan. More mundanely, perhaps FDR sometimes gave vent to feelings in private – about his disability and the almost insuperable problems of the Depression – which otherwise he kept hidden. Significantly, the moment FDR recognized the reporter his face reverted to its quotidian geniality. Consequently, with FDR more than most

⁷ Letter from Ramsay Macdonald to Walter Citrine, August 21, 1931, The Records of the Trade Union Congress, file on the ‘Financial Crisis of 1931’, National Expenditure Series, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

⁸ Kenneth S Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937* (New York: Random House, 1979), 204-205.

⁹ Renshaw, *Roosevelt*, 2-3.

*The Roosevelt’s owned a summer home on Campobello Island, off the coast of Maine.

¹⁰ Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 283-284.

people, we should not be misled by the image he presented to the world, in contrast to his authentic character.

Judging from FDR's genial image, he seemed extraordinarily amenable to different political ideas. Freidel describes Roosevelt's 'limitless receptivity', because he cheerfully listened to, and entertained, a wide range of opinions.¹¹ In this context, Freidel refers to the New Deal as a 'laboratory' of jostling political ideas.¹² Therefore, most of the principal historians of the New Deal era, even where they allow for definite Progressive era influence in policy, as for example with Freidel or Davis, view Roosevelt as fundamentally different from the conviction-driven politicians of that period, insofar as FDR was experimental, opportunistic, and pragmatic. Davis writes: 'Roosevelt's legislative operations were for the most part opportunistic responses to unforeseen challenges, very seldom were they expressions of his own deep-laid plans'.¹³ Of course, such views agree with Hofstadter's contention that the New Deal, personified by its architect – Roosevelt – was at root pragmatic and inimical to a moral ideology derived from the Progressive era. Therefore, according to this hypothesis, FDR's prevailing outward personality trait of cheerful, open-minded flexibility was carried over into the New Deal's policy-making. Yet the achievements of the New Deal in the three key policy areas belie an image of FDR largely characterized by an ideological void. Only a president with very decided objectives, a clear ideological pathway, and much strength of will, could have changed America so considerably, and in ways congenial to Progressive era principles.

Indeed, Roosevelt himself was quick to claim Progressive era antecedents for the New Deal. His Commonwealth Club address in San Francisco during the presidential election of 1932 showed that the New Deal would be strongly informed by the progressive historian Turner's closed frontier theory. FDR stated: 'With the turn of the century...we were reaching our last frontier; there was no more free land...Our task now is the soberer less dramatic business of administering resources...of distributing wealth and products more equitably. The day of enlightened administration has come'.¹⁴ If his words are broken down, to show the policy areas

¹¹Ibid., 75.

¹²Ibid., 435.

¹³ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937*, 211.

¹⁴ Gerald D Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 41-42.

they cover, Roosevelt envisaged government intervention over ‘resources’ (conservation), ‘wealth’ (social justice), and in distributing ‘products’ i.e. getting fairness for consumers from monopolies. These views are in line with the continuity argument - on the direct applicability of the three Progressive era policy areas to the New Deal, and their connections with the frontier thesis. Of course, they might have come from a Roosevelt speechwriter, rather than his own mind. However, there is good reason to believe that Roosevelt had more than passing familiarity with Turner’s ideas. When he was at Harvard University, FDR attended lectures on the ‘Development of the American West’ by Turner, who had come to Harvard for a year from the University of Wisconsin on a visiting professorship. One New Deal historian notes that Roosevelt missed the first six weeks of the half year course, and therefore is ‘dubious’ that the lectures could have had a lasting impact on FDR, and the New Deal.¹⁵ A case can also be made for the opposite conclusion. Furthermore, the frontier thesis formed part of an ‘educated’ Americans intellectual consciousness. Knowledge of Turner gave Roosevelt reason to reference his frontier thesis during a major West Coast speech on the eve of the New Deal.

Of course, to some extent, FDR may have been using the frontier thesis to provide ‘intellectual cover’ for his planned New Deal. If so, he conformed to Progressive era behaviour. Gerald Nash, the most prominent Turnerian of today, writes: ‘In a manner reminiscent of the Progressive era, politicians (of the 1930s)...now utilized the frontier thesis to justify increased government intervention’.¹⁶ Equally, FDR might have been absolutely sincere in seeing the applicability of the closed frontier theory to the 1930s. In which case, while he, like his progressive predecessors, was employing a theory which tended to overstate American reality, that point does not disqualify its relevance as a major influence in both the Progressive and New Deal eras. Moreover, Turner himself considered Hoover’s political testament *American Individualism* an expression of his ideas. Consequently, there is evidence for saying that behind the Progressive age, Hoover era, and New Deal lay a common philosophical source. It indicated above all else that the status quo was inadequate for America’s needs, although how far federal government should intervene to revitalize America caused incessant debate across these periods.

¹⁵ Kenneth S Davis, *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928* (New York: Random House, 1979), 139.

¹⁶ Nash, *Creating the West*, 29.

If Roosevelt considered his New Deal would involve government intervention to further conservation, monopoly reform and social justice aims, where, apart from Turner, had FDR derived his ideas? It is known that the young FDR visited TR several times in the White House, and he was suitably impressed by the dynamic personality of his older cousin, and almost certainly TR influenced FDR's politics. However, Schlesinger Jr., at his most perceptive about Roosevelt, offers an intriguing speculation on the burgeoning ideology FDR acquired during the Progressive era, which relates also to western progressive preoccupations, and this thesis' central argument.

Schlesinger points out that FDR was acutely conscious that 19th Century deforestation at the Roosevelt estate in Hyde Park, followed by over-cultivation of corn, had led to disastrous soil exhaustion and erosion on the property. He speculates that FDR's abiding interest in conserving America's natural resources, above all else its soil, stemmed from his Hyde Park experiences. According to Schlesinger, this interest, in turn, probably led to an evolving concern for other resources e.g. human resources, and the resource of water generating hydro-electric power. Yet again, pushed to the fore, in a discussion of the years 1900-1940 are the policy areas of: conservation (soil resources), monopoly reform (water-power companies), and social justice (human resources).¹⁷ Furthermore, Schlesinger goes on to enumerate examples of Roosevelt's beliefs in practice during 1912, the pivotal year for old Progressivism. For instance, State Senator Roosevelt showed early political radicalism by asserting in a speech at Troy (New York State) that farmers who failed to implement soil conservation should ultimately be forced to do so by government. He maintained 'community liberty' must take precedence over 'individual liberty', if individual recklessness endangered the common good. As radically, yet again in 1912, FDR argued, without success, for a power bill in the New York state legislature whereby the state would build power stations, to produce and distribute hydro-electricity. Furthermore, in the radical tradition of western progressivism's farmer-labour alliance, Roosevelt, who sat for an upstate farming constituency, supported industrial labour legislation, though such a stance was unnecessary for his electoral purposes.¹⁸ In effect, FDR unified Progressive era policy areas under the heading 'resources,' a claim substantiated by specific examples from 1912.

¹⁷ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order*, 345-349.

¹⁸ Ibid; Thomas D Fitzgerald, Chairman of New York State Federation of Labor to Roosevelt, November 1, 1912, File 137, box 12, Roosevelt Papers

Schlesinger, though, stresses Roosevelt's Progressive era ideas as essentially a personal philosophy, rather than part of a wider ideology.

Yet, there is another way of looking at FDR's progressivism. Perhaps his ideology was based more fully on an awareness of 'community liberty' than Schlesinger asserts. That belief shaped his views on social justice, monopoly reform, and conservation, even if his greatest affinity was with the latter. Significantly, Roosevelt's Troy speech takes as its starting-point working class discontent, not conservation.¹⁹ He mentions that 'liberty of the community' will provide the way out of working class difficulties. Liberty of the community should be understood as a state where the majority are not dangerously confined in their liberty by individual action. Roosevelt contends that in modern America individual liberty (Turner's rugged individualism) is inadequate to society's needs. He implies that industrialization, urbanization, and the settlement of America have necessitated a negotiation between individual and community liberty. American democracy will only succeed, and indeed survive, with an accommodation between these notions. Otherwise, individual liberty will finally destroy community liberty, or alternatively, a revolutionary seizure of power by the community will result in dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the Troy speech Roosevelt ranges over the three tenets. Over conservation, when individual farmers ruin the soil, that impacts on the community at large, and the government should 'compel every cultivator to pay something back' to the land.²⁰ In monopoly reform, a trust, in Roosevelt's view, is not evil on account of its size, but because it constrains the 'liberty of the community.' For this reason, 'it will be necessary for ... (the) community to change its features.'²¹ Regarding social justice, an employer must not trample on the liberty of the community by denying his workers any power. The employer and employees should co-operate to ensure mutual success.²² Therefore, a good case can be made for an 'ideological Roosevelt' in the Progressive era related to the three tenets. However examples of Roosevelt's interest in the three tenets must be detectable later in his political career, if they represent a set of genuine

¹⁹ Roosevelt Address before the Peoples' Forum, Troy, New York, March 3, 1912, reported in *Poughkeepsie News Press*, p3, March 5, 1912, New York State Senator Speeches, box 1, Roosevelt Papers

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

political convictions, and were not merely the outpourings of someone caught up in the general ideological euphoria of 1912 – that seminal Progressive era year.

To be sure, Roosevelt's actions after 1912, as a state senator during the 1910s and governor of New York State (1928-1933), remained 'freighted' with Progressive era values. In 1913, over conservation, State Senator Roosevelt introduced an unsuccessful bill for the 'Protection of Lands, Forest and Public Parks'.²³ When governor of New York State, FDR still championed in monopoly reform public production of hydro-electric power, 'if need be'.²⁴ During his governorship, where urban, rather than rural, support was more critical, he was known nationally regarding social justice as a 'friend of the (small) farmers, suffering from low prices for their produce'.²⁵ It seems FDR's radical Progressive era beliefs were sustained up to his presidency in the 1930s.

Nonetheless, the contention that FDR held longstanding Progressive era beliefs requires further development. In particular, why were the radical ideas that FDR held in the 1910s and 1920s not translated unexpurgated into New Deal policies? The part played by Progressive era consensus in FDR's thinking is perhaps crucial here, as in both the Progressive and New Deal eras the need for democratic consensus, at a presidential level, acted like a filter on radical ideas. For FDR consensus was not only important to unite Americans, but also, by winning elections, in the creation of an effective reformist political party. What is more, democratic consensus was always an objective of FDR's politics, at whatever level. As a New York State Senator, he repeatedly stated that 'your Senator should represent the whole people'.²⁶ Of course, a consensus was much harder to achieve nationally than locally. If Roosevelt's policy ideas from the 1910s and 1920s were further modified during the 1930s, the objective of cultivating a democratic consensus nationally, and avoiding an electoral 'pushback,' helped produce that result.

FDR, as president, expressed a preference for Progressive era consensus, inasmuch as he believed that progress was based on harmonizing the interests of the American people. He said mid-decade: 'The science of politics...may properly said to be...the adjustment of conflicting

²³ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny*, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁶ Roosevelt speech reported in *Hudson Evening Register*, October 28, 1910, New York State Senator Speeches, box 1, Roosevelt Papers

group interests...in the interests of the largest group of all...(the) one hundred and twenty five million people in whom reposes the sovereignty of the United States'.²⁷ This statement of consensus politics was surely more than just rhetoric, even if by 1936 opposition to the New Deal made its sustainability increasingly difficult. Throughout the 1930s, Roosevelt stated repeatedly his intention to be 'President of All the People'.²⁸ In the same manner, his vision of government involved fusing new ideas from the present, with the past. It has already been argued that Progressive era rule combined elements of the past and present. FDR called New Deal government a 'combination of the old and new that marks orderly peaceful progress...Our new structure is a part of and a fulfilment of the old'.²⁹ At times of instability, 1900-1940, Americans wanted the reassurance of tradition, as well as problem-solving innovation. Therefore, the New Deal looked to the past like the Progressive era itself, and Roosevelt recognized he was building on reformist foundations. The moderate tenor of this approach to group conflict in society, and between the old and new, though, should not obscure progressivism's essential dedication to change, rather than instinctual deference to the existing order.

Moreover, there is ample circumstantial evidence that FDR, like many New Dealers, reached into the Progressive era and Entr'acte for lessons about consensus to put into effect during the 1930s. Insofar as he learned salutary lessons from the Progressive era and the 1920s, he was typical of many 1930s progressives. He wished not only to emulate these eras' successes, but also to avoid their mistakes. In so doing, he became the progressive leader *par excellence*. As a New York state senator during the 1910s, and later as governor of New York State, in the late 1920s, FDR had seen how vital consensus was, especially in the second case while negotiating the volatile ethnic politics of New York City, and Tammany Hall's entrenched corruption. Conversely, he had witnessed two occasions in his life when the Democrat party had become polarized factions, during 1904, between the conservatives and the Bryanites, and 1924, over the McAdoo and Smith groupings.³⁰ Both times internecine warfare had made the party unelectable,

²⁷ Roosevelt's address at Rollins College, Florida, March 23, 1936, quoted in Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Political Philosophy of the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970, originally MA dissertation written in 1940), 56.

²⁸Davis, *FDR*, 435-436.

²⁹Ibid., 373, FDR's fifth 'Fireside Chat', June 28, 1934

³⁰ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933*, 100-103.

and these were object-lessons in the absolute necessity of achieving consensus in his party, and the country.

In a similar vein, during the 1930s FDR's constant awareness of the need to convince Americans of his policies, and carry them with him, was a prevailing characteristic of his age. Before becoming president he stated clearly 'the greatest duty of a statesman is to educate'.³¹ Roosevelt's didactic liberalism indicates a need to persuade voters of his beliefs, rather than simply satisfying populist demands. FDR's regular radio 'fireside chats' encouraged policies that were readily articulated and at one with the needs of the American public. In his press conferences, he disarmed hostile pressmen by dispensing with written questions, permitting him to be interrogated closely by journalists over policy areas. As a result, presidential press conferences 'served...as a classroom to instruct the country in the new economics and the new politics'.³² In part FDR's policy and communications approach was prompted by the mistakes of previous 'progressive' presidents. The maladroit stances of Wilson and Hoover in particular showed FDR the folly of policies which were not, or could not be made, sympathetic to the temper of the American people. Wilson's faltering personal crusade for an interventionist America in world affairs through membership of the League of Nations had been a commitment too far for America after the sacrifices of the Great War. Hoover's mistimed mission to make federal government interventionism a method of last resort domestically, in the name of 'progressive individualism', was out of step with Great Depression America, crying out for government action. Over these areas, the behaviour of Wilson and Hoover had been a subversion of Progressive era consensus politics. In the end, they had tried to lead where the American public was not prepared to follow. At one stage in his presidency, FDR had expressed a wish to be a 'preaching president' like TR.³³ However he was determined to be a preacher who retained his congregation. The electorates' desertion of Wilson in 1920, and Hoover during 1932, highlighted the need in a democracy for progressive policies to be in keeping with the mood of the American people. Yet, where the public remained behind FDR, he showed progressivism should not genuflect to tradition. In 1940 Roosevelt sought re-election as president for a third

³¹Roosevelt's Commonwealth Club Speech, September 23, 1932, quoted in Humphrey, *The Political Philosophy of the New Deal*, 54.

³² William E Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 330.

³³*Ibid.*, 346.

time, rejecting a long-standing political convention against third term presidencies. In large measure, he was rectifying TR's mistake in 1908, when he tamely accepted convention and did not seek a third term, thereby perhaps distorting the whole evolution of American progressivism.

Finally, Roosevelt's reaction to the economic catastrophe of the Great Depression had a moral dimension. There needed to be a reform of American behaviour, as well as a change in the role of government. Freidel remarks on: 'The earnestness of the moral fervour running through ... (FDR's 1933)...inaugural address'.³⁴ In it the new president talked about a need to return to 'the precious moral values' of the past.³⁵ If Roosevelt was indulging in pious rhetoric about the New Deal, then speeches by Progressive era leaders can be likewise termed morally sententious. Perhaps more plausibly, FDR felt his fellow countrymen should change their ways as a result of a man-made economic disaster – the Depression. Of course, that change could entail bringing back old values as well as introducing new ones. In the same manner, after the Panics of 1893 and 1907, progressive politicians considered a change of attitude was required by Americans for their new reality. Consequently, progressivism remained throughout the 1900 to 1940 period an ideology animated by a moral purpose that looked both backwards and forwards.

By this analysis, Hofstadter's pragmatic New Deal needs major amendment. FDR's ideology was motivated by his conceptualization of the three tenets as 'resources,' his awareness of Turner's frontier thesis, and the Troy speech's emphasis on 'liberty of the community.' As president, he retained his strong belief in consensus, and an ideology combining tradition and innovation. He possessed the Progressive era attitude of moral outrage over short-sighted individualistic behaviour leading to economic catastrophe. There is merit in the contention that we should not judge FDR's ideological compass by his non-ideological image. His ideological outlook was qualified by pragmatism, because he had seen that ideological warfare among Democrats made them unelectable in 1904 and 1924. How then did FDR's ideology shape the three tenets of progressivism in the two New Deals?

³⁴ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, 340.

³⁵ Norman A Graebner, Gilbert C Fite and Philip L White, *A History of the American People* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970), 1057.

Conservation

Conservation policy during the New Deal was imbued with Progressive era concerns about Turner's closed society, which conveyed how the frontier's demise might adversely affect Americans. The experience of America in the 1930s confirmed and intensified Turner's warnings, serving to strengthen the progressive case that federal government intervention was essential to avert an unfolding economic and ecological disaster. For example, under two years into FDR's administration the last of the public domain was closed down.³⁶ This development represented the final death knell to 19th Century notions of America as a land of limitless space and opportunity, where recklessness over land usage carried few national economic risks. For a growing number of Americans, the US was a 'closed system', unable to expand geographically and economically, a situation worsened by trade barriers of its own devising, which had resulted in retaliatory responses from former trading partners. In this atmosphere, the Progressive era clarion call about preserving, improving and reclaiming the finite land that Americans had power over assumed a new and irrefutable relevance. TR had signalled the primacy of conservation in his thinking during a 1908 presidential conference on the subject, when he stated: 'The wise use of all our natural resources...is the great material question of today.'³⁷ Conservation was also central to FDR's progressivism. Renshaw writes conservation: 'was the political issue "closest to FDR's heart."³⁸ Yet, although FDR's conservation policies invariably demonstrated a genuine conservationist sensibility, very often they also offered to the electorate tangible economic benefits, the *sine qua non* of all federal government domestic policy during the Depression. In fact, the characteristic *modus operandi* of New Deal conservation policy comprised action against the Depression with action for conservation.

Forestry exemplifies FDR's approach to conservation. *Au fond*, the progressive preoccupation with improving land was involved with the soil, whose health was vital to prevent erosion and ensure fertility. Within three years of coming to power, Roosevelt had increased

³⁶ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 29.

³⁷ (Ed) Roderick Frazier Nash, *American Environmentalism: Readings in Conservation History* (Third Edition) (New York; McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), chapter on Opening Address by the President at Conference of Governors, 86-87.

³⁸ Renshaw, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 62.

federally-owned national forest land by over 100%.³⁹ Much of this land was specifically for re-forestation, as it constituted ‘cut-over’ land which had been recklessly felled, exposing the soil to erosion and ruination.⁴⁰ However, to make forest conservation directly relevant to depression-hit Americans Roosevelt, after consultation with TR’s chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, won congressional approval for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).⁴¹ Between 1933 and 1939 it employed two and a half million young men in forestry, who by 1936, under the aegis of the Forest Service, had planted nearly a billion trees.⁴² Many members of the CCC were unemployed who came from the eastern urban wastelands, and most were employed by the New Deal in western states. In this manner, the CCC satisfied progressive mutuality between the East and West of America. Bearing in mind American localism, though, ‘economic sectionalism’ had to be overcome before federal intervention by the CCC gained widespread acceptance. The CCC needed to offer local economic benefits, or the prospect of them. Therefore, from the outset of the CCC, Roosevelt authorized hiring ‘local experienced men’ to supervise CCC recruits, and this decision resulted rapidly in 24,000 people being employed.⁴³

Many contemporaries recognized Roosevelt’s strong interest in conservation, and comments abound about his lively participation in the CCC. Roosevelt’s personal involvement in the CCC projects is considered to have been ‘decisive in their formulation and implementation’.⁴⁴ FDR was so committed to the CCC that head of the Forest Service Ferdinand Silcox, in 1937, remarked that Roosevelt’s ‘knowledge of its details is almost uncanny’.⁴⁵ Self-evidently, the centrality of conservation in his intellectual landscape makes FDR’s input over forestry on the West Coast in the later New Deal especially significant. Even so, as forward-looking politicians in the Progressive era discovered, FDR had to balance his ‘environmental idealism’ against the pragmatic ‘economic sectionalism’ he encountered in areas like the West Coast. ‘Economic sectionalism’ arose not only over CCC deployments there, but also related to forests in Olympic National Park, because forestry was vital for Washington State’s economy.

³⁹ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 174.

⁴⁰ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, 257.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Nash, *American Environmentalism*, chapter by Robert Fechner, head of the CCC, 1936, 142.

⁴³ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, 265.

⁴⁴ Anthony J Badger, *The New Deal: the Depression Years, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 9.

⁴⁵ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*, 329.

The issue of national parks highlights a Progressive era movement, the preservationists, and how they were able to achieve ascendancy over their progressive rivals, the wise users. As a result, they gained great influence with New Dealers during the 1930s. The Hetch-Hetchy controversy in the Progressive and New eras had created such a legacy of bitterness for preservationists that they were motivated to develop a well-reasoned strategy that gave them decisive intellectual clout in the West Coast in the late New Deal when national park issues arose. Significantly, the two national parks established by the New Deal on the West Coast at the end of the 1930s were intricately connected to forestry, an aspect of conservation which the preservationists focused on particularly, and something we know was of great importance to FDR.

Several factors enabled preservationists to exert considerable influence on New Deal national park policy. Firstly, the New Deal was receptive to the ideas of preservationists, in large measure, because events on the West Coast had vindicated them. In the original Hetch-Hetchy dispute, wise users felt by granting San Franciscans a necessary water reservoir and power dam during 1913 they had achieved ‘the highest use of natural resources.’⁴⁶ It left the rest of the Yosemite National Park untouched, and blocked private utility development there. However, their Progressive era argument was largely invalidated in 1925 when Pacific Gas and Electric, a private utility, gained control of the dam’s electricity. This outcome helped radicalize New Deal thinking over protecting national parks on the West Coast. In effect, a dam development at Hetch-Hetchy, to benefit San Francisco’s population, notwithstanding the area’s status as a national park, had smoothed the path for a utility monopoly. On account of the Hetch-Hetchy saga, wise users themselves were more receptive to the preservationist argument over national parks, as events had proved their position a mistake. By 1933, the leading representatives of these groups, Pinchot and Marshall, were amicably exchanging letters.

Secondly, preservationists organized themselves into an effective pressure group, the Wilderness Society - founded in 1935 - with its power base in Washington DC. Robert (Bob) Marshall, the leading light in the Wilderness Society published *The Living Wilderness*, a magazine that proselytized for the wilderness idea. Marshall’s Wilderness Society stemmed

⁴⁶ (Ed) William Francis Deverell and Tom Sitton, *California Progressivism Re-visited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49.

from the defeat over Hetch-Hetchy, which forced ‘preservationists’ to re-group during the 1920s and evolve a coherent set of beliefs based on the intrinsic worth of the American wilderness.⁴⁷ The New Deal permitted the Wilderness Society pressure group, which had fashioned itself into a countervailing power, to impact on policy decision-making. At the end of the 1930s, preservationists were ready to seize control of the progressive discourse when the New Deal founded the Olympic National Park, Washington State (1938), and Kings Canyon National Park, California (1940). Chapter four considers, at greater length, the Wilderness Society and Marshall’s contribution to late New Deal policy.

Thirdly, among the tactics Marshall deployed, the Wilderness Society harnessed its preservationist message to Turner’s frontier thesis, which was enjoying a renewed interest among New Dealers. Turner had concluded that the closed frontier demanded federal government intervention to carefully husband finite natural resources. Re-interpreting Turner’s ideas, the Wilderness Society argued the wilderness natural resource of national parks deserved maximum federal government protection. They maintained it was irreplaceable because undeveloped land provided Americans with a ‘frontier experience’, *according to Turner*, the main building block of American character. This dimension of the preservationist message, connecting it forcefully to the Progressive era’s moralistic ideology, perhaps merits more emphasis in the literature of the New Deal. Typically, an article in *The Living Wilderness* stated that wilderness was ‘to those in whom the pioneering spirit survives ... a land of exploration (and) ... adventure.’⁴⁸ Americans in the 1930s faced a time of heightened anxiety. In this atmosphere, the New Deal wished to alleviate fears that the frontier’s end signified also the end of America’s pioneering spirit and economic potential - possibilities which the Great Depression had reinforced. Therefore, what could be more reassuring than the prospect that Americans would always be able to rekindle their frontier spirit in the pristine wildernesses of the National Parks?

Accordingly, forestry and national park conservation should be understood as an ongoing discourse which emerged from the Progressive era. The wise user utilitarian approach in forestry

⁴⁷ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Fourth Edition) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 200.

⁴⁸ Editorial, December 1937, *The Living Wilderness*, Vol. III No 3, Marion Koshland Bioscience and Natural Resources Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

remained ascendant at the start of the New Deal. Already, over national parks preservationists were winning the argument against wise users due to developments in the Hetch-Hetchy controversy during 1913 and 1925. However, they needed to wait until the late 1930s on the West Coast to see their ideas implemented. Reclamation was also dependent on a Progressive era foundation and developments during Hoover's decade.

In reclamation, if TR was the originator of federal schemes for 'making the desert bloom,' Herbert Hoover, in the 1920s, possessed the technical and local knowledge of the West Coast to make them a reality. 'The Great Engineer' was a driver of reclamation policy. Hoover's Colorado River Compact (1922) achieved agreement over irrigation among six of its seven 'riparian' states, which led in 1930 to Hoover Dam providing California with water, power, and settlement. In California, Hoover also brought together federal, state, and private funding to forward the Central Valley Project (CVP), which would overcome the flood problems of the Sacramento Valley, and supply water to the parched San Joaquin Valley. The CVP was first proposed during the Progressive era (1919).⁴⁹ California's legislature gave it the force of law in 1933.

Yet, having acknowledged the Progressive and New Era background of 1930s reclamation policy, the New Deal's own contribution was decisive, although it should be seen as a policy continuity, rather than departure. The old Progressive Harold Ickes, FDR's Secretary of the Interior, firmly put his stamp on reclamation policy, and re-invigorated it. He reconstituted the CVP in 1935 which became a large-scale federal scheme, and completed the Hoover Dam the following year. In so doing, he took significant decisions on access to, and use of, water and power for these projects during the late 1930s. Moreover, Roosevelt's government began during 1933 the Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams in Oregon and Washington State respectively – realizing Hoover's objective of a Columbia River scheme. These dams were completed at the end of the New Deal. The extent Ickes attained progressive aims in these ambitious projects deserves examination, as the New Deal came under pressure from different groups to favour their particular interest.

⁴⁹ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: WW Norton, 1985), 236.

Although, ostensibly irrigation was politically neutral in offering water to dry-lands across the West the policy had multiple aims. Practically-speaking it was hedged about with all manner of regulations and traditions, making irrigation politically contentious. Since frontier times ‘prior appropriation’ gave first settlers rights over water in perpetuity, rather than all those who lived by the water source – ‘riparian rights’. Under the Homestead Act of 1862, federal government encouraged Jeffersonian small farmers to open up the West. Therefore, 160 acres was to be the maximum sized farm granted to a settler,⁵⁰ (eventually doubling in size for married couples). Crucially, during the Progressive era, TR decided in his Reclamation Act that only small farmers, defined by the 160 acre rule, would have access to water from federal government projects. Effectively, progressives had broadened the scope of irrigation in conservation policy, so it was connected to social justice, and, by discouraging land engrossing, monopoly reform.

In New Deal reclamation projects, water could be used to improve existing farming land. For instance, approximately a quarter million acres of land that mainly prosperous farmers owned in California’s Central Valley could be irrigated by the CVP, and water from Grand Coulee promised radically to improve poorer farms in East Washington State.⁵¹ The bulk of water from these schemes could do more – convert desert land to fertile farmland. In the case of California’s CVP, creating three million new acres, and by Washington State’s Grand Coulee project reclaiming a million acres.⁵² However, at the end of the 1930s it was unclear who would benefit from the farmland created or improved. In essence, the New Deal had to decide if irrigation schemes should be used as a promoter of social justice aims, or whether the economic and political importance of large farmers would be accorded a higher priority. Certainly, as a politician concerned with all three tenets of progressivism, from early in his presidency, FDR envisioned that reclamation as a conservation measure should be used to further wider objectives, conforming to his radical Progressive era background. In 1934, when he visited the Grand Coulee site, he expressly connected settlement opportunities on reclaimed land with helping solve the Depression’s social justice problems, and giving a new lease of life to Turner’s frontier. He assured those in the depressed ‘settled parts of the nation’ that reclaimed land meant ‘you

⁵⁰ John Opie, *The Law of the Land: Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 65-67.

⁵¹ Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 241., (Ed) Richard Lowitt, *Politics in the Post-war American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 281.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 157.

shall have the opportunity of still going West'.⁵³ By the end of the decade, Roosevelt said the Grand Coulee project was the answer to resettling Dust Bowl migrants.

To summarize, New Deal conservation policy in forestry, and national parks should be understood as a Progressive era discourse between wise users and preservationists. Over forestry, wise user beliefs remained predominant during the early New Deal when economic imperatives were uppermost in political considerations. Regarding national parks, preservationists had already won the argument with wise users because of prior developments surrounding the Hetch-Hetchy controversy in the 1910s and 1920s. However, preservationist thinking achieved major success in the later New Deal, not only concerning West Coast national parks but also in forest wilderness areas. At the same time, the influence of a progressive past was resilient in reclamation schemes. The New Deal scaled up, began, or completed West Coast projects, and maintained the Progressive era principles of TR over irrigation. The 'multiple-use' approach – which encompassed the three tenets – was continued during the late New Deal. As the next chapter details, both the Wilderness Society, and Progressive era-inspired individuals were vital on the West Coast for continuing an ideological purpose to New Deal conservation policy.

Monopoly Reform

Monopoly reform policy during the New Deal is viewed by historiographical wisdom as counter-ideological, because FDR seemed to switch from one type of policy to another in response to political, economic, or constitutional pressures, rather than ideological conviction. In doing so, he showed the suppleness of his political brain, but not consistency. The Progressive era had given New Dealers choices about how to tackle big business, which tried to rig the market, over-charge the public, and eliminate smaller competitors. At the time of the 1912 presidential election, Wilson had argued for New Freedom – using the law to break up big business, so-called trust-busting. Alternatively, TR believed in New Nationalism, to regulate monopolies, which was aimed at changing their behaviour. At the start of the New Deal, within the administration there were adherents of both types of monopoly reform. Felix Frankfurter and his *protégés*, Tom Corcoran and Ben Cohen, were Brandeisians, followers of Louis Brandeis, Wilson's economic

⁵³ Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 270.

advisor over the New Freedom option. Presidential aide, Raymond Moley, and economist, Adolf Berle, represented New Nationalist thinking. Both sides vied for the attention of Roosevelt.

In the First New Deal, (1933-1935), New Nationalist thought seemed to be in the ascendant, with the business self-government of the National Recovery Administration (NRA). It even went beyond the government-business co-operation of the Hoover era, because most anti-trust measures were suspended during the NRA. This phase of the New Deal is considered un-ideological because it made practical sense for government to work with business, as breaking it up would only add to America's unemployment woes. Conversely, the Second New Deal (1935-1938) resorted to the trust-busting option. The historiography judges that the change of direction had been motivated by pragmatic considerations – the Supreme Court's ruling, May, 1935, that the NRA was unconstitutional, which forced a change of policy. Additionally, a more radical edge to the New Deal was introduced because FDR, out of expediency, wanted to 'spike the guns' of political opponents, like Huey Long, who advocated a stepping up of government intervention in the 1936 presidential elections.⁵⁴

Typical of New Deal historians, Freidel suggests, from the outset of the New Deal, FDR did not view New Nationalism and New Freedom as mutually antagonistic, and had no special preference for either. For these historians, writing at a time when there was a strong awareness of how inflexible 20th Century totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and Stalinism had inflicted such harm on the world, Roosevelt's purported unconcern about ideological orthodoxy must have seemed modern and liberating. In effect, pragmatic reasons dictated the policy FDR chose. According to Freidel, Roosevelt failed to appreciate supposedly inherent contradictions between the two monopoly policy approaches.⁵⁵ Therefore, apparently, FDR was cast adrift from the Progressive era, and the politicians of that time who, in this reading of the situation, had resolutely followed one monopoly reform method and abjured alternatives.

Indeed, contemporaries like the New Nationalist Moley, expressed exasperation with FDR's apparent lack of ideological consistency. Moley had left government by the time of the Second New Deal, but strongly disapproved of its seeming abandonment of New Nationalist orthodoxy.

⁵⁴ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 493.

⁵⁵ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, 434.

Like some member of an extreme religious sect of ‘true believers’ he viewed with outraged indignation Roosevelt’s willingness to switch from one monopoly reform belief to another, or, worse, mix them promiscuously together. He judged FDR incapable of pursuing a coherent policy over big business. When Roosevelt apparently forsook New Nationalism and intensified his New Freedom approach in the final years of the New Deal, the historiography considers he turned opportunistically against big business, in order to make it a scapegoat for the economic downturn of the so-called ‘Roosevelt Recession’, 1937-1938.⁵⁶ The resulting Temporary National Economic Committee (TNEC) (April, 1938) set up to investigate monopolies was headed by FDR’s preferred choice, Senator Joseph O’Mahoney. O’Mahoney promptly said he aimed to ‘set business free from monopoly and government’ - a statement of seemingly opposed objectives. In disgust at this clinching proof of the president’s lack of ideological resolve, Moley commented that the TNEC constituted ‘the final expression of Roosevelt’s indecision’.⁵⁷ Yet, Moley’s one-track approach to monopoly reform had little in common with the Progressive era, which gave FDR his intellectual template.

In fact Roosevelt never viewed monopoly reform from the ‘particularist’ perspective of New Nationalism or New Freedom. Instead, the ideological understanding he inherited from the Progressive era allowed him to accommodate both in his thinking. As we have seen, apart from the 1912 presidential election where Wilson and TR exaggerated the New Freedom and New Nationalist positions in order to create ‘issue space’ between them, these two policies were never mutually contradictory in the Progressive era. Rather, they were, and remained, simply two ways of dealing with a central problem progressivism identified, namely how to curb the excessive economic and political influence of quasi-monopolistic business in American life. It is not necessary to reiterate the detail of TR’s and Wilson’s actions in the monopoly field, but suffice to say that both presidents willingly employed each other’s monopoly reform policies, having failed to gain Congressional consent for their own policy preferences. In the light of what had happened in the Progressive era, FDR judiciously decided not to adopt a fixed view on monopoly reform. At no time did he view New Nationalism or New Freedom as mutually hostile anti-monopoly methods, and in that conclusion he reflected the political practice of the

⁵⁶ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*, 258.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Progressive age. Consequently, FDR's opinion that the two approaches should be regarded as mutually supportive was entirely consistent with Progressive era practice, and connected him with that era rather than setting him apart from it. Opinion which is not fixated on 'ideological particularism' tends to bear out this contention

Hubert Humphrey, writing in 1940, without the influence of subsequent historical reconstructions of the New Deal, quotes FDR and endorses his opinion that the two monopoly reform methods were not at variance. Humphrey states: 'Many of the achievements of the last seven years have been, in the words of the President, "the fulfilment of progressive ideas expounded by Theodore Roosevelt of a partnership between business and government and also the determination of Woodrow Wilson that business be subjected, through the power of government, to drastic legal limitations against abuses"'.⁵⁸ Progressivism in practice bequeathed to the New Deal a flexible ideology on monopoly reform, although obviously theorists of New Nationalism and New Freedom like Moley or Frankfurter respectively often remained loyal to their strand of progressive ideology. However, rather than presenting New Dealers with a stark choice between business regulation or trust-busting, if they were to be consistent with progressive thinking, Progressive era practice had shown the advantages of both methods.

The NRA in the First New Deal sought business co-operation to facilitate economic recovery. Although NRA codes regulated companies, they ceded much power to big business in the design of the codes. True to consensus values, the New Deal 'Planners' who FDR selected to shape policy comprised a Progressive era balance of the enlightened left and right. Rexford Tugwell wanted to use the coercive power of government to reform business away from acquisitive capitalism. Raymond Moley had a Hoover-like faith in persuading business to reform itself towards social responsibility. He even organized dinners with businessmen (1934) in the manner of Hoover's meetings to win them to new ways.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the First New Deal was a Progressive era exercise in consensus politics. It also re-asserted another expression of consensus – TR's and Wilson's twin track monopoly reform policy, using a mixture of New Nationalism and trust-busting. In this context, it is necessary to dispel the impression that the First New Deal was occupied exclusively in business-government co-operation. As in the Progressive era,

⁵⁸ Humphrey, *The Political Philosophy of the New Deal*, 119-120, quote from FDR, *On Our Way*, pp x-xi

⁵⁹ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937*, 417.

regulation and trust-busting existed side by side, although trust-busting during the First New Deal was on a considerably lesser scale than in the later 1930s, due to the temporary suspension of most anti-trust measures under the NRA. Like the Second New Deal, though, the anti-trust action that did take place frequently involved utility companies. One of the most important cases in the early New Deal was taken against the Stone and Webster utility cartel, which was dissolved by federal anti-trust regulations in 1934. Stone and Webster were a national company, but it was perhaps best known for its ownership of Puget Power, the main utility provider in Seattle, Washington.

As elements of New Nationalism and New Freedom co-existed in the First New Deal, so the Second New Deal transition from government regulation of business to trust-busting in 1935 was not the straightforward process sometimes portrayed. Leuchtenburg shrewdly detected the twin track nature of the Second New Deal, stating that, as well as Brandeisian influences, ‘many of the NRA emphases persisted’.⁶⁰ Bearing in mind Progressive presidents accommodated both New Nationalist and New Freedom into their thinking then once more Progressive era continuity is apparent in the New Deal. Likewise, trust-busting, conducted during the Second New Deal, arose from a gradual build-up of pressure for this policy, not an abrupt policy shift. The issue of holding companies exemplifies this point. We saw in chapter one that TR broke up the first holding company – the Northern Securities railroad company in the Pacific North West – and also expressed misgivings about the over-concentration of utility companies. From the 1920s, holding companies became dominant in the utility industry, and caused much public and political disquiet, because this development coincided with the electrification of America. Consequently, the most celebrated trust-busting law of the Second New Deal – the Public Utility Holding Company Act (1935) – was far from being a spontaneous action taken by FDR’s government.

Of all the measures from the Second New Deal, 1935-1936, the Utility Holding Company Act ‘had the longest gestation period, having begun to be conceived at the very height of the New Economic Era.’⁶¹ Although Hoover during the 1920s remained sanguine about utility holding companies, appreciating their contribution to modernizing the USA, the American public and their representatives became increasingly disturbed at the corruption of legislatures by

⁶⁰ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 163.

⁶¹ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937*, 529.

utilities in the 1926 mid-term elections, and the over-concentration of companies controlling America's electricity.⁶² As a result, investigations into utility holding companies, inaugurated by the Senate and House in 1926, were conducted by the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Power Commission. These 1920s investigations, which were still ongoing 1933-5, uncovered further serious economic and political corruption during the 1934 mid-term elections.⁶³

The rise of large private utility companies needs also to be seen in the context of federal expansion of hydro-electricity from major dams in the West and South that politicized electricity issues. Even before the New Deal was underway, Brandeisians and New Nationalists realized that control of electricity, especially HEP, would be a major political battleground in the future. Prophetically, the Brandeisian Felix Frankfurter wrote to FDR in 1929, setting the scene for the HEP struggles of the 1930s. He stated: 'Hydro-electric power raises without a doubt the most far-reaching social and economic issues before the American people, certainly for the next decade.'⁶⁴ With the Depression deepening, even people sympathetic to large business, like New Nationalists, saw the need for action against HEP utility holding company's excessive economic and political influence. Two days after FDR's election triumph of 1932, the New Nationalist, Berle wrote to Moley of the urgent need for 'federal regulation of ...public utility holding companies'.⁶⁵ Significantly, the Public Utility Holding Company Act also illustrated Roosevelt's Progressive era ideological intent, because he personally supported having the 'death sentence' clause included in the legislation.⁶⁶ By this clause, all utility holding companies would be automatically broken up in 1940, unless they could demonstrate to the New Deal's regulatory body, the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), a rationale for their existence at a local level. Therefore, the Public Utility Holding Company Act, the most far-reaching trust-busting measure of the Second New Deal was not just introduced as a pragmatic response to the Supreme Court striking down the NRA, or as a way of challenging FDR's more radical opponents in the 1936 presidential elections. On the contrary, whether the NRA had still been in place, or not, the New Deal, was both responding to a build-up of support for government action against large utilities among the public, and taking action on ideological grounds.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid; Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform*, 153.

⁶⁴ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*, 127-128.

⁶⁵ Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, 73.

⁶⁶ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937*, 531.

Ideology is vitally important in the third New Deal solution to monopoly reform – ‘countervailing powers’ – inspired by the Progressive era. Municipal power companies had functioned as a counter-weight to private utilities in HEP since Progressive times. From the Hetch-Hetchy Dam decision of 1913, progressives had encouraged rivals to the big utility companies – in this instance, the San Francisco municipal company. According to one interpretation, Hoover, as shown in the previous chapter, favoured municipal power companies. He saw them as local, often preferable to ‘statist’ or private utility solutions, and - with a progressive concern for the extension of popular will - democratic. Therefore, the New Deal reached back into preceding eras for its countervailing power policy. Secretary of the Interior Ickes actively encouraged the growth of municipal electricity companies in the 1930s, and his agenda showed clear policy continuity.⁶⁷ For example, early New Deal action against Stone and Webster (1934) should not merely be categorized as trust-busting, because it can be placed into a wider context. After its break-up, the Stone and Webster subsidiary Puget Power on the West Coast needed to be re-organized under local ownership. City Light, its municipal rival in Seattle, benefited enormously from this outcome. There is the strong suspicion that New Dealers had acted decisively to dismantle Stone and Webster to help its local municipal rival, which had been struggling in the early 1930s. Continuity in aiding municipal power companies is illustrated by the fact that JD Ross, the head of City Light since Progressive times – 1911 – and a leading advocate of public power development, had secured bail-out funding from Hoover in 1932 to tide City Light over the Great Depression. During the later 1930s, he went onto assume a leading position for Roosevelt in the HEP field on the West Coast, discussed in chapter five.

In summary, monopoly reform in the First and Second New Deal can only be fully understood with greater recognition of its Progressive era ideological content. FDR’s treatment of New Nationalism and New Freedom thinking as mutually supportive during the New Deals was in keeping, not at variance, with the practice of progressive ideology. His use of countervailing powers over the electricity power issue was inherited from the 1900-1920 period, and the case can be made for an unbroken public power lineage that includes the New Era. Moreover, in privileging municipal power companies, the New Deal connected itself to

⁶⁷ William M Emmons III, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt, Electrical Utilities, and the Power of Competition’ *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 53 No 4 (December 1993): 886.

ideological preoccupations within progressivism about extending democratic control, and avoiding the socio-economic extremes of untrammelled capitalism or state control. As chapter five shows, these viewpoints were strongly held on the West Coast, and became very relevant to the big dams there which began producing electricity in the late 1930s.

Social Justice

Social justice in the New Deal was inextricably linked to the first national priority – the economy. Therefore, it is best understood as an expression of socio-economic policy. Faced by the unparalleled economic downturn of the Depression, FDR implemented in the ‘hundred days’ an extraordinary programme of government intervention. While this response was aimed principally at the economy, it implied from the outset that Roosevelt’s government felt duty-bound to supply a measure of social justice for the poverty-stricken unemployed. Accordingly, Harry Hopkins’ Civil Works Administration (CWA), 1933-1934, and the Work Progress Administration (WPA), 1935-1940, provided direct relief and work creation schemes. Harold Ickes’ Public Works Administration (PWA) re-employed skilled workers building highways, railroads and dams. Old Progressives like Ickes and Hopkins led this New Deal response. Politicians from Progressive era dynasties, FDR, and La Follette Jr., were leading exponents of ‘big government’ spending on relief.⁶⁸ This unheard-of federal intervention was, in some respects, a policy departure, even if it paled in comparison with government spending during World War II.

FDR used the mantra ‘relief, recovery and reform’ to describe his New Deal vision. If relief measures to help the unemployed were largely innovations of the 1930s, then New Deal recovery and reform initiatives have a greater kinship with the Progressive era. The policy of directly aiding labour unions in New Deal reforms can be readily located within a progressive tradition. In the Progressive age, TR unsuccessfully mediated to give coal miners union recognition, and Wilson ended a legal impediment to the formation of unions. During the New Era, Hoover succeeded, by government and press propaganda, in securing steelworkers improved conditions, and Congress outlawed injunctions against peaceful picketing. However, labour unions lost

⁶⁸ Renshaw, *Franklin D Roosevelt: Profiles in Power*, 65; Patrick J Maney, *‘Young Bob’ La Follette: A Biography of Robert M La Follette Jr.* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 93.

membership during the 1920s, and this process was greatly accelerated by Great Depression unemployment. In these circumstances, the New Deal actively stimulated unionization, as a social justice policy, and to increase purchasing power in the economy.

Even so, the methods the New Deal used proved especially controversial. In the Progressive and New Eras, progressives tried to persuade employers that very limited union demands should be met, and moreover removed barriers which had made union activity illegal. During the New Deal government interfered directly in the workplace – the personal domain of the employer. Employers were told by New Deal regulation and law to accept unionization and not oppose it. Section 7a of NRA codes during the First New Deal (1933) obliged employers who joined the programme to recognize unions. When the Supreme Court struck down the NRA, the Second New Deal National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935 went further. Section 7a in NRA codes had sometimes just been ignored, or circumvented by employers who encouraged company unions that they controlled, rather than allowing independent unions which could foment strikes among workers. In contrast, the NLRA stipulated every employer must grant exclusive negotiating rights to the union that the majority of their workers wanted. Actually, New Deal measures were merely an extra ‘ratcheting-up’ of pressure for unionization, in the progressive tradition. Even so, for many American employers, they were an attack on their property rights and the exercise of rugged individualism, especially as the NRA and later the NLRA set off a wave of unionization strikes, threatening company profits.⁶⁹ At the same time, New Deal unionization helped industrial labour achieve a level of social justice e.g. winning higher pay because of their strengthened negotiating position.

Nevertheless, it is wider context implications of unionization that concern us here, because they exposed potential weaknesses in progressive ideology. The original progressives had feared political extremism caused in part by a sense of injustice among the urban and rural poor. Progressive era politicians set out to build national unity through removing social justice grievances and persuading voters that this outcome would benefit everyone. Consequently, progressivism’s philosophical urge was to make a fair society, which would have unity of purpose. However, its political imperative was the utilization of that unity of purpose across

⁶⁹ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 170.

society, and among particular groups, to maximize electoral support. For progressives, these two urges went hand-in-hand – ideology always tended to march in step with pragmatism. In Progressive times, a national consensus appeared possible, which included the rural/urban farmer-labour alliance. During the New Deal, though, unionization threatened to wreck the national consensus behind Roosevelt, by stirring up political extremism, fragmenting the farmer-labour alliance, and further jeopardizing the small farmers' status.

The first ideological weakness that unionization brought to the surface was related to anti-communism, and the damage it might inflict on a national consensus. The spectre, or reality, of Red Scares always threatened to force the New Deal into retreat, as they had the enlightened policies of the Progressive era. Complicating matters, in similar fashion to the original progressives, the reforms of the New Deal were inevitably going to set in train extremist demands for more sweeping changes in American society from communists, and others. Reactionary elements were ready to label New Deal measures pro-communist, especially unionization, conflating reformers with revolutionaries, because both challenged the status quo, ignoring the New Deal's adherence to capitalism and democracy. At the start of the New Deal, Rex Tugwell's work on the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) was compared to the state socialist schemes of Stalin's Russia. In December, 1933, the journalist Mark Sullivan wrote a series of columns insinuating that the New Deal was pro-communist.⁷⁰ In April, 1934, the Wirt affair alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched within the New Deal to facilitate FDR's failure so he could be replaced by a Stalin figure. Though Wirt's allegation was easily refuted, Schlesinger writes: 'the Wirt affair helped shape a new stereotype – the theory of the New Deal as a subversive conspiracy'.⁷¹ In fact, the New Deal was regularly accused of harbouring, and encouraging extreme left wing views, in an America peculiarly susceptible to anti-communism throughout the 20th Century. Therefore, as with previous progressives, New Dealers were vulnerable to anti-communism deflecting them from reform, or targeting them. As suggested earlier, the absence of an established Progressive party, to normalize reform ideas among the public, facilitated accusations that reformist governments were subversive of American values, and this lurking danger was nowhere more apparent than over government-

⁷⁰ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: the Coming of the New Deal*, 445.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

sponsored unionization. Furthermore, during the Depression many employers quite understandably believed strikes and higher wages caused by unionization would wreck chances of economic recovery.

In 1934 the national consensus was threatened because of events on the West Coast. This time the communist smear had a greater chance of sticking than the Wirt affair. On account of Section 7a of NRA codes, there was an upsurge in unionization activity. The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), part of the normally docile AFL union movement, was re-constituted as a result of the NRA, and argued the case for representing all dock workers in the ports of the West Coast.⁷² However, the employers had no intention of allowing their pliable company union to be replaced by the ILA, whose leader, the hard bitten Australian Harry Bridges, was a committed Marxist.⁷³ For eleven weeks from May, 1934, Bridges held a strike in the San Francisco docks over union recognition.⁷⁴ Bridges' strike sent shock-waves through the Industrial Association, the employers' organization, because it soon spread to every port on the West Coast.⁷⁵ The situation degenerated into hate-filled violence when the Industrial Association attempted to open up the docks at San Francisco, and two strikers were killed in clashes on 'Black Thursday.'⁷⁶ It also placed FDR in an invidious position, for at the end of June he was drafting an executive order to set up the first National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which would help oversee unionization under the NRA.⁷⁷ Clearly, if pro-union regulations resulted in a state of affairs amounting to class warfare the policy might inflict a heavy electoral price on the New Deal at the 1934 mid-term elections. The crisis came to a head in July with a general strike breaking out across San Francisco.⁷⁸

Widespread revulsion was expressed about this unfolding crisis, including from old Progressives. Conflict between the political extremes of communism and anti-communism represented the antithesis of Progressive era consensus politics. Hiram Johnson sent a telegram

⁷² Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 328.

⁷³ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 171.

⁷⁴ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 335, 328.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 331; Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 176.

⁷⁷ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 330.

⁷⁸ Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*, 377-379; Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 177.

to his fellow old Progressive Harold Ickes, describing the San Francisco general strike as a ‘disaster’ and the ‘possible ruin of the Pacific Coast’.⁷⁹ Historians have noted how, among the employer class, ‘all along the Pacific shore’ the San Francisco strike ‘vividly recollected’ the Progressive era Seattle general strike of 1919.⁸⁰ In 1934 extreme violence flared again in Seattle when clubs and tear gas were used against pickets.⁸¹ Serious damage to the New Deal was only averted when after four days the strike ended, and concessions were made on both sides. However, these Pacific Coast strikes in 1934 represented an early warning to the New Deal of how its social justice reform policies could unleash forces which were anathema to progressive values and New Deal electoral chances. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) – the Second New Deal’s solution to the defunct NRA’s unionization policy – created similar problems for Roosevelt, in another incendiary communist crisis for the New Deal on the West Coast, 1939-1940, that featured once again Bridges’ union.

This later crisis was appreciably worsened by a development coeval with the passage of the NLRA in 1935. That year the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) changed strategy. Up till then, the CPUSA had viewed other left-wing parties as capitalist collaborators. Afterwards American communists worked together with them in a popular or united front. Attracted by Second New Deal radicalism, communists covertly entered federal government agencies, like the NLRB, and were an overt presence in the growing labour movement. Earl Browder, the CPUSA leader, attempted to appeal to a wider electorate by arguing that his party was an authentically American movement. He claimed that the CPUSA had been ‘shaped by national experience’, and was not the servant of Comintern, the Moscow-based body for co-ordinating global communism, which had ordered his change of strategy.⁸² Although the popular front phase of communism was superficially more moderate, ultimately it endangered the New Deal’s national consensus.

In the mid 1930s, the accommodation of popular front communist elements within an expanding progressive consensus, whether in the CIO unions or New Deal, appeared relatively

⁷⁹ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 331.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 332, and Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*, 377.

⁸¹ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*, 405.

⁸² Kenneth Waltzer, ‘The New History of American Communism’ *Reviews in American History* Vol. 11 No 2 (June 1983)

innocuous, even though many old Progressives never lost their strong distrust of communism. Moreover, expressing the public relations dangers of communism, Senator La Follette Jr.'s newspaper *The Progressive* presciently stated in 1936: 'it is to be hoped the communist question does not become the monkey-wrench in... (the) gears' of the farmer-labour movement, western progressivism's key electoral grouping, and a potential 'third force' in American politics.⁸³ Finally, at the end of the decade, developments in unionization and the reversion of the CPUSA to divisive politics helped revive a fierce anti-communism, particularly on the West Coast. Accordingly New Deal forbearance towards popular front communists, or at least that perception among the public, and the cumulative effect of specious pro-communist accusations against the New Deal, assumed a new significance. Anti-communists attempted to conflate the New Deal, unionization, and the divisive politics re-emerging within the CPUSA.

The second ideological weakness that unionization highlighted was the fragility of the Progressive era farmer-labour alliance. Although eventually 1930s unionization helped hasten its downfall, at first government-sponsored unionization seemed to strengthen farmer-labour unity. New Deal measures for poorer groups stressed the mutuality of the farmer-labour alliance, by encouraging industrial worker unionization, and assisting small farmers. In raising both groups' purchasing power, economic recovery might be achieved, and the unity of the farmer-labour alliance consolidated. Only later in the 1930s did unionization appear counter-productive to farmer-labour unity.

Roosevelt had said 'our economic life today is a seamless web', to underscore how American citizens were interdependent, as they confronted the depredations of the Great Depression.⁸⁴ The phrase was more than an oratorical device, serving to unite Americans artificially against adversity. There is every indication that he, and other leading New Dealers, sincerely believed it to be true. Appreciating the 'mutuality' of groups in society, like the industrial and agricultural workforces, they believed, was vital for economic recovery and the furtherance of social justice. At the start of the New Deal, Roosevelt acknowledged his hopes for reducing chronic urban unemployment depended on a rural measure – the Agricultural Adjustment Act, 1933, which was designed to increase the 'purchasing power' of small farmers for goods produced by urban

⁸³ *The Progressive*, June 6, 1936

⁸⁴ Report on FDR's campaign speech the previous week in Topeka, Kansas, *Time* (September 26, 1932)

workers.⁸⁵ Senator Robert La Follette Jr., representative of 1930s western progressivism, stressed that his support for large scale First New Deal relief programmes to aid the industrial unemployed involved a rural sub-text. By increasing the spending power of the urban working class, he asserted, the relief programmes would help recover agriculture.⁸⁶ His work on the Second New Deal Civil Liberties Committee, principally assisting industrial unionization, was not only aimed at boosting urban working class pay, but also raising farm incomes by expanding the consumption of agricultural goods. Therefore, economic and social justice interests were congruent, along with the interests of the small farmer and industrial worker.

Indeed, Senator La Follette Jr.'s appointment to head the new Civil Liberties Committee in 1936 was particularly apt. His home state of Wisconsin, by 1930, was 53% urban, and the fact that Wisconsin was an almost equal mix of the agricultural and industrial sectors meant he was well placed to carry out the mandate of the committee.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Wisconsin had its own revived Progressive party during the 1930s, led by the senator's assertive brother, Governor Philip La Follette. Senator La Follette's support for the farmer-labour alliance, and his strong progressive credentials enhanced his suitability to lead the Civil Liberties Committee. Senate Resolution 266, (March, 1936), proposed an investigation into 'undue interference with the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively'.⁸⁸ The La Follette Civil Liberties Committee looked at attempts by employers, between 1936 and 1940, to thwart the right of workers to join unions, especially as guaranteed under the NLRA of 1935. Its most acclaimed work was concerned with industrial unions, the direct beneficiaries of the NLRA. During the final phase of the committee's work between 1939 and 1940, it concentrated on both rural poverty and the food processing industries, including a major enquiry in California.

To a great extent, the La Follette Committee was a propaganda exercise on behalf of industrial labour, to retain public support for unionization, at a time when violence consequent on it was causing controversy. Accordingly, Robert Wohlforth, the La Follette Committee's able secretary, who had a background in journalism, co-ordinated its activities to achieve optimum

⁸⁵ Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 126.

⁸⁶ Maney, 'Young Bob' La Follette, 128.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ Jerold Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty: The La Follette Committee and the New Deal* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 63.

publicity in newspapers about dire industrial conditions. The progressive parallels with Hoover's newspaper campaign in favour of oppressed industrial workers are self-evident. Heber Blankenhorn, the liaison between the La Follette Committee and Roosevelt's government, assisted the committee's news management operation. In World War I Blankenhorn was a founder of 'psychological operations' ('psy-ops'), where he had pioneered airborne drops of morale-sapping leaflets behind enemy lines. During the New Deal, he suggested mass psychology techniques to the La Follette Committee.

However, while La Follette, his co-chairman Senator Elbert Thomas, and Wohlforth, often massaged the facts to strengthen the case for industrial unionization, the stark and sickening evidence that they unearthed about widespread employer abuse against workers was not an invention. In many American workplaces, and several of the most lurid examples were in La Follette's Mid West, there was an atmosphere of brooding violence and intimidation towards those who joined unions or attempted union action. Gangsters were employed as strike-breakers by management at the Black and Decker plant in Kent, Ohio.⁸⁹ Republic Steel owned ten times more tear gas guns than Chicago's entire police force. General Motors in Detroit systematically destroyed industrial espionage files, rather than hand them over to La Follette, who was investigating the extent the automobile company used spies to disrupt union activity. Coal owners in Harlan County, Kentucky, 'owned' the local police and at Louellen their un-unionized workforce lived like feudal serfs behind a gate, which barred the only road going into town. Permission was even needed from the coal owners for their workers to have outside visitors.⁹⁰

In response to such conditions, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the unskilled and semi-skilled union movement, began a campaign of unionization, marked by violence. CIO numbers rose to a claimed 3.7 million by the end of 1937.⁹¹ Their militant behaviour was reminiscent of the Progressive era International Workers of the World, and the CIO were suspended by the more moderate American Federation of Labor (AFL) in September, 1936.⁹² Certainly, the conciliatory AFL union movement should have been preferable to a progressive

⁸⁹ Testimony of R.M. La Follette Jr., Senate Education and Labor Committee, *Oppressive Labor Practices Bill: Hearings*, 76th Congress, 2nd Session (1939)

⁹⁰ Maney, 'Young Bob' La Follette, 181.

⁹¹ Graebner, Fite and White, *A History of the American People*, 1067.

⁹² McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 290.

like La Follette. Then again, at the end of 1936, the CIO began using the sit-down strike—occupying factories to gain union recognition – a method that often set off pitched battles with the employers’ hired guards.⁹³ Contrary to La Follette’s progressive beliefs about compromise, the CIO’s action verged on the revolutionary, albeit for industrial rather than political objectives. The recruitment of communist organisers, especially in the automobile and steel disputes, further conveyed immoderation in the CIO. La Follette might be expected to have distanced himself from this CIO campaign, especially as its aura of anarchy was viewed with revulsion by his bedrock supporters, law-abiding western farmers. Instead, he despatched La Follette investigators into the thick of CIO disputes.

However, La Follette’s stance becomes more comprehensible in view of the behaviour and beliefs of CIO leader, John L. Lewis. In important ways, the inspirational Lewis, who was able to rouse crowds with his evangelical passion, and ‘air of pugnacity even when standing perfectly still’, was fundamentally a product of the Progressive era.⁹⁴ Like La Follette, though, he had been further radicalized by the Depression, and both believed it could only be averted again if there was greater ‘purchasing power’ among the industrial workforce.⁹⁵ Lewis’ unionization of workers was predicated on the need for ‘industrial democracy’, giving them a right to have representatives, that corresponded with their political rights.⁹⁶ This concept had progressive overtones because progressivism had invariably desired to extend democracy in all areas of life. Lewis’s ‘industrial democracy’ was based on first-past-the-post elections – as in America’s political system – giving power to the union that won the majority of votes. Perhaps significantly, Lewis cited AFL failure in the Progressive era US Steel strike of 1919 to rally support for the CIO.⁹⁷ Conversely, during the New Deal, US Steel, described by Lewis as ‘the crouching lion in the pathway of labor’, tamely conceded to a tranche of CIO demands in 1937.⁹⁸

⁹³ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 277-289.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁹⁵ (Ed) Sidney M Milkis and Jerome M Miller, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), chapter by Nelson Lichtenstein, ‘Politicized Unions and the New Deal Model’, Lichtenstein discusses New Deal ‘under-consumptionist’ theorists who believed increased purchasing power through unionization was synonymous with the interests of the ‘nation as a whole’, 136.

⁹⁶ John L Lewis, ‘What Labor is Thinking’ *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 1 No 4 (October 1937): 27

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 240.

Even so, Lewis' sit-down strike unionization drive was only tactically revolutionary, whereas strategically it located itself in the American progressive political tradition. As the sociologist C. Wright Mills writes of Lewis: 'Even as the labor leader rebels, he holds back rebellion. He organizes discontent and then sits on it...He makes regular what might otherwise be disruptive'.⁹⁹ Or, as Lewis expressed his progressive goals: 'there must now be new economic and social controls...established in America;' ... (but) 'reforms must be worked out in accordance with American precedents and ideals'.¹⁰⁰

If La Follette could accommodate Lewis' tactics to his thinking, the consequences of CIO unionization in the end created insupportable tensions for La Follette's farmer-labour beliefs. The CIO's unionization campaign galvanized the AFL to similar efforts, during the late 1930s, in order to survive as a union movement against CIO success. In particular the AFL Teamsters union, representing truckers, and allied groups, became synonymous with aggressively successful organization. Jimmy Hoffa of the Detroit truckers was infamous for 'strong arm' tactics.¹⁰¹ On the West Coast, the Teamsters were headquartered in Seattle. Although AFL/CIO competition to unionize American workers is no longer considered to have been as intense as once thought, the union 'civil war' speeded up the rate of unionization, and feelings ran high on the West Coast.¹⁰²

Both the CIO and re-energized AFL regarded the food processing industries as the next stage in the unionization process during the late 1930s. Yet small farmers feared unionization would disrupt movement of produce and hit farm income. In Progressive times, as already noted, FDR's progressivism had been pulled in opposite directions when he had been slow to support humanitarian New York State legislation to help food processing workers, lest he offend his upstate small farmer base support. During the New Deal, very largely due to federal government-condoned unionization, conflicts of interest between small farmers and industrial workers multiplied as food processing unionization spread. To the western progressive La Follette such a situation could spell political disaster, because there was a direct correlation

⁹⁹ C.Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 8-9, quoted in McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 296.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, 'What Labor is Thinking': 24.

¹⁰¹ Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 413.

¹⁰² Christopher L. Tomlins 'AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Perspective' *Journal of American History* Vol. 65 No 4 (March 1979)

between the depth of poverty of Wisconsin dairy farmers, for instance, and their strength of support for him. Wisconsin was a major food processing area, both America's biggest milk producing state, and, by the end of World War II, responsible for a fifth of the country's canned vegetables.¹⁰³ If La Follette's duties in the Civil Liberties Committee required him to look into the rights of food processing workers, he would be placed in a very awkward predicament regarding his key farming base. Precisely this situation occurred, 1939-1940, when the La Follette Committee investigated California's labour problems, as described in chapter six. California was the biggest and most diverse food producing state in the USA. By the late New Deal, unionization was embroiling Roosevelt's government in a series of Communist controversies, and had undermined the farmer-labour alliance.

The third ideological weakness unionization contributed to surrounds the political loyalty of the small farmer socio-economic group. As noted previously, the lack of an enduring Progressive party since Progressive times meant small farmers were not perhaps granted the undivided governmental attention that certain groups enjoyed, like large farmers, big business, and increasingly in the New Deal, big labour. Although western progressivism saw small farmers as the time-honoured receptacle of American values and an extant crucial voting force in western constituencies, right through the years 1900-1940 presidential leaders did not subscribe to their centrality in policy. In these circumstances, incrementally, as the New Deal unfolded, the small farmer group grew increasingly restive, and prone to desert the New Deal for more extreme alternatives.

True to Progressive era values on 'mutuality', FDR recognized that the rural West should assist the recovery of the industrial East from the Depression, and *vice versa*. He envisaged a socio-economic and geopolitical consensus, if you will. Roosevelt stated: 'The East has a stake in the West and the West has a stake in the East...the nation...shall be considered as a whole and not as an aggregate of disjointed groups.'¹⁰⁴ However, he was acutely conscious of the limitations placed on the West by Turner's closed frontier theory, the intellectual thread running through the Progressive, New, and New Deal eras. Therefore, the West, America's agricultural heartland, was no longer a self-regulating organism, where struggling farmers could find new

¹⁰³ Richard Nelson Current, *Wisconsin* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 73-77, 88-89.

¹⁰⁴ Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937*, 384, FDR speech at Glacier National Park, Montana, 1934.

and better land during economic troubles. Instead, it was viewed as a place in need of outside assistance- a society in stasis.

Consequently, Roosevelt was mindful of a strong constituency among western farmers which, more than any group in society, had vociferously demanded since the 1920s ‘progressive’ programmes to remedy their conditions, including federal government intervention.¹⁰⁵ In using intervention to address the rural West’s socio-economic difficulties, Roosevelt was responding to broad-based democratic pressure, but crucially he believed government programmes benefited the national community, because boosting agricultural purchasing power would aid industrial America. On this basis, the New Deal ‘government-subsidized scarcity’ programmes, which reduced farm production to force up prices, as in the Agricultural Adjustment Acts (1933 and 1938) and the Soil Conservation Act, satisfied both western progressive electoral pressure and Progressive era consensus politics.¹⁰⁶

However, another Progressive era concern – countervailing powers – disadvantaged small farmers. Since the 1900s, Progressives were preoccupied by the disproportionate influence big business exerted on the economy and politics. Therefore, strong farming organizations had been encouraged to re-balance society and counteract big business. Almost inevitably richer farmers came to the fore in progressive calculations. The Farm Bureau, set up in Chicago during 1919, represented large farmers and was important across the West, lobbying vigorously for the farming interest. Large farmers had the time and money to organize effectively.

At the start of the New Deal, no farmers were prospering, due to Great Depression contraction of the domestic market, protectionism’s impact on international markets, and overproduction in farming.¹⁰⁷ As with big business co-operation in the First New Deal, Roosevelt’s government believed large farmers were the most capable in their socio-economic sector of driving national recovery during an unmatched socio-economic emergency. Therefore, the Farm Bureau held greater sway over New Deal farm programmes than the more devolved National Grange, representing small farmers. Similarly, the Farm Bureau pressure group constituted the most

¹⁰⁵ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁷ Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940*, 67, information from Van L. Perkins, *Crisis in Agriculture: The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the New Deal, 1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969)

viable and robust prospect within rural society for a countervailing power to help re-balance the US economy. Humphrey cites the First AAA to demonstrate its pressure group politics, whereby the New Deal responded to the agenda of ‘organized farm groups’.¹⁰⁸

Despite FDR’s longstanding political support for small farmers, the need to strengthen large farmers, on ideological and pragmatic grounds, dictated that New Deal farm programmes were ‘cut to their cloth’. The most capable economically and organizationally won out over western progressivism’s small farmer, whose interests suffered. On account of New Deal agricultural programmes giving most help to the strong rather than the weak, poorer farm owners were compensated less generously by crop reduction payments, so they increasingly sold up to banks and large farmers. Moreover, large farmers, in taking acreage out of production, frequently dispossessed small tenant farmers.

Bearing in mind these factors, direct help to small farmers, although ideologically well-intentioned, was grossly inadequate for the magnitude of their problems. For example, New Deal attempts to improve credit facilities for poor farmers followed progressive precedents, but like them were insufficiently funded. Wilson had passed legislation during 1916 to grant small farmers credit. Hoover, the ‘progressive’ in 1923 established twelve Federal Loan Banks, supplying credit to poorer farmers grappling with the 1920s agricultural slump.¹⁰⁹ From 1937 Tugwell’s Farm Security Administration (FSA) provided New Deal loans to small tenant farmers, so they could purchase their farms. However, only 1 in 22 applicants received federal funding to buy farms under it.¹¹⁰ As with earlier progressive schemes, help to small farmers was a palliative, instead of a remedy, partly because ideologically the New Deal would not contemplate the heavy spending necessary, which alone could make a significant difference.

Of course, heavy spending was not required to further industrial worker unionization. As a consequence, unionization – constantly expanding, government-sanctioned, and successful – contrasted starkly with the dwindling fortunes of the small farmer. It spoke to a rising belief in rural communities that the New Deal gave preferential treatment to urban, industrial America.

¹⁰⁸ Humphrey, *The Political Philosophy of the New Deal*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Kendrick A Clements, *A Life of Herbert Hoover: Imperfect Visionary, 1918-1928* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 249.

¹¹⁰ Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940*, 185.

Increasingly, America's rural heartlands viewed the emergence of a predominantly urban society with consternation. There was widespread resentment in the countryside that the farming community was being sidelined by the growing demographic and economic significance of urban workers, which the New Deal had stimulated through unionization.¹¹¹ In these circumstances, by the late 1930s small farmers were in danger of deserting the national consensus behind the New Deal. As a political volatile group they might turn to political extremes, in the manner of the early New Deal left wing Farm Holiday movement, or they might seek shelter within right wing organizations. The Associated Farmers of California – established in 1934 – was militantly anti-New Deal. At the end of the 1930s, it adapted its policies to win support among small farmers in the West Coast states of Oregon and Washington.

An added factor made a complicated situation on the West Coast more complex at the end of the 1930s. *Déclassé* small farmers had become, by circumstances, migrant farm labour. Families forced off the land by mechanization, New Deal farm policy, and the Dust Bowl joined the rural multitudes that poured westwards into the Pacific states during the 1930s. These small farmers faced in the Dust Bowl an apocalyptic disaster. Farmers had ploughed up the soil-binding buffalo grass which originally covered southern Great Plains states like Oklahoma and Arkansas, and for years pursued single crop wheat farming. The Great Drought (1932-1936) turned the degraded soil to dust, accompanied by a high wind with a sinister 'low roaring resonance.'¹¹² It was like an avenging angel visited on reckless farming methods, and blew away the topsoil and left farmers destitute. They witnessed farms representing years of 'toil in the sun' being destroyed, and felt a 'sorrow that can't talk'.¹¹³ Small farmers fled this 'dead world of dust' and sought new lives on the West Coast.¹¹⁴

Their desperation was only added to by what awaited them on the West Coast in general, and especially California. They first discovered brutal confirmation of Turner's closed frontier theory. The western migrants were not able to find new, fertile land. Instead, as migrant farm labour, they needed to compete on quasi-monopolized farms with mainly Mexican-American

¹¹¹ James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism in the New Deal* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 330.

¹¹² Vance Johnson, *Heaven's Tableland: The Dust Bowl Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1947), 149.

¹¹³ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1951: first published in the USA, 1939), 81.

¹¹⁴ Vance Johnson, *Heaven's Tableland*, 149.

farm labour in field work, and often indigenous white labour throughout California's food processing industries. Largely because of Great Plains migration, half of field workers were white by 1934, 'and the proportion continued to increase'.¹¹⁵ In the extensive fruit, cotton, and vegetable farms of California the supply of labour, swollen by Dust Bowl migration, far exceeded demand, driving down wages. Consequently, conditions for the 'Okies' were frequently pitiful. The contrast between the farms where they might find work – a cornucopia of lush grapes, oranges, and peaches – and their own dire circumstances must have been almost unbearable.

In this state of affairs, politicians feared exploited workers would gravitate to political extremism, unless their acute social justice needs were acknowledged. During the early New Deal, the Communist Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) organized strikes for the predominantly Mexican American fieldworkers. In the later New Deal, the Communist-led CIO union the United Canning, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) began a unionization campaign among the fieldworkers, who were increasingly Dust Bowl migrants. Likewise, the Associated Farmers of California were trying to recruit members among small farmers in Washington and Oregon. When La Follette began his Civil Liberties Committee investigation of the West Coast at the end of 1939, small farmers, or *déclassé* small farmers, were perceived as in danger of deserting the New Deal and turning to political extremism.

New Deal social justice policy sheds light on ideological weaknesses within progressivism, explored further in chapter six. At the end of the New Deal, La Follette Jr., in his Civil Liberties Committee, which concentrated on unionization, confronted these weaknesses in an extreme form on the West Coast. If he were successful, his Civil Liberties Committee must contain anti-communism, hold together the farmer-labor alliance, and help prevent small farmers, or those formerly in that group, from embracing extremist politics. Should he fail, 1930s progressivism might fail, and with it the New Deal enterprise.

¹¹⁵ Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 240.

This chapter has attempted to re-interpret the New Deal by looking at it from a Progressive era perspective. FDR has emerged much more ideological than the historiography admits, and his ideology was anchored in the Progressive era. Gary Gerstle, in his article, 'The Protean Character of American Liberalism' identifies liberalism's many faces.¹¹⁶ For example, Gerstle argues Progressive era moral beliefs underwent a transformation into the economically-oriented New Deal.¹¹⁷ However, from another perspective, the Progressive era gave the New Deal its belief system. From the 1910s, Roosevelt conceptualized progressivism's three tenets by regarding them as 'resources,' a very economically-oriented view; as areas emphasized in the 'frontier thesis,' and as crucial to his 'liberty of the community' idea. In the three tenets, during the Progressive era and New Deal there were normally two strands of belief, one more ideological, and the other an accommodation between ideology and pragmatism based on recognizing existing economic realities. Conservation policy witnessed avowedly ideological 'preservationists' jostling for influence with more pragmatic 'wise users.' Over monopoly reform, 'trust-busters' were more ideological, whereas 'regulators' allowed for ideology and some meeting of minds between reformists and big business. In social justice, the more conciliatory AFL union movement, which matured in the Progressive era, was matched by the CIO with at least resemblances to the IWW. However, it would be inaccurate to say that 'wise users', 'regulators', or the AFL movement, were devoid of an ideological thrust in either the Progressive or New Deal eras. The post-Hofstadter historiography found pragmatic reasons for policy in the New Deal even when it pursued a blatantly ideological path, say over trust-busting. An alternative viewpoint acknowledges the existence of an ideological New Deal, whose policy options and apprehensions were derived from the Progressive era. The next chapters concentrate on the West Coast in the later New Deal, (1937-1942), with a chapter apiece concerning conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice. These areas can be comprehended more fully with an appreciation of their Progressive era background.

¹¹⁶ Gary Gerstle, 'The Protean Character of American Liberalism' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99 No 4 (October 1994)

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 1044.

Chapter Four: Conservation on the West Coast, 1937-1942

In 1940 John Huelsdonk, a legendary logger on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, where he was known as the ‘Iron Man of the Hoh’ opposed an extension to the New Deal’s Olympic National Park. He was reacting to the proposed absorption of the richly forested green slopes and valleys of the area into a national park, which would prevent the trees from ever being logged. Bringing his logging experience to bear, he commented laconically ‘that nature never preserves anything permanently – when it is ripe it falls and that timber is ripe now.’¹ One can almost picture him, rubbing his hands together, raising an axe, ready to perform the task.

Huelsdonk’s comments focus attention on a continuing division in outlook over conservation and American land. As in the Progressive era, so in the New Deal, there were those who believed forestry, national park, and reclamation policy should always be driven by economic imperatives, and others who felt social, spiritual, or environmental values should be given significant, equal, or greater weighting. Progressives wanted to give scope to those additional values. The following chapter looks at the later New Deal on the West Coast, and decides whether, at that time, Progressive era values – in any meaningful sense – shaped conservation policy.

In 1955 Richard Hofstadter rejected the strong link between the Progressive and New Deal eras, and argued instead that the New Deal was defined by a forward-looking pragmatism, while the commanding characteristic of the Progressive era involved an ideology rooted in 19th Century morality.² According to Hofstadter’s reading of the past, the ‘progressivism’ of the New Deal was very different from that of the Progressive era. Over conservation policy, however, even a devoted disciple of Hofstadter, Otis Graham Jr., was slow to deny a Progressive era influence during the New Deal, when it seemed so apparent. In the years that followed, though, the further in time the historiography moved from Hofstadter’s 1950s claims, the surer became the belief that indeed a disconnect existed in conservation between the Progressive and New Deal eras.

¹ *Port Angeles Evening News*, March 26, 1940, box 58, Warren Magnuson Papers, University of Washington, Allen Library, Seattle, WA

² Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 315.

This trend is further proof of Hofstadter's historiographical staying power. During the 1980s, Donald Worster, and his new western history followers, reinforced Hofstadter's contention of New Deal organizational pragmatism, and minimized the scale of Progressive era influence on conservation policy, regarding reclamation.³ More recently, perhaps the last redoubt of the view that a significant continuity between the periods in conservation is valid – the issue of America's forested wildernesses in National Forests and National Parks – fell to Hofstadter's paradigm. Sutter, in the new millennium, has largely refuted a link between the eras over conserving wilderness.⁴ So, conservation, on the West Coast during the later New Deal, is a good place to begin challenging a historiography that is still expanding consciously, or coincidentally, in the direction of Hofstadter's thinking. With that aim in mind, the issues of forestry, national parks, and reclamation will be successively discussed, showing how an ideological continuum persisted, which allowed individuals – both in the political background and foreground of the New Deal – to influence policy towards Progressive era beliefs.

Forestry

Since the Progressive era, the conservation issue of forestry constituted an abiding concern for policy-makers. In the 1900s, TR used federal government to set aside forested lands, prompted by Turner's warnings that lumbermen were in danger of destroying the wood resources of the US. That policy continued during Hoover's years in the 1920s, and was given fresh impetus under Roosevelt's presidency. As pointed out in the last chapter, Roosevelt possessed a strong interest in forestry derived from his Progressive era past, including his awareness that de-forestation was a major cause of soil erosion across America. He consulted Gifford Pinchot, TR's Chief Forester, on forest conservation during the 1930s, at a time when Pinchot's views had become more radical on account of the Great Depression and developments in the timber industry. Throughout the 1920s, logging interests failed to practice self-regulation or agree on federal regulation. Even before the Depression large surpluses were produced. By the time FDR was elected to power, the collapse of the building industry and domestic consumer demand, consequent on the Depression, created a 'super saturation' of timber in the market. The leading 'preservationist',

³ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: WW Norton, 1985), 256.

⁴ (Ed) Michael Lewis, *American Wilderness: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter by Paul Sutter, 'Putting Wilderness in Context: The Interwar Origins of the Modern Wilderness Idea.'

and wilderness advocate, Bob Marshall, and the Progressive era's most celebrated surviving 'wise user', Gifford Pinchot, communicated about the situation in forestry on the eve of Roosevelt's presidency. Marshall was an important figure in the political background of conservation policy up to 1937. Summarizing the recently published three thousand page Copeland Report from the Forest Service, Marshall wrote: 'Private forest ownership has broken down completely and ... the great and immediate need is public ownership of a large share of our timber lands.'⁵ Pinchot agreed, and requested more information from Marshall on the report, adding 'Roosevelt is immensely interested in forestry, and I think we have got a real chance.'⁶

Pinchot and Marshall represented different strands in progressive thought that dated back to the Progressive era, but, as their correspondence suggests, in fundamentals they were on the same side. Both men recognized the Progressive era necessity of limiting private and public logging to a level which would not destroy forest stocks – sustained yield production. Since Progressive times, Pinchot had believed government should control and regulate forest land on behalf of the people. Although Pinchot and Marshall were radicalized by the Depression neither deviated from a strongly government interventionist position over forestry. During the Progressive era, though, Pinchot's 'wise users' were perhaps more at odds with 'preservationist' advocates over 'wilderness' – America's wild public land. The 'wise users'' ideology pragmatically allowed some development of forest wilderness, for compelling economic reasons, while 'preservationists' pursued a more ideologically rigorous anti-development stance, resisting timber company demands. However, that difference in emphasis should not obscure the 'wise users'' and 'preservationists'' common commitment to wilderness protection. Likewise, the Depression of the New Deal era, which reduced demand for timber, and the timber industry's political clout, probably narrowed the ideological space between 'wise users' and 'preservationists' over forest wilderness. It also increased the prospects of 'preservationists' gaining influence over policy. Significantly, for the 'preservationists', their leader Marshall

⁵ Marshall to Pinchot, February 28, 1933, Robert Marshall Papers, box 9, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

⁶ Pinchot to Marshall, March 8, 1933, box 9, Marshall Papers

moved into the New Deal's political foreground in 1937, when he became the US Forest Service's first Director of Recreation and Lands.⁷

Marshall is worth discussing at some length as an influence on New Deal policy. Like Roosevelt he came from a privileged East Coast family, and as with Pinchot he had a university degree in forestry. Prior to the New Deal, Marshall had worked in the Forest Service. Between 1933 and 1937 he was at Ickes' Department of the Interior, with responsibility for forestry in the department's Bureau of Indian Affairs. This restless wilderness idealist thought nothing of hiking forty miles in a day through the mountainous and forested interiors of the West. The heavy rucksack he carried on these expeditions, which towered above his shoulders, marked him out as a man who was not easily discouraged. Marshall exemplified many of the criteria which will substantiate Progressive era-inspired connections with the New Deal. Firstly, he helped found a major pressure group, the Wilderness Society, that worked purposefully for the preservation of the West's forests and which clearly impacted on West Coast conservation policy in the later 1930s. Secondly, from early on in the New Deal, Marshall established good contacts with leading New Dealers like Harold Ickes, whose continued support throughout the decade was essential for promoting Marshall's 'preservationist' strand of progressive thinking. Thirdly, Marshall conceptualized his conservation views within the philosophical framework of the three tenets, aligning him with other Progressive era-inspired reformers.

Although many types of terrain existed in wilderness areas, from the inception of the Wilderness Society (1935), its journal *The Living Wilderness* singled out forests as its main concern. It defined 'wilderness' to be an area showing no sign of human development, and 'extensive wilderness' areas as where a walker 'may spend at least a week of travel...without crossing his own tracks.'⁸ Marshall's Wilderness Society was interested principally in two categories of forested public land, designated as wilderness in the vastness of the American continent. By far the bigger share was held in the National Forests, run by the Forest Service, a Department of Agriculture agency, and the rest came within the National Parks, part of Ickes' Interior Department. During the 1930s, Marshall gained experience in both government

⁷ (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 179.

⁸ *The Living Wilderness*, Vol. 1 No 1 (September 1935), p2 Marian Koshland Bioscience and Natural Resources Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

departments that were interested in forest wilderness. However, when he was appointed Director of Recreation and Lands in the Forest Service (May, 1937), he had charge of 80% of America's forest wilderness.⁹ Therefore, as the protection of forest wilderness represented the Wilderness Society's top priority, Marshall was in a good position to fulfil their aims. He articulated the importance of forested land in Wilderness Society thinking when he stated: 'This is the place where the majority of wilderness areas must be established if they are going to be established at all.'¹⁰

For our purposes, it is necessary to establish whether Marshall's Wilderness Society was motivated by the same concerns as its Progressive era counterparts. During the Progressive era, wilderness advocates were worried about the blighting of forest wilderness, most obviously by the timber industry. Recent literature by Paul Sutter has stressed, though, that the Wilderness Society came into being in the mid 1930s mainly as a response to a separate set of reasons. Most importantly, the interwar surge in automobile ownership led to 'motorized recreation', which stimulated road building and the construction of tourist facilities in National Parks and National Forests.¹¹ At the same time, the predominant ethos of the Forest Service, aimed at 'managing' forests, e.g. fire-breaks, look-out posts, and truck roads, helped to degrade wilderness areas. Finally, the New Deal itself accelerated these processes by placing emphasis on road building in Great Depression job creation projects, and using the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) youth employment force to supplement the Forest Service's management of forests.¹² Sutter's research on 'motorized recreation', and the like, has certainly helped deepen understanding about why the renewed wilderness movement of the mid to late 1930s came about. Furthermore, by showing that Nash's seminal environmental history *Wilderness in the American Mind* created a false polarity between 'wise users' and 'preservationists', Sutter has demonstrated their commonalities, especially during the New Deal.¹³

Even so, Sutter's distinction between Progressive era 'preservationists' opposed to 'resource development', and inter-war progressive 'preservationists' concerned about 'motorized

⁹ Marshall to Ickes, December 8, 1936, box 7, Marshall Papers

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 170.

¹² Ibid., 173.

¹³ Ibid., 178-179.

recreation' is perhaps too stark. Of course, motor car ownership became a new and highly significant threat to wilderness areas between the wars that had not existed, to any extent, in Progressive times. In 1910, there was only 1 automobile for every 265 Americans; by 1929 the figure has fallen to 1 in 5. However, this threat was added to that of resource development, and did not substitute for it. Indeed, Wilderness Society literature deems the old issue of resource development the greater menace to wilderness, at least on a *prima facie* basis, giving continuity between the Progressive era and the New Deal. The first copy of *The Living Wilderness* in 1935 presents the Wilderness Society's platform. Given most prominence in the platform, point one claims that man's 'mental resource of wilderness' is as vital as developing 'timber and other (physical) resources.' Therefore, the Wilderness Society's journal legitimizes its wilderness ethic in opposition to timber 'resource development', a backhanded compliment to resource development's centrality as a wilderness threat. 'Motorized recreation' is only dealt with afterwards, and implicitly. Point two refers to wilderness as a 'public utility', which must be protected from all 'commercialization', an inexact term that probably covers 'motorized recreation', but also 'resource development.'¹⁴

Placing Sutter's argument within Hofstadter's discontinuity discourse, 'motorized recreation' was merely an alternative type of recreation to 'wilderness recreation'. Consequently, according to Sutter's perspective, pragmatically the New Deal needed to accommodate both in conservation policy. However, in the Progressive era, there was an ideological divide between 'resource developers' stressing economic imperatives in forest wilderness, and 'preservationists' or 'wise users' who were, to a greater or lesser extent, committed to wilderness protection. If Sutter's own polarity between 'motorized recreation' and 'wilderness recreation' is questioned, and the 'Progressive era' divide between progressives and 'resource developers' is maintained, there was ideological continuity between the eras. Furthermore, reinforcing the continuity argument, Hofstadter's rejection of a 'Progressive era' moral impulse in the New Deal is disproved by 1930s preservationist Robert Sterling Yard's exhortation about a 'gospel of wilderness'.¹⁵ In truth, the language of moral uplift present in 1930s wilderness literature harks back to Progressive era wilderness advocate John Muir. For example, a preservationist in 1937

¹⁴ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. 1 No 1 (September 1935): 2.

¹⁵ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, (Fourth Edition) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 207.

wrote of wilderness: ‘To those who have eyes to see it ... it is a universe in which is being enacted the sublime drama of creation ..., a realm of ever changing beauty, a stimulus to creative thought and effort.’¹⁶

Other considerations help further clarify Wilderness Society thinking. When the timber industry was weakened largely due to the Depression, possibly the threat to wilderness of ‘motorized recreation’, which was increasing in any case, became relatively, but not absolutely, more important. Also, perhaps, ‘motorized recreation’, or New Deal interventions like the CCC, although they posed potential dangers to forest wilderness, did not represent the ‘authentic’ enemy of wilderness advocates. Instead, they might be viewed as part of a bigger progressive consensus, which the Wilderness Society sought to work with against their actual opponents – private resource developers - the timber industry. This aspect of the Wilderness Society will be explored more fully in connection with national parks. At this stage, though, the suggestion can be tentatively made that the Progressive era divide was maintained in the New Deal between a conservationist alliance, and interests representing private resource development.

Yet, for Marshall to influence government conservation policy, he required a politically sympathetic atmosphere within the New Deal. Indeed, when Marshall became the Forest Service’s Director of Recreation and Lands, he wrote a valedictory letter to Ickes, which shows that during his time at the Interior Department, Marshall had influenced Ickes towards a more ‘preservationist’ path over forest wilderness in national parks. Marshall wrote: ‘You have backed me personally in every proposition in defense of wilderness which I have put up to you, even though it meant on several occasions overruling your own Park Service.’¹⁷ Therefore, by 1937, within the government departments responsible for forest wilderness, Marshall had secured the allegiance of Ickes at the Interior Department, while he controlled this policy area himself in the Forest Service.

At a macro-level, there were strong signs too in 1937 that Roosevelt was poised to introduce a more co-ordinated policy on conservation. FDR planned to hold a Governors’ Conference on

¹⁶ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. III No 3 (December 1937)

¹⁷ Marshall to Ickes, May 4, 1937, box 7, Marshall Papers

Conservation in that year to help formulate environmental policy.¹⁸ This conservation conference can be placed within a progressive tradition. With much the same objectives, Theodore Roosevelt held the North American Conference on Conservation at the White House in 1909, and, similarly, Hoover convened the National Conference on Conservation in 1924. Moreover, still riding a wave of popularity from his triumphant 1936 presidential election, Roosevelt forwarded a Reorganization Bill in 1937, to convert his government departments into stronger units. As a result, Harold Ickes' Department of Interior would be transformed into the Department of Conservation. Under this proposal, he would retain the forests of the national parks, and acquire the Forest Service from the Department of Agriculture.¹⁹ This plan was controversial, drawing the fire of Henry Wallace, the Secretary of Agriculture, and Gifford Pinchot. Wallace wished to keep his department intact, while ex-Chief Forester Pinchot, even though he criticized the service's 1930s record on forestry protection, did not desire it to be taken over by an over-extended Interior Department. Nonetheless, for many 'preservationists', like Marshall, the prospect of having all forestry matters in a conservation department, especially if Ickes were minded to promote more forcefully their beliefs, had the great advantage that a single forest wilderness strategy could be implemented.

In the event, the high hopes of progressives during 1937 were not realized, at least in the short-term. The Reorganization Bill suffered congressional defeat, and had to be re-drafted, while the Governors' Conference was sidelined by other demands on the administration's time. Beyond these setbacks, the 'Roosevelt Recession' (1937-1938), and the numerous troubles of FDR's second term, threatened to derail the government's whole programme. Many historians believe that in the late 1930s the New Deal lost momentum, or even came to a halt. Not so, on the West Coast, where Marshall's encouragement of Ickes along a more 'preservationist' path bore fruit, 1938-40, and Marshall's activities at the Forest Service, 1937-1939, yielded tangible results for the Wilderness Society.

Marshall's work, at first, carried on that of Chief Forester Ferdinand Silcox, a strong ally of FDR in forestry. Silcox's Forest Service had already aided the 'preservationist' cause on the

¹⁸ Harold L Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1939*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 38-39, 59.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 41-43.

West Coast. During 1934, it set aside as a primitive area one million acres of wilderness in the Cascades mountain range of Washington State.²⁰ Again, in Washington, the following summer, under the same designation, a large section of the Olympic mountain forest was reserved.²¹ A ‘primitive area’ was the contemporary name for a wilderness area, under Regulation L-20. This regulation strongly favoured protecting areas from development, unless compelling economic needs could be proved – a typical arrangement under the Forest Service’s ‘wise user’ ethos. During 1937 alone, though, with Marshall and Silcox at the helm of policy, the Forest Service established three new primitive areas in the West. For instance, the Three Sisters Primitive Area set in the Oregon stretch of the Cascades consisted of 191,000 acres.²² During 1939, in this sympathetic political environment, Marshall was finally able to place Forest Service wilderness policy decisively on a preservationist path. Re-introducing the term ‘wilderness’ for ‘primitive’ area, under his U-Regulations, henceforward what was designated as wilderness would be fully protected from timber development, forever.²³ Importantly, for continuity between the 1900s and 1930s, Marshall showed in this measure that he considered ‘resource development’, not ‘motorized recreation’, to be his chief target.

Consequently, within the Forest Service, the ‘preservationists’ had a considerable impact on forest wilderness policy in the later New Deal. The narrowing of ideological space between ‘preservationists’ and ‘wise users’, that resulted from the timber industry’s relative weakness, helped them jointly commit to greater protection for forest wilderness. However, the ideological sympathetic environment created by the New Deal enabled ‘preservationists’ to exert influence, and attain power, over forest wilderness policy. Moreover, their ideological enemy remained, following on from the Progressive era, ‘resource developers’, although as Sutter rightly argues ‘motorized recreation’ became a significant competing recreational threat. These truths can be applied equally to national parks on the West Coast in the later New Deal. Furthermore, national park policy sheds light on progressivism’s longstanding ideological weaknesses, and the manner in which New Deal progressivism learned from the Progressive era in order to survive.

²⁰ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. I No1 (September 1935): 10.

²¹ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. II No 2 (November 1936): 4.

²² *The Living Wilderness* Vol. III No3 (December 1937): 15.

²³ (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 179.

National Parks

Harold Ickes, head of the Interior Department, exercised a guiding hand on national park policy, and was inclined towards a 'preservationist' stance. *The Living Wilderness* approvingly noted Ickes saying, 'I am tremendously interested in parks, particularly in those sections of them which are wilderness. I think we ought to keep as much wilderness in this country ... as we can.' The extent Ickes was influenced by Marshall is a matter of debate. Much of Ickes sympathy for the wilderness ethic was possibly induced by FDR, or self-generated, because of his Progressive era background, and, moreover, he inherited a department more open than others to 'preservationist' attitudes. However, that Ickes was influenced by Marshall towards a more 'preservationist' stance there is no doubt. Besides, regardless of the precise origins of Ickes' preference for Marshall's wilderness approach, it did link him undeniably to a 'preservationist' progressive tradition.

Ickes' vision for parks increased the likelihood of a 'preservationist' agenda. He stated: 'I am not in favour of building any more roads in the National Parks than we have to build So long as I am Secretary of the Interior ... I am going to use all of the influence I have to keep ... (them) in their natural state.' Ickes's comments on state parks, rather than federal national parks, were equally revealing. He wrote: 'state parks near centres of population ought to be largely recreational, but those farther removed should be cherished for their wilderness character.'²⁴ Of course, development of roads and tourist facilities in state parks close to urban centres would help divert some 'motorized recreation' from national parks. Nonetheless, Ickes' counsel that state parks deep in the countryside should be protected as wilderness possibly indicates a wider commitment to wilderness, beyond his immediate departmental responsibilities. Certainly, Ickes sustained his interest in forest wilderness throughout the New Deal. For example, Marshall wrote to Ickes in March, 1937, asking him to give out a press release on 'your splendid remarks in behalf of wilderness preservation.'²⁵ However, on the West Coast was New Deal national park policy in the late 1930s able to translate Ickes' and the Wilderness Society's aims into reality?

²⁴ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. 1 No 1 (September 1935): 12. Ickes' speech to CCC, February, 1935

²⁵ Marshall to Ickes, March 10, 1937, box 7, Marshall Papers

Two national parks were founded on the West Coast in the later New Deal – the Olympic National Park, Washington State (1938), and California’s Kings Canyon National Park (1940). They are often regarded as isolated examples of success for the New Deal, belaboured by opposition. Indeed, only the active support of Republican minority leader Senator Charles McNary of Oregon, who strongly approved of tree preservation, ensured their legislative success. As national park measures, Sutter typically considers them exceptional for a Park Service still unsure whether to accept fully ‘preservationist’ nostrums.²⁶ However, from the Wilderness Society’s perspective, the foundation of these national parks was not auxiliary to its aims, but central to them. Furthermore, in terms of their Progressive era past, their evolution during the New Deal, and the issues they raise about progressivism, an analysis of these national parks contributes to the continuity argument.

The Olympic National Park, west of Seattle, expanded the existing Mount Olympus National Monument established by TR in 1909. During 1935, Washington Congressman Monrad Wallgren attempted to steer a bill through the House to create a national park on the Olympic Peninsula, but it was held up in Congress. In important respects, the stalled Olympic National Park Bill helped incentivize ‘preservationists’ to set up the Wilderness Society. The new society was in no doubt that the bill was delayed because ‘local lumbermen opposed’, which at once alerts us to ‘resource development’ as the main wilderness threat.²⁷ Thereupon, in *The Living Wilderness* ‘preservationists’ declared a ‘national campaign’ to protect the Olympic Peninsula forest wilderness, and argued their case from a number of angles. For instance, one article at the end of 1937 justified the importance of the Olympic forest because the majority of Roosevelt Elk – 8,000 animals – grazed in its boundaries – Oregon and California accounted for the remainder.²⁸ The original Mount Olympus National Monument was established in large part to protect this endangered species, and its natural habitat during the summer – the Olympic Mountains. Extension of the national monument into a national park would encompass the mountains forested western slopes down to the Olympic Peninsula, where the herds of Roosevelt Elk wintered.

²⁶ (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 182.

²⁷ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. II No 2 (November 1936)

²⁸ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. III No 3 (December 1937)

However, an article titled ‘The Third Greatest American Tree’ explained most trenchantly the importance of the Olympic forest in ‘preservationist’ thinking.²⁹ The Wilderness Society elevated forest wilderness above other wilderness types. *The Living Wilderness* article singled out three tree varieties and their locations for greatest protection: the sequoia *gigantea* found in Yosemite, Sequoia, and Grant National Parks, as well as elsewhere; the Coast Redwoods of the California State Parks, which were under special restrictions; the Douglas fir of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula. As the Redwoods were already protected, the ‘preservationist’ policy priority was consolidating the sequoia forest holdings, and placing the Douglas fir forest in a National Forest or National Park. Of the men who set up the Wilderness Society, Marshall, Leopold, and MacKaye all had degrees in forestry, and had worked for the Forest Service. Robert Sterling Yard, the other founder of the society was keen to protect only the best examples of US wilderness – in order to validate its unique status.³⁰ The preoccupations of the founders of the society inevitably led to the Olympic Peninsula forest being given their highest priority.

In fact, for Marshall especially, the Olympic National Park represented an apotheosis of his ideas, which the Wilderness Society duly reflected. Like Muir before him, Marshall was an avid wilderness hiker. He argued Sequoia and Redwood national or state park land could be ‘walked across in at most a few hours.’ Conversely, Marshall wrote: ‘It is only here in the Olympics where one can escape for days in the glory of the most magnificent forests ever created.’³¹ In the late 1920s, Marshall had added a PhD in Botany to his forestry degree. Ecology, a branch of Botany, had become a prominent academic discipline in the Progressive era. Victor Shelford’s Ecological Society of America (ESA) went back to 1915. The ESA campaigned on ‘preserving representative areas of particular ecological communities.’³² The Olympic Peninsula Douglas fir forest was a good instance of just such an ecological community. Sutter claims the ESA’s influence on wilderness policy was ‘minimal.’³³ However, the tenor of articles in *The Living Wilderness*, Marshall’s own intellectual interests, and the presence of the ecologically-minded Aldo Leopold in the Wilderness Society, suggest ecological concerns were important in the Olympic National Park campaign. An article in *The Living Wilderness* showed the biodiversity

²⁹ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. II No2 (November 1936)

³⁰ (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 181.

³¹ Olympic National Park memorandum by Marshall, 1937, subseries3.2, carton 3, Marshall Papers

³² (Ed) Lewis, *American Wilderness*, 177.

³³ *Ibid.*

of the Olympic Peninsula forest, two thirds Douglas fir, but there ‘many species meet and mingle, each at its maximum height, color and beauty.’³⁴ Marshall and 1930s ‘preservationists’ also inherited a Progressive era ‘natural beauty’ aesthetic, for instance, from the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS), which became a national movement during 1900.³⁵ In a wider cultural context, the awe-stricken wonder that Progressive era ‘preservationists’ and Marshall experienced before the monumental ‘giant trees’ of the West Coast invoked a Native American tradition centuries old. Writing about the Olympic forest area, *The Living Wilderness* described, ‘the unequalled splendour of ... virgin streams rolling in the ... freshness of nature through ... forests towering 250 feet into the air.’³⁶ Accordingly, Marshall’s interest in extensive wilderness, unique tracts of forest, and pristine, beautiful settings – ideas which connected him with the Progressive era – came together over the Olympic National Park. The wilderness ideas which inspired him were embodied in policy.

The legislative path to founding the Olympic National Park was tangled. Wallgren’s first bill in 1935 had called for a 735,000 acre park. When this proposal provoked widespread local opposition, Wallgren, whose constituency included part of the Olympic Peninsula, compromised. In his second Olympic Park bill, February, 1937, he envisaged a national park of 648,000 acres. However, this bill failed to meet with federal government approval. Jonathan Pebworth has shown how the New Deal administration both manoeuvred Wallgren into introducing the first bill, and dissuaded him from sticking to the second bill.³⁷ Therefore, in March, 1938, Wallgren introduced a third bill which eventually reproduced the smaller park of the second bill, with the ‘rider’ that FDR was given the power, by proclamation, to increase the national park to 898,292 acres.³⁸ This bill became law, and, as subsequent events proved Roosevelt fully intended to use its proclamation powers. Earlier in his life, Wallgren won the US amateur billiards championship.³⁹ In the national park legislation that the New Deal secured, Wallgren would

³⁴ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. II No 2 (November 1936): 6.

³⁵ Ian Tyrrell, ‘Transnational Creation of National Space in the Progressive Era’ *The Journal of American Studies* Vol. 46 No 1 (February 2012): 8.

³⁶ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. 1 No 1 (September 1935):11.

³⁷ Jonathan Pebworth, ‘Evergreen Struggle: Federal Wilderness Preservation, Populism, and Liberalism in Washington State, 1935-1984’ (PhD thesis, University of Oregon, June, 2003), 50, and 90-91.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

have appreciated the preservationists' skill. As happens in billiards, they had set one ball rolling – the popular smaller park – to strike the ball they wanted to pocket – the larger park.

The policy outcome of the Olympic National Park Act was an example of Roosevelt, (arguably the Progressive era ideologue), deploying 'his personal policy-making power in the later New Deal era.'⁴⁰ Pebworth stresses both the commitment of FDR and Ickes to preservation throughout the Olympic Park episode, but also the role of the New York City-based Emergency Conservation Committee (ECC) in helping to shape policy.⁴¹ The ECC provides another perspective on the Olympic National Park, although the Wilderness Society, which Pebworth does not discuss, enjoyed an expertise perhaps lacking in the ECC. Rather than mere ECC idealists the leadership of the Wilderness Society, while equally dedicated preservationists, possessed direct forestry or national park experience.

Local opposition remained intense to both the 1937 and 1938 bills, and issues rehearsed in 1937 were repeated in 1938. As a generality, the opposition charged that Washington DC and rich Easterners were imposing their will on Washington State. How preservationists reacted to this opposition tells us much about what they conceived to be the principal threat to the national park. Inevitably, any major federal government intervention impinged on 'states' rights,' and one critic of the Olympic National Park pointed out that already 'the Federal Government ... is holding more than a third of the land of our State.'⁴² Washington's timber industry was a key element in the state's economy. Even after decades of extensive logging 22.3% of Washington was still forest in 1937.⁴³ Action which jeopardized the state's premier industry – despite a 'super-saturation' of timber on the market – unleashed a storm of protest from lumber interests. Crucially, logging was banned in national parks, so the creation of the Olympic National Park would have immediate impact on the timber industry.

The Washington Planning Council voiced the opposition's main concerns. Washington State's Planning Council – a state government organization – dated back to the early New Deal, when economic planning was the vogue in federal and state government. It held hearings on the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

⁴¹ Ibid., 40-42, 90-91.

⁴² State senator James Dailey to Magnuson, May 7, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁴³ Forest Service statistics sent to Magnuson, March 9, 1937, box 20, Magnuson Papers

proposed Olympic National Park, in an attempt to pre-empt Wallgren's second bill. The hearings expressed timber industry opposition, but then moved onto another 'resource development' theme. Reference was made to 'numerous great deposits' of manganese found within the borders of the proposed park. The hearings recorded: 'Manganese is one of the so-called strategic metals essential to the ferro-alloy industry and vital to national defense.'⁴⁴ On top of intractable economic depression, late 1930s America confronted disturbing foreign policy dangers. The rise of fascism in Europe, especially Nazi Germany, caused apprehensions. On the West Coast, though, perhaps a greater menace was perceived, across the Pacific Ocean, from the aggressive militarism of Japan, and anti-capitalist communist Russia. Against this background, the Planning Council advised prohibiting potential manganese mining areas from inclusion in a national park. As most US manganese supplies were imported, the point made by the Planning Council was not frivolous, and continued to be pressed in 1937.

During 1937, after Wallgren introduced his second bill, attacks on the proposed park broadened. At first, in March, 1937, state senator James Dailey reinforced the Washington Planning Council's complaints about the 'resource development' issues of timber felling and manganese mining.⁴⁵ However, in May, the Northwestern Conservation League charged that influential Olympic Peninsula residents attached to the Planning Council were pushing the anti-national park agendas of 'those who want timber, those who want the minerals, and those who want roads ... to exploit the tourist possibilities.'⁴⁶ By October, the Washington Planning Council had added yet another demand to undermine the park, saying, 'municipal and industrial ... water power (dams) ... should be permitted even within the park area, if necessary.'⁴⁷ Summarizing these various points in November, the Planning Council stated the national park should have no more than 'an ample area of big trees,' and it expected 'controlled use of other resources.'⁴⁸

Marshall's response to this array of 'economic sectional' forces revealed what he considered the principal threat to the proposed new park. Two memoranda from 1937 by Marshall about the

⁴⁴ Hearings of Washington Planning Council, October 17, 1936, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁴⁵ Dailey to Magnuson, March 18, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁴⁶ League Secretary Margaret Thompson to Congressman Rene De Rouen, May 5, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁴⁷ Washington Planning Council to Magnuson, October 27, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁴⁸ Washington Planning Council to Magnuson, November 6, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

Wallgren Bill provide the evidence. In the first, he discussed the merits of establishing the proposed park area under Forest Service or Park Service management. In doing so, he suggested Congress should strengthen Forest Service powers over the Olympic wilderness, to match those of the Park Service. Provided that happened, though, he judged either agency could effectively run the park, because they were both capable of fulfilling his number one requirement, to keep the park area ‘free from logging.’⁴⁹

Earlier in the memorandum, Marshall considered timber worker job losses resulting from the new park. He argued: ‘The 6,632 people who would lose employment if the sustained yield of the proposed forest were withdrawn would, from a national standpoint, be unnoticeable when compared with the 9 million people unemployed in the whole country.’⁵⁰ The callousness of this remark should be noted. In arguing that thousands of redundancies were ‘unnoticeable’ from ‘a national standpoint,’ Marshall omitted to say they would be deeply noticed by those affected. Marshall, in fact, knew that any substantial Olympic Park bill would have significant consequences for the timber industry. On the Olympic Peninsula two timber products were important. Aberdeen, in Grays Harbor, was the centre of wood production, and sawmills there relied on Douglas fir. This traditional industry was severely weakened by the Depression. In Port Angeles pulp and paper mills had been set up in the 1920s, which used western hemlock. Despite the adverse economic conditions, this new industry was flourishing. The timber industry was united in its implacable opposition to all the park proposals. For example, the final legislation of 1938 establishing the Olympic National Park, obviously threatened Douglas fir and western hemlock logging. More insidiously, the powers given Roosevelt to enlarge the park, created economic insecurity, jeopardizing paper industry investment, while Douglas fir loggers suspected the president would appropriate large tracts of Olympic rainforest into the park. The Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce complained: ‘Six pulp and paper mills were induced to locate on the Olympic Peninsula ... by the US forestry department ... to have available a continuous (timber) supply ... for all time.’⁵¹ Of course, the large lumber companies attacked the proposed law. More worryingly – from a New Deal perspective – the Olympic Peninsula Lumber and Sawmill Workers local, an American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliate,

⁴⁹ Olympic National Park memorandum by Marshall, 1937, subseries 3.2, carton 3, Marshall Papers

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 13, 1938

representing sawmill workers, also opposed it. Conscious that wilderness advocates were often well-to-do Easterners, they protested: ‘The passage of this bill will purchase a rich man’s park with the laboring man’s payroll.’⁵²

However, Marshall was not uncaring of the timber workers’ plight. He was a humane reformer. Just before 1937, Marshall had written to Ickes referring to the three tenets of progressivism as ‘the three battles.’⁵³ He considered the ‘preservation of civil liberties’ was essential to achieve social justice, as well as thinking socialism should replace monopoly capitalism, and that wilderness areas must be preserved. He had elaborated on these beliefs in his treatise *A Practical Program for Economic Recovery* and confirmed them during an interview he participated in with Ickes.⁵⁴ In essence, he was greatly troubled by the societal ills expressed in the three tenets of progressivism, and wanted greater protection for the working class. However, preservation of forest wilderness was his core belief. Therefore, it seems likely that he was prepared to compromise other principles – like social justice aims – to secure the principle he clung to most fervently – that of wilderness preservation.

The historian Mowry contends that Progressive era ideology – which embraced different classes, economic interests, ethnic groups, and US geographical areas – was fatally flawed, because it claimed to speak for conflicting interests and loyalties.⁵⁵ He maintained that if progressives achieved power they would have to favour one side against another. The example of Marshall from the 1930s demonstrates Mowry’s contention in practice – not that every progressive would have made Marshall’s choice. However, the stark choice forced upon him, between forest wilderness preservation, and social justice, acted like the ‘Bloody Question’ given to English Catholics during Elizabethan times, and in his decision Marshall’s truest loyalties were laid bare.*

⁵² Lumber and Sawmill Workers to Magnuson, April, 1937, box 11, Magnuson Papers

⁵³ Marshall to Ickes, December 8, 1936, box 7, Marshall Papers

⁵⁴ Treatise by Marshall, series 2, carton 2, Marshall Papers; Transcript of interview with Ickes and Marshall, December 30, 1937, box 7, Marshall Papers

⁵⁵ Michael Rogin, ‘Progressivism and the California Electorate,’ *Journal of American History* Vol. 55 No 2 (September 1968):313; see George E. Mowry, *California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951)

*A question posed to English Catholics: whose side would they take if a Catholic Power invaded, - their own Country’s or Rome’s?

Certainly, the issues were not straightforward. Many Washingtonians were hostile to the timber industry. Not only had the lumbermen often ruined, with cut-over land, the aesthetic quality of the environment, but also its economic potential. As Wallgren knew, the Olympic Peninsula experienced serious flooding partly because of de-forestation. Consequently, the New Deal was able to build up a progressive consensus, which accepted that, as a result of creating the park, the timber industry would be weakened. Washington Senators – Homer Bone and Lewis Schwellenbach – supported the park. Congressman John Main Coffee was an enthusiast for it. He illustrated how preservationist thought and limited ‘motorized recreation’ were not incompatible approaches. Coffee promoted the new Narrows Bridge road link to his constituents, because it would make ‘Tacoma ... the gateway ... to ... the Olympic National Park.’ The urban and radical Democrat Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF) backed the park, while the rural Washington State Grange, representing small farmers, endorsed it. Even the Olympic Peninsula local of the timber worker International Woodworkers of America (IWA) championed the new park.⁵⁶ The IWA was a Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) affiliate. New Dealers actively encouraged the breakaway CIO labour movement, which competed with the older, more conservative, AFL for membership. It is possible that research might establish that CIO support involved a hidden agenda to the Olympic National Park. Perhaps New Dealers – including Marshall – were less concerned about job losses because they impacted more heavily on AFL members, rather than the CIO.

Furthermore, the second memorandum from 1937 furnishes the clinching proof that, in the case of the Olympic National Park, notwithstanding Sutter’s argument, Marshall’s Wilderness Society regarded timber ‘resource development’, not ‘motorized recreation’, as the main threat to forest wilderness. In fact, arguably, Marshall was willing to contemplate limited motorized recreation’ in the vicinity of the proposed park, as a lesser evil than timber ‘resource development.’ The memorandum issued by Marshall in the name of the Wilderness Society stated: ‘ It is highly probable that a considerable part of the unemployment and the income and taxes which will be lost to the Olympics through reducing ... sustained yield forestry ... will be made up by the additional tourist trade which an Olympic National Park should bring to the

⁵⁶ Grange letter to Senator Homer Bone, November 19, 1937; letter from Wallgren to Bone mentioning IWA support, May 17, 1938, box 24, Homer Bone Papers, Collins Memorial Library, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA

region ... The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has probably brought far more money into that region than the operations of the lumber ... companies.⁵⁷ Only some compromises with ‘motorized recreation’ could deliver these significant economic benefits, but intrusive ‘skyline drives’ were judged unacceptable. One such road, dominating the skyline, Marshall had blocked in the Great Smoky National Park. Marshall’s sentiments connected him directly to John Muir, his progressive predecessor, and demonstrate Progressive era-New Deal continuity. Over the Yosemite National Park, as Righter has recently indicated, Muir made concessions to ‘motorized recreation.’ He did so, in order to argue that tourist revenue would offset the economic consequences of banning the HEP ‘resource development’ at Hetch Hetchy Dam.⁵⁸ Similarly, over the Olympic National Park, Marshall was prepared to consider concessions to ‘motorized recreation.’ His position allowed him to argue that tourist revenue would offset the economic consequences of curbing timber ‘resource development’ on the Olympic Peninsula. Therefore, New Deal preservationist opinion, and timber industry protest, 1937- 1938, demonstrated that timber ‘resource development’ constituted the main threat to the Olympic National Park, not ‘motorized recreation.’

The Kings Canyon National Park (1940), like the Olympic National Park, took years to become established in the final years of the New Deal. As with the national park in Washington’s Olympic Mountains and Peninsula, the idea to found a Californian national park at Kings Canyon, about midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, stretched back to the Progressive era. During 1911, the Acting Superintendent of the Sequoia National Park suggested inclusion of adjoining National Forest land within the park’s boundaries, to unite America’s main giant sequoia groves.⁵⁹ In 1918, Stephen Mather, founder of the Park Service, ‘studied this country carefully,’ including Kings Canyon and the Tehipite Valley, the latter considered the ‘loveliest canyon ... after Yosemite in the US.’ He ‘fought for the rest of his life to preserve’ this area for its aesthetic value and protect the stands of giant sequoia it held.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Wilderness Society memorandum by Marshall, 1937, subseries 3.2, carton 3, Marshall Papers

⁵⁸ Robert W Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 106-107.

⁵⁹ Memorandum for Silcox by Assistant Chief of Forest Service, subseries 3.2 Folder 26, Marshall Papers

⁶⁰ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. IV No 4 (March 1939)

Eventually, during the New Deal, the old Progressive Senator Hiram Johnson of California introduced a bill to create a national park in 1935, which consolidated the giant sequoia forests. It left the contiguous Sequoia National Park separate, but more important groves of giant sequoia nearby were placed within a new park. The defeat of his Kings Canyon National Park Bill the same year as the failure of Wallgren's first Olympic Park Bill (1935), helped energize preservationists to set up the Wilderness Society. The society's campaign to create the two national parks followed a similar trajectory. The failure of the two bills in 1935 to found parks jolted preservationists into campaigning, through their Wilderness Society, for new legislation aimed at creating national parks. The national parks were a top priority, because they comprised forests containing two of the three 'giant trees' of the West Coast. The final legislation for each national park built on existing federally-owned park or national monument land.

In February 1939, Representative Gearhart of California introduced the John Muir-Kings Canyon National Park Bill. The legislation brought together into one national park giant sequoia forests that extended from the Kings Canyon to the Redwood Mountains. They included between the two perimeter points the Grant National Park groves, and the world's largest giant sequoia forest in the Redwood Canyon.⁶¹ Like the Olympic National Park Act the previous year, the timber industry was loud in its denunciation of the proposed park, which prohibited logging. However the hot, sunny climate of California added extra complications to the Kings Canyon Bill. Washington's Olympic Peninsula was a land of grey clouds and 'rainforest,' in contrast to California's vivid blue sky and dry soils. Consequently, Californians, for their survival and prosperity, needed to trap water in reservoirs, or pump underground water to the surface, using power from hydro-electric power (HEP) dams – a process known as 'supplementary irrigation.' Although water 'resource development' was an issue in parts of Washington, it bulked much larger in relation to California economic sectionalism. During the 1910s, Mather had identified power and reclamation 'resource development' as being major threats to preservation in the Kings Canyon area.⁶² In 1939-40, the preservationists' ability to reconcile the various competing claims on the Kings Canyon country, by forging a 'progressive consensus,' ensured their national park came into being.

⁶¹ Department of Interior press release, February 14, 1939, subseries 3.2 Folder 26, Marshall Papers

⁶² *The Living Wilderness* Vol. IV No 4 (March 1939)

The details of the Gearhart Bill showed how shrewdly New Deal preservationists ‘kept on board’ potential opposition from water ‘resource developers’ and ‘motorized recreation.’ A press release from Ickes’ Interior Department (February, 1939), expressed these aspects. The proposed Pine flat irrigation reservoir on the Kings River was left outside the park, while planned ‘power dams’ and their ‘supplementary irrigation wells’ would be located ‘on the edge of the park.’ If the dams went ahead, they would not be included in the park. Should they be abandoned, President Roosevelt could add the land to the park by proclamation.⁶³ Bearing in mind the damaging early 20th Century Hetch Hetchy Dam controversy, and progressive ‘wise user’ support for reclamation, these sensible concessions held together a ‘progressive consensus.’ Accordingly, the Interior Department’s press release announced that ‘irrigation interests support the park.’⁶⁴

Similarly, preservationists were able to contain ‘motorized recreation’ by ‘limiting roads to the valley of the South Fork of the Kings (River)’. They further limited ‘recreational development’ by stipulating tourist ‘buildings may be constructed only with Government funds.’⁶⁵ At the start of 1940, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce attacked the Kings Canyon Bill, accusing Ickes of ‘attempting to control ... natural resources by getting them into the National Park System ... so ... Ickes ... will have a whip hand on all matters touching dams, power sites, mining, forestry, timber etc.’⁶⁶ On the contrary, Ickes had made concessions to water ‘resource development,’ leaving land designated for it outside the park. ‘Motorized recreation’ was minimized, but the possibility of some tourist development not entirely ruled out. These decisions might be viewed as in line with Hofstadter’s pragmatic New Deal. Equally, they can be considered as constructing a progressive consensus where wilderness preservation, ‘wise user’ reclamation, and regulated tourism, could be welded together to protect unique forests against imminent, or future, threat of timber ‘resource development.’ In the event, minus the appellation of ‘John Muir’ in front of it, the Kings Canyon National Park Bill became law in March, 1940.

⁶³ Department of Interior press release, February 14, 1939, subseries 3.2 Folder 26, Marshall Papers

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Frank Doherty to Hiram Johnson, January 8, 1940, box 35, Hiram Johnson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

California's two senators, Sheridan Downey and Hiram Johnson, supported the Kings Canyon legislation. Both were responsive – quite possibly electorally beholden – to agricultural interests, which stridently opposed federal government restrictions, or bans on access, to precious water rights. Frank Doherty, attorney for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, became an increasingly influential figure in the political background of Johnson. He lent his support to the park.⁶⁷ By the late 1930s, the old Progressive Johnson had fallen out with Roosevelt, judging him over-powerful and too willing to use his power. Johnson's support of the Kings Canyon Bill, therefore, amounted to an exception at a time when he was opposing practically any New Deal legislation. Johnson's and Doherty's support was testimony to the effectiveness of the concessions to water 'resource development' in the Kings Canyon Bill. For example, Doherty, far more right wing than Johnson's previous Californian advisors, attended the 1940 Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce meeting at which the national park proposal was attacked. Yet, he repudiated the Chamber of Commerce's attitude, and commended Johnson for supporting the national park.⁶⁸

By 1940, the New Dealers on the West Coast could be pleased with the advances made for forest wilderness through the realization of the Olympic and Kings Canyon National Parks in Washington and California respectively. The preservationists' joy, though, was tinged with sadness. Bob Marshall did not see the culmination of the preservationists' campaign. In October, 1939, Marshall had enjoyed a convivial dinner with keen New Deal supporter, Gardner Jackson. He was recovering from a health-scare, which Jackson put down to Marshall's 'long hikes, coupled with his constant mental activity.'⁶⁹ Later that night, he left Jackson's home in Washington DC, and took the midnight train to New York. On the train he suffered a heart attack, and was found dead in his sleeping car the following morning. Marshall had loved to roam freely over the West's wildernesses. In a strange twist of fate, he died in a cramped sleeping berth on a train bound for the crowded Eastern metropolis of New York. John Main Coffee, the pro-preservationist Washington Congressman articulated the esteem Marshall was

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gardner Jackson to John Main Coffee, October 3, 1939, Gardner Jackson Papers, box 15, Franklin D Roosevelt Library , Hyde Park, NY

held in by many West Coast progressives for his wilderness work. He commented: ‘Bob, one of the finest fellows into which God ever breathed life.’⁷⁰ Despite Marshall’s death, his legacy seemed secure by 1940, and, in many respects, the New Deal consolidated preservationist gains that year.

The Queets Corridor Episode

In January, 1940, the fears of the lumber industry materialized. Roosevelt added 187,411 acres of rainforest to the Olympic National Park. Then at the end of March, the same month the Kings Canyon Bill became law, Ickes used residual powers from the defunct National Industrial Relations Act (NIRA) to enlarge the park again. Along the Queets River, he created a narrow two mile wide, sixteen mile long corridor of parkland, which widened when it reached the Pacific Ocean, and took in a fifty mile strip of coastline. The coastal area included scenic Lake Ozette, and envisioned a ‘parkway’ up to Cape Flattery. Ickes’ action potentially increased access to the Olympic National Park because of the parkway, and allowed limited ‘motorized recreation.’ Yet again, the concession to ‘motorized recreation’ was a small price paid for a big preservationist gain – this time the Queets Corridor.

These Olympic Park extensions were, nonetheless, high risk. Supporters of the park on the Olympic Peninsula were chiefly concerned with economic improvement for their locality. For instance, the *Port Angeles Evening News*, fully endorsed by its publisher Charles Webster backed both the 1937 and 1938 Wallgren bills, but their support was predicated on the need to accommodate wilderness, timber, and ‘motorized recreation’ interests. By 1940, the New Deal appeared unsympathetic to the Olympic Peninsula’s timber industry, and, as events showed, although Webster’s paper stayed supportive of the New Deal it was more critical than on previous occasions. In an election year, the Administration was naturally apprehensive if even its local allies began criticizing New Deal initiatives.

Significantly, the Wilderness Society had urged full federal protection over the Queets River area since, at least, November, 1936, when an article in *The Living Wilderness* discussed the

⁷⁰ Coffee to Jackson, November 25, 1939, box 15, Jackson Papers

issue. At that stage, prior to the successful Olympic National Park Bill, discussion concentrated on the Forest Service, which had reserved in 1935 a large part of the Olympic forest. The article disclosed, however, that the reserved area was ‘lacking in Douglas fir stands of the higher class ... On the west the entire super-forested valleys of the (adjacent) Bagachiel, Hoh and Queets, which show the Douglas fir in ...full perfection ... are conspicuously not included.’⁷¹ Marshall kept up the pressure, when he became Director of Recreation and Lands in the Forest Service. A memorandum dated June 1937, from, or influenced by, Marshall, stated: ‘I would ... extend the north west corner of the primitive area on the Queets, north and in a direct line to the present monument including the largest body of fir and spruce located in the entire Queets drainage.’⁷² Therefore, Ickes’ action in 1940 to incorporate the Queets Valley into the Olympic National Park responded to a specific demand by the Wilderness Society pressure group. (Later in the 1940s, the Bogachiel Valley was taken over by the Forest Service, and during the 1950s became part of the Olympic National Park).

In this way, the Olympic National Park extensions of 1940 fulfilled Wilderness Society aims, and conceded limited ‘motorized recreation.’ They represented a penultimate example, to cite against Sutter’s contention, that forest wilderness was being preserved primarily from timber ‘resource development’ rather than ‘motorized recreation.’ As with preservationist sentiment in the Progressive era, preservationists during the New Deal were willing to make some limited concessions to ‘motorized recreation’ to achieve federally controlled protection of the most important wilderness – in this case prize Douglas fir forest. The preservationists’ traditional foe remained the timber industry. ‘Motorized recreation’ was far from being the preservationists’ enemy, and, if limited by restrictions, could offer ‘intellectual cover’ – because of its economic benefits – for their actual goal: ‘wilderness recreation.’

However, the Queets Valley extension assumed a much larger significance – albeit briefly - which placed in jeopardy not only preservationist objectives, but also the New Deal itself. 1939 to 1940 were years of unusual ideological tumult. In foreign affairs, the Nazi-Soviet Neutrality Pact, August, 1939, astounded democratic political establishments. The two diametrically opposite ideologies – Nazism and Communism – reached an agreement to avoid war. Having

⁷¹ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. II No 2 (November 1936)

⁷² Forest Service memorandum, June 4, 1937, subseries 3.2, carton 3, Marshall Papers

apparently reconciled their differences, Germany and Russia were united against representative democracy – America’s political system – and free to expand without being countered by the other. In September, 1939, Germany invaded the ‘Polish Corridor,’ a contested territory, which gave Poland access to the sea. Germany’s rapid occupation of Poland, using the fearsome tactic of blitzkrieg, plunged Europe into war, and reverberated around the world. Two months later, in November, 1939, Russia invaded Finland. Airborne troops led the attack, the first time in history troops had parachuted into battle.⁷³ The war in Finland was inconclusive over the winter of 1939-40, but during the spring came fresh offensives by both aggressors. In March, 1940, the Russians seized Finnish territory near Leningrad. On April 9, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. These events had repercussions even in distant Washington State.

Meanwhile, domestically, the presidential election of November, 1940 would set the USA on a momentous ideological path. Either the New Deal would survive in essentials, or expand. Alternatively, a Republican, or conservative Democrat, president might dismantle some, or all, of it. In the spring of 1940, it was unclear whether Roosevelt would run for an unheard-of third term. If he did, and won, America would have, arguably, the same ideology, and certainly key personnel, like Ickes, holding power for over a decade. Through newspaper and radio reports, 1939-40, the public were conscious of Hitler’s blitzkrieg in the ‘Polish Corridor,’ Russia’s invasion of Finland, and the ideological uncertainty hanging over American politics. In this febrile atmosphere, Ickes incorporated the ‘Queets Corridor’ into the Olympic National Park.

Ickes’ action soon became a focus of fierce protest and opposition, from March to April, 1940. In part, the opposition was due to local issues, but additionally shot through with the foreign affairs and domestic tensions already mentioned. As accusations flew thick and fast against the national park extension, we can observe the ideological problems the New Deal was exposed to during this election year. For example, opponents of the Queets Corridor were adept at turning against the New Deal its own progressive ideas. The Queets Corridor incident was about ‘contested ideas’ as well as a ‘contested space.’ Yet unlike the Progressive era, 1919-20, reform was not halted in the closing years of the New Deal. In a number of crises that occurred, 1939-40, over the three tenets of progressivism, New Dealers did not lose the argument, or surrender

⁷³ Steven J Zaloga and James Loop, *Soviet Bloc Elite Forces* (Oxford and New York: Osprey Publishing, 1985), 5.

to un-progressive policies. Instead, in the instance of the Queets Corridor, they made small concessions for bigger objectives, and were able to withstand attacks, which called into question the New Deal's public image.

New Deal reformers, like those in the Progressive era, used Turner's frontier thesis as intellectual justification for federal intervention to protect wilderness. Wilderness provided the archetypical frontier experience, so preserving these conditions allowed modern Americans to re-connect with their 'rugged individualism,' which Turner claimed defined US character. However, this argument could be turned against the New Deal. In the Queets Corridor, a small number of pioneer settlers opposed their territory being taken into the national park. They owned land, which they had 'carved out of the wilderness at great personal labor and hardship.'⁷⁴ The settlers feared being evicted from their homes, so the federal government could create wilderness conditions along the Queets River. The message was abundantly clear. These opponents of New Deal reform believed they were the authentic custodians of America's frontier spirit, not the preservationists who were often affluent Easterners. They resented 'being forced to sell their homesteads back to Uncle Sam "for the benefit of a few rich tourists," as one put it.'⁷⁵ In this manner, the frontier thesis, which was employed to legitimize New Deal initiatives over forest wilderness, could be used to de-legitimize them.

The *Port Angeles Evening News* reported how hostile local papers attempted to subvert other stereotypes of the New Deal. Roosevelt's New Deal, and previous progressive administrations, placed great emphasis on helping the poor and unemployed - the 'forgotten man' - rather than the more affluent. Likewise, from TR onwards, progressives were interested in uniting the sections of America, bringing Easterners and Westerners together, especially as historically the East was richer than the West. FDR was particularly proud that the young men of the CCC, mainly from Eastern cities, had succeeded in improving the West's environment. For example between 1937 and 1938 there were fifty CCC camps in the forests of Washington State.⁷⁶ However, undoubtedly, the Olympic National Park resulted in thousands of job losses in the timber industry, and the Queets Corridor might lead to settlers in that territory being evicted. In

⁷⁴ *Port Angeles Evening News*, March 21, 1940, box 58, Magnuson Papers

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ Press release from Robert Fechner, head of the CCC, February 15, 1938, box 20, Magnuson Papers

these circumstances, anti-New Dealers parodied the Wilderness Society, and New York's Emergency Conservation Committee, which were shaping national park policy, as privileged East Coast organizations. When Dan McGillicuddy, Secretary of the Grays Harbor Industrial Council in Aberdeen, addressed the Queets Corridor settlers, his words dripped with timber industry venom against the New Deal. *The Washingtonian* eagerly quoted McGillicuddy saying that the settlers were being made refugees by a group of 'New York window box farmers and society (ladies) who wouldn't get out of their car for fear they'd get a run in their stockings.'⁷⁷ Obviously, during an election year, there were serious dangers in New Deal enemies subverting the public image of the New Deal. Rather than the New Deal being for the poor and the cohesion of the economically disparate sections of the USA, it might be transmuted into a set of policies against ordinary Americans, whereby Eastern values were imposed on the West. That latter interpretation of the New Deal found a receptive audience among people in Aberdeen, the Grays Harbor timber town, who watched events involving the Queets settlers with keen interest.

The Queets situation took on more incendiary dimensions when the local press compared New Deal actions with those of foreign dictators. They reported how Queets Valley settlers, with a whiff of the frontier, or possibly the 21st Century 'Tea Party Movement,' began organizing themselves 'for a fight ... with the long arm ... of federal government,' and paraded through Aberdeen in a caravan *en route* to Olympia, the state capital.⁷⁸ Once there, they demanded Governor Martin, an enemy of the New Deal, send in the National Guard 'to protect them against federal officers' who might seize their land. At time of peace, a state governor was commander-in-chief of his National Guard units. Press stories suggested that, as in the Soviet airborne invasion of Finland, the New Deal might occupy the Queets Valley 'by plane.' An Aberdeen newspaper detailed that one settler brandished a placard saying 'This is not Russia.'⁷⁹ That message would have resonated with the sizable Finnish-American community in Washington State.

⁷⁷ *Port Angeles Evening News*, March 26, 1940

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, March 22, 1940

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

The next day, the Queets Corridor was likened to the Polish Corridor.⁸⁰ Webster's paper relayed the inflammatory local press claim that Queets Corridor settlers 'fear they may be victimized in the next Ickes' blitzkrieg on the frontier.'⁸¹ Once more, a highly-charged foreign policy analogy, involving dictators, was used to stoke up feeling against the New Deal. Roosevelt did not wish such views, suggesting the New Deal acted like an 'elected dictatorship' to take root with the public and close down the prospect of a third term presidency. Indeed, Roosevelt's original actions against the Depression probably headed off dictatorship, by sustaining the belief of most Americans in democracy. America remained a bastion of democracy, when across the globe countries succumbed to violent dictators. Yet, during the Queets Corridor episode, the New Deal found itself compared with dictatorial political systems – Nazism and Communism – the very ideologies it had combated in the Depression years.

Nevertheless, the New Deal had extended the reach of federal government, to take action against the Depression, and for conservation. In the process, the New Deal often challenged states', and local, rights. In 1935 most of the NIRA was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, because it impinged on 'states' rights.' Significantly, Ickes used a remaining power under the NIRA to extend the Olympic National Park in 1940.⁸² Opponents could claim he was enforcing an act associated in the minds of the public with the New Deal overstepping its powers, to enlarge the national park. Such an accusation was damaging to Roosevelt, and press reports specifically named not simply Ickes but Roosevelt as being behind the creation of the Queets Corridor.⁸³ FDR did not decide finally until May, 1940, to run again for the presidency. Even then, he was slow to tell the Democratic Party and the public of his controversial decision. He knew his enemies would accuse him of acting *ultra vires*. Therefore, he did not wish the Queets Corridor, and similar incidents to encourage the opinion that he was becoming dictatorial. Roosevelt's New Deal had portrayed itself as the liberator of the people from the Depression and other oppressive forces. Contrariwise, the Queets Corridor protesters formed part of a loosely-knit opposition which portrayed Roosevelt's government as a tyrant, extending its reach too far over their lives.

⁸⁰ *Port Angeles Evening News*, March 23

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² Warren Magnuson letter, April 9, 1940, box 20, Magnuson Papers

⁸³ *Port Angeles Evening News*, March 26, 1940

On March 26, Webster published ‘an open letter’ to Ickes in the *Port Angeles Evening News* about the Queets Corridor.⁸⁴ While he still backed the Queets initiative, and was dubious about the wilder accusations hurled at Roosevelt’s government, Webster felt the New Deal had mishandled matters. He suggested two solutions, to rectify this ‘unfortunate situation.’⁸⁵ Firstly, the federal government’s plan to buy out the settlers underestimated ‘the intense attachment developed by (them) for lands which they have cleared ... out of this frontier wilderness.’ With the European crisis in mind, he remarked ‘these people ... do not want to leave their homes (and) are just as naturally distressed as refugees abroad.’ Consequently, Webster urged that when Ickes purchased their land for the Corridor, the settlers should be granted lifetime leases so they would not have to move. Secondly, the area’s main employer – the timber industry – repeatedly maintained, despite being told otherwise, that the Queets Corridor constituted a barrier against hauling logs to Grays Harbor. Webster believed an official statement from Ickes that lumbermen retained rights-of-way across the Queets Valley would counteract this ‘unnecessary alarm.’⁸⁶

That issue returns the argument to resource developers as the preservationists’ principal enemy. The timber interests strenuously opposed valuable timber stocks being ruled off-limits by the Olympic National Park, and enlargements to it. They additionally claimed the Queets Corridor would impede hauling logs to timber mills. While it would be wrong to impugn the motives of the settlers opposed to the Queets Corridor, timber interests were active in stirring up their opposition. If we strip away extraneous layers, an underlying argument about ‘resource development’ is reached. Lena Fletcher, whose husband John Fletcher headed the settlers’ organization, which forty settlers had joined in the previous week, stated that the neighbouring densely forested ‘Hoh and Bagachiel valleys are (also) alarmed by developments.’⁸⁷ John Huelsdonk from the Hoh Valley, mentioned at the start of this chapter, asserted that timber in the Queets Corridor was ‘ripe’ for logging.⁸⁸ He represented timber industry interests, the settlers, and also Finnish-Americans. Lena Fletcher was ‘outspokenly opposed’ both to the Queets Corridor and more generally to the Olympic National Park. She said that ‘subversive influences, interested in having the strategic resources of the nation locked up, might be behind the park

⁸⁴ Ibid., Webster open letter to Ickes

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid., Editorial,

⁸⁸ Ibid

program.’⁸⁹ In the ideological tension and confusion of the late 1930s conspiracy theories abounded. Lena Fletcher was suggesting that there were elements within the New Deal in league with hostile foreign powers. The strategic resources she alleged they might lock up were timber stocks and manganese deposits. Although she possibly had links with resource development interests, it was undeniable her views reflected theirs. Consequently, the opponents of the Queets Corridor, like the original enemies of the Olympic National Park, ultimately attacked the New Deal preservationists’ plans on the basis of the need to have access to ‘resource development.’ At the end of the New Deal, ‘resource development’, not ‘motorized recreation’ was the undeviating constant in opposition to West Coast national park wilderness policy, whatever other attacks were levelled at Roosevelt’s government.

The settlers’ and the timber industry attacks might have diverted the government from its progressive path in the Queets Corridor. In a wider sense, the threats to the New Deal’s self-image could have destroyed the election prospects of a liberal presidential candidate. However, as with ‘motorized recreation,’ New Dealers made concessions, and moreover clarified their position, to further the protection of forest wilderness. The New Deal reiterated that timber industry rights-of-way across the Queets Corridor would be upheld, nullifying a contentious issue. The progressive Senator Warren Magnuson wrote to Webster of the *Port Angeles Evening News*, April 2, assuring him that the government would grant the settlers lifetime leases.⁹⁰ Final public confirmation came from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the most influential newspaper in Washington State. On April 28, the paper reported: ‘It was revealed (yesterday) that some of the old settlers who would be loathe to leave the wilderness of the Olympic Peninsula’s “last frontier” will be allowed to live out their lives in their wooded retreats.’⁹¹ John Boettiger owned the *Post-Intelligencer*. He was married to Anna Roosevelt, FDR’s daughter. In the political background of the New Deal, he helped, with others, to put out political ‘wild fires’ that broke out during 1940, the presidential election year. Each ‘wild fire’ crisis threatened to engulf the New Deal and destroy the prospects of a progressive being elected president. Perhaps New Dealers were acting with the consciousness in 1940 that progressivism must not surrender its gains, as happened under the old Progressives, 1919-20. Appropriately, on the rain-drenched Olympic

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Magnuson to Webster, box 20, Magnuson Papers

⁹¹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 28, 1940, box 58, Magnuson Papers

Peninsula the Queets Corridor ‘wild fire’ crisis was soon damped down. However, over the other two tenets of progressivism, as will be seen, crises occurred which menaced the New Deal with even more combustible material.

The Preservationists Adapt to War-Time Conditions

Although many pieces of New Deal legislation survived 1940, for example the two West Coast national park Acts, most historians would argue that the New Deal had stopped advancing, as FDR, from that year, became increasingly preoccupied with preparing for war. There is an alternative interpretation. In the lead up to, and start, of World War II progressive policies were precipitated or consolidated. Forestry and national park policy provide useful examples at a federal and state level. Dedicated New Dealer, Culbert Olson, the Democrat governor of California, used the imminence of war to achieve an objective in conservation that the state legislature had blocked during peacetime conditions. Therefore, the New Deal in California continued to advance. His objective concerned ‘wild fires’ in a literal sense. He stated: ‘California is confronted with the toughest overall fire suppression problem in the United States.’ In response to this situation, which placed in jeopardy the state park Redwoods, ‘one of the first acts of the ... State Board of Forestry, appointed by Governor Olson (during 1938) , was to sponsor ... a State-wide forest fire control plan.’ ‘Several times’ the plan was submitted to the Legislature and rejected. Nonetheless, ‘this plan formed the sound foundation upon which, in 1941, as a *defense measure*, the city, county, and State fire-fighting forces joined in creating the State-wide “California Fire Disaster Plan.”’⁹² It was organized centrally from an office in Sacramento, the state capital, which supervised different districts, both rural and urban areas that voluntarily offered each other fire-fighting aid. Equipment was ‘designed for use against ... forest fires, but also completely useful on city fires.’ In January, 1942, the state legislature appropriated \$4 million for the Fire Disaster Plan.⁹³ Therefore, Olson had used the argument of defence to achieve a preservationist goal – protection of California’s Redwoods.

Nationally, preservationists also adapted to war time conditions, consolidating national park gains for forest wilderness. The Queets Corridor incident had shown how easily the New Deal’s

⁹² Speakers’ manual for Olson’s 1942 re-election campaign, carton 5, Culbert Olson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

⁹³ Ibid.

opponents could lay claim to the frontier thesis. In March, 1942, an article in *The Living Wilderness*, 'The War and the Wilderness' demonstrated how preservationists were able to regain ownership of the frontier thesis, thereby justifying wilderness at time of war.⁹⁴ It argued that war had entered a new phase. World War I was characterized by the trench 'warfare of position.' World War II would be characterized by 'warfare of movement,' of which blitzkrieg was an example. The former required 'regimented obedience and deference,' the latter stressed 'initiative and self-reliance.' Forest wilderness was the ideal setting for those who wished to attain self-reliance. It became 'second nature to the man who divests himself of the conveniences ... of city life and ... goes out to face nature on his own.' The writer argued 'those qualities which the wilderness develops ... are qualities of value to all, from the humblest private to the greatest general, and among civilian (war workers) as well.'⁹⁵ This argument gave wilderness national parks war-time relevance – for developing American character – which would contribute to winning the war.

In government, Ickes appreciated that national parks must adapt to the war. However, he was not pragmatically altering national park policy to suit the war emergency. Instead, he was maintaining the preservationist policy of forest wilderness, but justifying it with new arguments. He feared the war would become a threat to wilderness. As he wrote in *The Army Navy Journal*, April, 1942: 'Under the ... war program, public lands are being withdrawn so as to permit the establishment of military ranges.'⁹⁶ National parks could be devastated by becoming sites for military manoeuvres, shelling, and bombing practice. When Ickes wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, November, 1942, he suggested a purpose for national parks entirely consistent with forest wilderness. He wrote: 'It seems to me that such a park as Yosemite ... would be an ideal place to send soldiers and sailors for rest and convalescence. I am advised that the Navy already proposes to make use of Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood in Oregon. I can think of no better place to serve such purposes ... than whatever national parks may be available.'⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *The Living Wilderness* Vol. VII No 7 (March 1942)

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Ickes' article, *Army Navy Journal*, April 10, 1942, box 114, Harold Ickes Papers, Manuscript Division, Madison Building, Libraries of Congress, Washington DC

⁹⁷ Ickes to Frank Knox, November 4, 1942, box 222, Ickes Papers

In these ways, New Deal forestry and national park policy abided by Progressive era preservationist aims over forest wilderness, and survived the Queets Corridor crisis, and even the war-time emergency. Gary Gerstle wrote about ‘The Protean Character of American Liberalism.’⁹⁸ By that phrase he meant progressivism, which he said was synonymous with liberalism, could re-invent itself, applying different policies to Progressive era concerns, from 1900 to the 1960s. He was especially persuasive as to how progressivism, or liberalism, changed its policies over time, aiming to achieve a more cohesive society. However, progressivism was protean in another sense, at least in the instance of forest wilderness. It showed an ability to change arguments, not policy. Preservationists – notwithstanding Hofstadter and Sutter – wanted the same policy in the Progressive era, the 1920s, and during the New Deal. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, they had more influence, for the reasons already explained. At this time, they finally achieved their dream to protect the finest forests that contained the three giant trees of the West Coast. Even when they made concessions, as in the past, the essentials of forest wilderness remained. During the lead into war, though, they needed to adapt their arguments to preserve forest wilderness. Then their protean character consisted of a facility for new arguments to serve an old policy. In the later New Deal, they had founded and preserved the Olympic and Kings Canyon National Park forest wildernesses, but justified them with new arguments at time of war. Under the guise of a war time defence argument, their New Deal ally, Governor Olson, gave the California state park Redwoods an effective protection against the ever-present hazard of fire.

Reclamation

Ickes was also in charge of the conservation area of water reclamation on the West Coast during the later New Deal, through the Interior Department’s Bureau of Reclamation. In contrast to forestry or national park wilderness, Ickes’ reclamation policy pursued a more ‘wise user’ ethos. Socio-economic issues took priority in irrigation schemes because ultimately lives and livelihoods depended on securing sufficient water supply. These considerations left no scope for a preservationist approach, in an area of policy which was based around transforming, not preserving, land. Although irrigation schemes were necessary in parts of Oregon and Eastern Washington, California’s hot climate and dry soils made irrigation imperative there. However,

⁹⁸ Gary Gerstle, ‘The Protean Character of American Liberalism’ *The American Historical Review* Vol. 99 No 4 (October 1994)

once its soil was irrigated, California could produce the greatest variety and abundance of crops in all America. Since the Progressive era and TR's Reclamation Act (1902), irrigation dams and reservoirs were locked into a multiple-use agenda. Water supply, hydro-electric power, social justice, agricultural, and industrial purposes were all promoted. However, the environmental and related socio-economic aspects of reclamation provide the most meaningful continuities between the Progressive and New Deal eras in a conservation policy context.

California's \$265 million Central Valley Project (CVP) was 'the largest conservation project in the history of man.'⁹⁹ Despite this ambitious reclamation scheme having Progressive era origins, it was officially begun as a federal scheme, with significant central funding, in 1937. Donald Worster acknowledged the Progressive era lineage of the CVP. He mentioned that in 1919 Robert Bradford Marshall of the Reclamation Service came up with a blueprint for the scheme, which was eventually started during the New Deal.¹⁰⁰ However, Worster implies that the CVP's development deviated from progressivism of any sort, because eventually the Bureau of Reclamation 'empire' compromised with the big farmer elite of the Central Valley. Through utilizing water, they jointly dominated its environment, enabling the big farmers to entrench their socio-economic ascendancy over other groups.¹⁰¹ In giving water access to the agribusiness of large farmers, the New Deal also hastened the day when Californian water supplies would be catastrophically depleted. However, other dimensions of the CVP support Progressive era/New Deal ideological continuity. Furthermore, although there is much truth in Worster's argument, it can be challenged.

With those thoughts in mind, it is necessary to understand what the CVP entailed. The CVP encompassed the twin environmental goals of reclamation – to irrigate dry areas, and, as importantly, to prevent elsewhere damaging floods. The water problems of the West did not merely comprise a lack of water, but inequitably distributed water. Located inland, and south of San Francisco, the Central Valley included the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys. The San Joaquin Valley was very dry, and, because of intensive agriculture, 200,000 acres there required irrigation to prevent it reverting to desert. In contrast, the smaller Sacramento Valley was

⁹⁹ Speakers' manual for Olson's 1942 re-election campaign, carton 5, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁰ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: WW Norton, 1985), 236.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

afflicted by floods.¹⁰² To resolve these problems, the CVP began the Friant Canal, February, 1937. That canal, and the Contra Costa Canal, begun in October, 1937, would help re-locate water in the Central Valley. The centre-piece of the CVP, though, was the Shasta Dam, started in September, 1938.¹⁰³ It would collect huge quantities of water from the Sacramento River, near its source. The extracted water would then be stored in a vast reservoir, to prevent floods in the Sacramento Valley. Water released from another dam, the Friant Dam, into the Friant Canal would replenish the water supply of the parched San Joaquin Valley.

Culbert Olson, the Democrat governor of California, 1938-42, was an arch-disciple of the New Deal, but his general approach to the CVP revealed a Progressive era lineage. He presented his New Deal, and progressive, credentials to the voters in October, 1938, when he declared: ‘Ours is the larger purpose of bringing the New Deal to California, to the end that the government will serve all the people all the time.’¹⁰⁴ The CVP was one of several federal, or state, interventionist schemes underway in California during his administration. Yet, throughout his term as governor, Olson was harried and hampered by an ‘Economy Bloc’ in the state legislature, which opposed large-scale government spending – whether federal or state. Essentially, Olson took a moral stand whereby government intervention was a duty that would transform lives. In the case of the Central Valley, he alleged the ‘Economy Bloc’ was in the grip of private power interests, which did not want cheap government-controlled HEP, produced by the CVP, competing with them. In 1940, Olson stated during an NBC radio address: ‘The CVP ... was delayed by private power interests, which succeeded year after year in killing ... move(s) to get it under way ... they have fought every move by the people of California to get flood control, irrigation, and cheap hydro-electric power.’¹⁰⁵ Olson, and most Californian progressives, represented a political tradition that believed government intervention to create water projects in the West would deliver broad-based benefits. In 1942, an Olson re-election booklet conveyed how he believed the CVP would release the far-reaching social and economic potential of the Central Valley, as well as transforming its environment. It stated: ‘benefits will be measured in terms of ... increased employment, new lands brought under cultivation, freedom from flood and

¹⁰² Olson address on NBC radio, October 21, 1940, Carton 1, Olson Papers

¹⁰³ Compendium of Information on all phases of the Central Valley Project, carton 3, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁴ Olson radio talk, October 29, 1938, carton 1, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁵ Olson address on NBC radio, October 21, 1940, Carton 1, Olson Papers

drought, heavy increases in farm production ... (and) industries ... based upon the so-called “strategic metals” in which California is so rich.’¹⁰⁶ There was a moral and socio-economic purpose in advocating that government had a duty to finance a scheme to transform the lives and environment of the Central Valley.

However, underpinning Olson’s ideological views on the CVP in the later New Deal was his Progressive era past. At the end of the Progressive era in 1919, Olson was a state senator in Utah, the western state east of California. A local newspaper commented in January, 1919, ‘Olson of Salt Lake is fast gaining the reputation as the “recognized radical leader” on the floor of the Senate.’¹⁰⁷ During the spring of 1919 a number of bills were tabled about reclamation. The first measure of the water rights bill aimed to provide government to irrigation districts, empowering them to construct irrigation works. The bill’s second measure related to drainage districts which were sanctioned to build flood defences.¹⁰⁸ An accompanying bill in the house would have appropriated state government money for dams to protect ‘Mount Pleasant and its inhabitants from the flood waters of Pleasant creek.’ The newspaper reported: ‘Mount Pleasant suffered severely from flood damages last summer.’¹⁰⁹ These pieces of legislation were in keeping with Turner’s progressive axiom, that individual water schemes would be insufficient to solve the West’s water problems. Only group, state, or federal government schemes could finance substantial projects.

If Olson was the ‘recognized radical’ in the Utah state senate, state senator Joseph Chez might be termed the ‘recognized reactionary.’ He vehemently opposed progressive legislation that Olson sponsored or supported. For example, with the water rights bill he attempted to obstruct it with ‘a long list of proposed amendments.’¹¹⁰ Yet, even when the bill to fund flood protection for Mount Pleasant was passed by the house and senate, the un-progressive governor vetoed it. Governor Simon Bamberger argued: ‘To approve the bill ... would mean ... opening ... the doors of the state treasury to similar demands from scores of other towns and communities in the

¹⁰⁶ Speakers’ manual for Olson’s 1942 re-election campaign, carton 5, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁷ *Salt Lake Utah Tribune*, January 22, 1919, Scrapbooks Vol. 1, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁸ *Salt Lake Utah Herald*, March 8, 1919, Scrapbooks Vol. 1, Olson Papers

¹⁰⁹ *Salt Lake Utah Telegram*, March 24, 1919, Scrapbooks Vol. 1, Olson Papers

¹¹⁰ *Salt Lake Utah Herald*, March 2, 1919, Scrapbooks Vol. 1, Olson Papers

future.’¹¹¹ In the 1930s, Olson encountered the same pattern of behaviour, as in the Progressive era, from his political opposition. They desired low government spending, and were alert to the electoral advantages of that stance.

Robert Burke, Olson’s biographer, alluded to his earlier Progressive era career as a Utah state senator when explaining Olson’s strong beliefs over monopoly reform.¹¹² He overlooked, though, Olson’s Progressive era lineage in the conservation issue of reclamation. Olson brought a hardened ideological resolve to the late New Deal CVP, partly because of his Progressive era political career when reclamation projects to create irrigation schemes and flood defences were delayed, blocked, or vetoed. As evidence of their significance to him, Olson kept clippings of these earlier events in his political scrapbooks. He faced in the CVP the same type of ideological struggle he experienced during his earlier Utah political incarnation. Consequently, the ‘wise user’ ethos of Olson and Ickes in reclamation policy was consistent with a Progressive era moral purpose – that government intervention could transform environments and lives. Furthermore, the later New Deal pattern of behaviour of their opponents in reclamation policy, intent on an economically reductionist argument, which emphasized economy in government, demonstrated continuity from the Progressive era.

Worster’s central accusation against the Bureau of Reclamation, whereby the CVP eventually consolidated the power of the large farmer elite, deserves analysis. Even on Worster’s own reckoning, New Deal reclamation on the West Coast often worked towards promoting the small farmer’s interests. As pointed out in the last chapter, sometimes FDR envisioned a West Coast reclamation project embracing social justice aims – something Worster noted himself. The Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River would reclaim a million acres in an arid area of Eastern Washington State. Roosevelt considered in 1934 that small farms could be established on this land, for victims of the Depression from the East coast states.¹¹³ By the end of the decade, Roosevelt saw the Grand Coulee project in the Pacific Northwest as the answer to the resettlement of desperate displaced small farmers from the Dust Bowl, who had flocked to the West Coast during the 1930s. FDR said he would ‘like to see the Columbia Basin devoted to the

¹¹¹ *Salt Lake Utah Telegram*, March 24, 1919, Scrapbooks, Vol. 1, Olson Papers

¹¹² Robert E Burke, *Olson’s New Deal for California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 148.

¹¹³ Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 270.

care of the 500 thousand people represented in “Grapes of Wrath.”¹¹⁴ Likewise, in the election year of 1940, Olson made a speech before the Oregon Commonwealth Federation in which he compared the CVP with ‘similar projects in the Northwest, which are even larger, farther reaching, and far more spectacular.’ Among other issues, he discussed opening up ‘thousands of acres of fertile land to settlement.’¹¹⁵ In 1944 the ideological intent of FDR and Olson was given substance. The Columbia Basin Project authorized a large programme of farm settlements, each one restricted to 160 acres. Worster himself stated: ‘this ... was explicitly to be a programme in the redistribution of wealth.’¹¹⁶ Consequently, in this case, TR’s Progressive era objective of encouraging small farms in the West by federal reclamation schemes was continued under FDR.

Regarding the CVP specifically, the New Deal compromise with large farmers ran against that trend, and the continuity argument. However, a closer examination of the CVP’s development yields evidence for Progressive era/New Deal continuity. In the CVP, Ickes’ Bureau of Reclamation at first adhered to Progressive era rules on federal reclamation schemes. Only later did the Bureau of Reclamation compromise. TR’s 1902 Reclamation Act restricted water access from federal irrigation schemes to small farmers of a maximum 160 acres. Worster records that Ickes and Roosevelt explicitly applied that rule in the legislation setting up the CVP – the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1937.¹¹⁷ However, he neither emphasizes FDR’s and Ickes’ Progressive era past, nor acknowledges that TR’s 1902 Act had a socio-economic sub-text - to counteract monopolistic land practices on the West Coast. The New Deal had two socio-economic routes to choose from in the CVP. ‘Acreage limitation liberals’ wished to influence the Central Valley’s large farmers gradually towards smaller farms by application of the 160 acre rule. Alternatively, Californian ‘community’ New Dealers, e.g. Walter Packard or Carey McWilliams wanted to break up the big land holdings there, and turn them into socialized co-operative farms.¹¹⁸ Undoubtedly the stakes were high. The CVP did not only seek to save 200,000 acres of farmland from becoming desert; it aimed to transform a massive 3 million acres

¹¹⁴ Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 261.

¹¹⁵ Olson speech to Oregon Commonwealth Federation, February 17, 1940, Carton 6, Olson Papers

¹¹⁶ Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 271.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

of desert, much of it owned by large landowners, into farming land.¹¹⁹ Whatever general socio-economic benefits might result in the Valley, both ‘acreage reduction liberals’, and ‘community’ New Dealers saw the anomaly in spending large sums of federal money on the CVP to benefit the few, not the many. Acreage restrictions to CVP water, or socialized farms in the Central Valley were their solution to that anomaly. However, these competing progressive visions were never equally represented in CVP policy. Worster implies that a closely contested debate about policy was going on between their adherents. In fact, the ‘Progressive era’ ‘acreage reduction liberals’ controlled policy right up to 1945.

It is instructive to look briefly beyond the supposed boundaries of the New Deal, and this study, for a rounded understanding of the CVP’s ideological thrust. When the CVP finally compromised with large farmers, Worster once more ignores the Progressive era past of those with a role in these events. Senator Robert La Follette Jr., son of the great Progressive era leader, ‘Fighting Bob’ La Follette, on two occasions during 1944 stopped attempts to make large farmers exempt from the 160 acre rule in California. Firstly, in the Senate, he defeated the ‘Elliott rider’ to the new Rivers and Harbors Act, which would have scrapped that rule in California, and then he struck down the findings of a CVP report into ‘Problem 19,’ which would have resulted in the same outcome for the Central Valley itself.¹²⁰

La Follette Jr. was a progressive who viewed the issue of water rights and the small farmer as totemic. He believed restricting water access to small farmers was not just incidental, but at the heart of government reclamation schemes. When he intervened decisively to stop the ‘Elliott rider’ his words could have been spoken forty years previously, and echoed the concerns of the Progressive era. He asserted that reclamation schemes ‘should inure ... to the ... largest number of people,’ and pledged himself to ‘the maintenance of the family-sized farm ... because ... it is one of the cornerstones upon which our ... democracy rests.’ La Follette declared: ‘This conflict’ (over large farms) ‘runs back into the history of the ... development of California’, a reminder that TR’s Reclamation Act expressly aimed to roll back the trend towards land monopolization in California. Senator La Follette ended by stressing the ‘interest ... I have in this matter stems from my deep concern about the future ... development of agriculture in the United States. I

¹¹⁹Ibid., 241.

¹²⁰Ibid., 252-253.

consider the matter paramount in importance.’¹²¹ Significantly, on both occasions in 1944, Worster merely notes La Follette’s part in stopping changes to the 160 acre rule. He does not consider either the Progressive era, or the New Deal ideological origins of La Follette’s thinking, or the ideologically-charged words he used. Through these omissions, the opportunity to make the continuity argument in reclamation is left unexplored.

Likewise, the abandonment of acreage limitation in the CVP is considered by Worster through the prism of the Reclamation Bureau’s organizational imperatives. Pragmatically, the bureau needed the large farmers’ co-operation to secure necessary federal funds for the CVP’s completion. Large farmers constituted the most obvious recipients of CVP water, and delay over who should benefit from the scheme would give the Administration and Congress an excuse to withdraw funding.¹²² Yet, just as significantly, the shift to abandon acreage restrictions in the CVP coincided with Roosevelt’s death and Ickes’ resignation as head of the Interior Department. The two Progressive era-inspired politicians in charge of the 160 acre policy both exited during 1945, and immediately a change of policy became possible. There was no need for Michael Straus, the new Bureau of Reclamation commissioner, to follow a Progressive era-inspired leadership, and in 1947 he compromised with the large farmers. He declared that only ‘technical compliance’ with the 160 acre rule would be necessary in the CVP. Essentially, landowners would be able to deed land, and lease it back, to get around the Reclamation Act.¹²³

The continuity argument has considerable validity in reclamation schemes on the West Coast at the end of the New Deal. The concept of the CVP, which turned into the New Deal’s biggest reclamation scheme, came from the Progressive era. Its execution involved large-scale government intervention, transforming lives and the environment. In that sense, the CVP was a fulfilment of Progressive era ‘wise user’ beliefs. Governor Olson brought to the CVP a hardened ideological resolve, because of his Progressive era past. Reclamation schemes on the West Coast, like that at Grand Coulee Dam in Washington applied the Progressive era Reclamation Act by restricting water access to small farmers of a maximum 160 acres. That principle was also written into the legislation establishing California’s CVP. The Progressive era-inspired La

¹²¹ Congressional Record, La Follette’s speeches, December 6, 1944, box 1: C-593, La Follette Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Madison Building, Libraries of Congress, Washington DC

¹²² Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 254.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 255.

Follette Jr. staunchly defended that principle twice in 1944, to encourage social justice for small farmers in the CVP. The 160 acre rule was only abandoned there when the two Progressive era-inspired politicians, who ultimately controlled reclamation schemes – FDR and Ickes – were no longer in charge of policy.

During the late New Deal on the West Coast the Progressive era was still a significant presence. Conservation policy achieved central objectives in progressivism by protecting the three giant trees of the West Coast, and furthered forest wilderness. Resource development still remained the greatest threat to wilderness. The Queets Corridor episode showed how a European crisis could stir up ideological tensions within American politics - what had contributed to progressivism's defeat, 1919-1920. Reclamation schemes that upheld the principles of TR's Reclamation Act, alongside other conservation policies, were sustained deep into the war years.

Chapter Five: Monopoly Reform on the West Coast, 1937 – 1942

In 1948, Daniel Ogden Jr., an assiduous PhD student was researching the New Deal campaign against private utility monopolies on the West Coast during the late 1930s.¹²⁴ Who better to contact about this policy, he thought, than the former Washington US Senator Homer T. Bone? He was instrumental in developing public power – the main New Deal strategy for countering the private utilities. Writing to Bone, Ogden asked when he originally became interested in the power question – to which Bone answered ‘1908.’ The events of that year, reinforced by experiences during the rest of the Progressive era and 1920s, instilled in Bone a single-minded dedication to public power. As he said himself: ‘I came to know what it meant to put one’s hands on the plow handles ... not daring to ... remove them.’ Clearly, Bone, the young Progressive era lawyer, had undergone at that time a political awakening. Ironically, he had not been by inclination a progressive. Bone commented: ‘Looking back into these ... shadows of the past, I sometimes wonder what would have happened ... had I not been ... stirred by the attacks on ... men whose only purpose was to have their ... city produce power ... Probably I would have been the orthodox type of lawyer trying to lead a ... somewhat conservative existence.’¹²⁵

We know already that during the Progressive era reformers became preoccupied with monopoly reform, something the Bone anecdote alludes to. The realization that, year by year, industries, utilities, transport, agriculture, and finance were in the grip of fewer and fewer people helped launch the progressive movement. Without checks, any monopoly or quasi-monopoly could exploit at will. For example, those Americans having access to electricity discovered that the company which supplied their power dictated its price. Arguably, all other aspects of progressivism pivoted on the issue of monopoly reform. It readily connected the three tenets of progressivism – having implications for market competition, the conservation of natural resources, as well as employee, and consumer social justice. Progressives believed that unless government regulated, dismantled, or curbed monopolies (i.e. trusts) they were in danger of

¹²⁴ Daniel M. Ogden Jr., ‘The Development of Federal Power Policy in the Pacific Northwest’ (PhD, University of Chicago, 1950)

¹²⁵ Bone to Daniel M. Ogden Jr. September 9, 1948, box 1, Homer Bone Papers, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

stifling the economy, trampling on civil liberties, and, with their wealth, subverting democracy. This chapter contends that late New Deal monopoly policy was permeated with Progressive era influence, and it is best understood by looking at utility reform on the West Coast.

The historiography, post-Hofstadter, largely denies or ignores Progressive era influence on late New Deal decision-making in utility reform. Overviews, as in Schlesinger Jr. or Brinkley, stressed the practical considerations that drove monopoly reform decisions. Ficken's localized account of the Grand Coulee HEP dam in the Pacific Northwest – despite fully acknowledging a Progressive era tradition there – judged that ultimately pragmatism determined New Deal policy. Ellis Hawley's classic work, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, because of its academic standing, calls for the closest scrutiny.¹²⁶ He doubts the effectiveness of New Deal monopoly reform in general, stresses the limitations of utility reform and, of great relevance to our purposes, does not recognize a coherent Progressive era ideology.¹²⁷ Furthermore, he rejects the central importance of utility reform to monopoly policy. He says utility reform was 'essentially a skirmish on the flanks.'¹²⁸

This chapter puts forward an alternative view. It shows that Progressive era ideological influence significantly shaped West Coast utility reform policy in the late 1930s, which constituted a vital part of the New Deal's anti-monopoly campaign. The chapter divides into four sections, which are steps to reaching a convincing re-appraisal of this area of study in terms of progressive ideology. Step one explains the impetus for utility reform – the Progressive era-inspired public power movement nationally and locally, and quite why utility reform was so important especially on the West Coast. Step two considers how that public power movement shaped and implemented policy over the Bonneville Dam, 1937-1938. Step three shows that the challenges public power faced locally and nationally, 1939-1940, are only fully explicable in the light of a Progressive era context. Step four explains how the public power movement and the New Deal retained their relevance in the lead into war, 1941-1942. Therefore, the following pages aim to broaden understanding of New Deal monopoly reform, and progressivism.

¹²⁶ Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966)

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

The Public Power Movement and Utility Reform's Importance to Late New Deal Monopoly Policy

The public power movement on the West Coast would never have flourished as it did from 1937 onwards without New Deal initiatives, and the encouragement of a national public power movement active within Roosevelt's Administration. Firstly, municipalities received financial help from Ickes' Public Works Administration (PWA) in order to compete with private utilities. Secondly, a series of HEP dams on the West Coast were started, mainly by the PWA, from 1933. Thirdly, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) funded farm co-operatives to electrify the countryside. Fourthly, by the Public Utility Holding Company Act (1935) large Eastern private utilities, which controlled subsidiaries in regions like the West Coast, faced dismantlement with a starting date of 1940. The leading New Deal figures associated with these policies had a Progressive era past, which gave their 1930s actions a clear ideological pathway. FDR advocated public power in the Progressive age and as governor of New York during the 1920s. Harold Ickes' experience of Insull's Commonwealth Edison utility empire in Chicago 1907 onwards made him an anti-trust crusader. Morris Llewellyn Cooke, in charge of the REA, was an ideological survivor from the Progressive era, and had worked for Gifford Pinchot on public power in Pennsylvania throughout the 1920s.

Although the federal government forwarded the utility reform initiatives, the West Coast possessed a vigorous public power movement of its own whose origins lay in the Progressive era. Therefore, the West Coast public power movement was readily 'wired into' the New Deal national campaign. It interacted with the New Deal nationally and locally, shaping and implementing policy. Members of this movement subscribed to an ideological worldview that was recognizably derived from the 1900-1920 period. It conveyed a Manichean message in which democratic public companies, devoted to the common good, were pitted against tyrannical and exploitative private utilities. Freshman Democrat US Senator Homer Bone made a statement about water-powered electricity and utility reform in 1933. He charged that because of exploitative big business 'our great public domain, with its timber, coal, and oil lands, has been frittered away. There is left, inexhaustible and most valuable of our resources ... water-

power.’¹²⁹ He was committed to saving the great Columbia River system in Washington and Oregon for ‘the people’ as a public power source, which ‘would be like owning oil wells that never run dry.’¹³⁰ Bone’s missionary zeal was representative of public power advocates on the West Coast during the 1930s.

These public power advocates also shared the anti-monopoly lexicon of Progressive era reformers. The emotive image of monopoly as an incubus oppressing society was a staple trope in the writings and speeches of the Progressive era and the New Deal. Arguably, it has provided a progressive continuum right up to the present day – applied to monopolies in railroads, power, or finance. In 1901, Frank Norris wrote a novel called *The Octopus* about the railroad monopoly in California.¹³¹ TR talked about the ‘large swollen trusts’ during the 1910s. In 1937, JD Ross, a leading public power advocate on the West Coast, attacked ‘the blood-sucking activities of the power trust.’¹³² The following year Bone referred to the ‘power trust octopus.’¹³³ In 2009, during the ‘credit crunch’ crisis, a commentator described a finance house as ‘a great vampire squid.’¹³⁴ Actually, the private utility, with electricity lines like tentacles spreading inexorably from huge power stations, conveniently fitted the image of a greedy monster, which held its customers in captivity. Of course, progressive rhetoric should not be confused with policy reality. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that the revulsion Progressive era and 1930s West Coast reformers felt towards monopolies helped inform their policy decisions and actions.

Progressive era heads of West Coast municipal companies remained in post during the 1930s, and pushed hard for public power. They proselytized that electricity – America’s future energy source – must be publicly owned, supplied cheaply to the people, and kept from the clutches of private utilities. JD Ross and Ezra Scattergood exemplified this outlook. Ross headed Seattle’s City Light municipal company, and Scattergood was chief engineer for Los Angeles’ Bureau of

¹²⁹ Bone quotations from biographical note in Terry Slatten, ‘Homer T Bone, Public Power, and Washington State Progressive Politics in the 1920s’ (MA, Western Washington University, 1980), Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1901)

¹³² JD Ross KOL radio broadcast, January 15, 1937, box 127, Seattle Lighting Department Records, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

¹³³ Bone’s speech to State Democratic Convention, July 13, 1938, *Tacoma News Tribune*, John Main Coffee Papers, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

¹³⁴ Matt Taibbi, ‘The Great American Bubble Machine’ *Rolling Stone* (July 9, 2009)

Power and Light. Both men had led their companies since 1911. The aptly-named Scattergood believed that electricity dispensed by his company would transform Los Angeles, stimulating population growth and industry. In 1936 he built a 266 mile transmission line to Boulder (formerly Hoover) Dam, Arizona, so that Los Angeles could receive the dam's electricity when it came on-stream. By constructing the longest transmission line anywhere over deserts and mountains, he had placed his public power company in a better position to distribute Boulder Dam electricity than his private utility rivals. In 1937, Scattergood's company consolidated to become the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), the biggest municipal utility in the world.

On the West Coast and nationally, public power leaders displayed a like-minded ideology, and formed a progressive network. At a national level, Carl Thompson's pressure group – the Public Ownership League of America – gave public power advocates a mouthpiece. In the 1930s, Ross, Scattergood, and Bone were all active members of Thompson's organization.¹³⁵ The Public Ownership League was both a forum in which public power supporters could exchange ideas, and a political lobbying organization.¹³⁶ Founded during the Progressive era in 1914, it sought, among other aims, to influence federal HEP dam projects, and their recipients, towards public power.¹³⁷ For example, in 1928 Thompson contacted the California-based Boulder Dam Association early in the Colorado River project, to argue the case for public production of power, a considerably more radical stance than publicly distributed electricity.¹³⁸ Ross, Scattergood, and Bone brought to the Public Ownership League direct public power experience. The latter had served as attorney for the Tacoma municipal company in the early 1920s.¹³⁹ The Washington city of Tacoma, located on Puget Sound – like nearby Seattle, and Los Angeles in southern California – manifested a strong public power tradition. Tacoma Light, its municipal company, had charged the lowest electricity rates in the United States since 1914, and continued that record into the late 1930s.¹⁴⁰ By 1937, the Pacific Coast Public Ownership

¹³⁵ 'Public Ownership of Public Utilities' *Public Ownership League of America Memorial Number* Vol. xxi, No 4, April 19, 1939, box 22, Magnuson Papers

¹³⁶ Carl Thompson to Hiram Johnson, February 15, 1928, Carton 8, Johnson Papers

¹³⁷ Thompson to Ross, January 13, 1938, box 79, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹³⁸ Thompson to John L Bacon, July 17, 1928; Thompson to SC Evans, Director of Boulder Dam Association, August 2, 1928, carton 8, Johnson Papers

¹³⁹ Biographical note in Slatten: 34.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Bone to Ogden, September 9, 1948, box 1, Bone Papers

League – an offshoot of Thompson’s national organization – united the three West Coast states behind the public power campaign.¹⁴¹

However, public power on the West Coast was far from being a ‘top-down’ exercise by prominent individuals. It had genuine grassroots support, and was expressive of a popular movement. In cities, municipal companies enjoyed a democratic mandate, and attracted consumer investment. Perhaps more significantly, in the countryside of Washington and Oregon the State Granges, representing small farmers strongly supported public power. State Granges were reborn as radical organizations during the Progressive era, and retained their radicalism through the New Deal. An Oregon progressive went so far as to say they were the ‘backbone’ of the 1930s public power movement in those states.¹⁴² Small farmers viewed public power as a way of electrifying the countryside, and having a say in electricity prices, rather than ceding that control to private utilities.¹⁴³

Indicating Bone’s rapport with the wider public power movement, in the 1920s he was not only the attorney of Tacoma Light, but also of the Washington State Grange. Therefore, he had a foot in both public power camps – the urban municipal companies, and the rural Granges. With this experience, Bone, a man of legislative energy, was ideally placed to channel the public power movement’s views into law. While a state senator in 1930, he sponsored the Public Utility District (pud) law. The legislation gave rural areas a structure to organize electricity districts. Bone pointed out the law he drafted reproduced the recommendations of the Washington State Grange in 1919 at the end of the Progressive era. When he was a US senator, Bone enacted a law in 1934 permitting the sale of municipal electricity to rural areas. Again, he referenced the Progressive era in putting forward this legislation. The Washington State legislature had passed a similar law in 1911, at the request of the municipal companies, only to see utility interests overturn it subsequently. At a national level, Bone regarded his 1934 federal law as restoring the original Progressive era situation in Washington. In these various ways, the highly motivated public power movement on the West Coast exhibited a Progressive era

¹⁴¹ Thompson to Bone, July 7, 1937, box 24, Homer Bone Papers, (Tacoma)

¹⁴² Transcript of interview conducted by Barbara Costigan with Monroe Sweetland, May 11, 1987, box 2, Howard Costigan Papers, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

¹⁴³ Ibid.

consciousness, which enabled successful engagement with New Deal initiatives coming to fruition 1937 onwards.

Although a vigorous public power movement existed nationally and on the West Coast, did utility reform rank as a significant monopoly issue? At a national level, Hawley downplays New Deal utility reform, and argues that federal action was taken against the power trust, not because of its central importance in the anti-monopoly campaign, but due to flagrant abuses perpetrated by it.¹⁴⁴ Doubtlessly, he had in mind instances like power trust attempts to corrupt the 1926 and 1934 mid-term elections. However, Hawley surely underrates the importance of utility reform, and therefore electricity. He contends that transportation, which had similar monopoly problems, needed the sort of reforms that were directed at utilities.¹⁴⁵ He implies railroad transportation was an equally important issue, and that the New Deal was remiss in failing to tackle its monopolies. More recent research has argued that the shrewdness of railroad monopoly owners, not New Deal policy weakness, prevented successful regulation of railroads. Management granted railroad unions concessions, so they presented jointly an insurmountable opposition to continuing New Deal regulatory measures beyond 1936.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, although during the Progressive era railroads were a massive monopoly problem – for example, on the West Coast Northern Securities and Southern Pacific– by the interwar period trucks and automobiles were relentlessly replacing rail transport. Conversely, in the 1930s, electricity was the emergent and future energy source for America. Roosevelt’s government was quick to grasp that fact in its utility reform program, and encouraged public power as the ideological means to achieve the end of America’s electrification. As a follower of Hofstadter, Hawley typically judges that New Deal monopoly reform in the late 1930s was characterized by ideological contradictions, containing policies that both encouraged and discouraged big business.¹⁴⁷ More to the point, the New Deal could not fight every anti-trust battle. By choosing to concentrate on utilities, as it had done earlier with finance, the New Deal acknowledged their primacy in monopoly reform. In doing so, utility reform would give succour

¹⁴⁴ Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 343.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁴⁶ (Ed) Sidney M Milkis, and Jerome M Mileur, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), Donald R Brand chapter, ‘Competition and the New Deal Regulatory State,’ 180-181.

¹⁴⁷ Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 489.

to a traditional Progressive era objective – public power – and head off private utility monopolies becoming the exclusive beneficiary of US electrification. After 1937, utility reform on the West Coast, with that region’s vast potential for electricity production, assumed a pre-eminent position in New Deal policy.

Richard Neuberger was an Oregon journalist, who operated in the background of the public power movement, and provided a useful commentary on it. A 1938 article by him put across the high stakes involved in utility reform on the West Coast. Instead of Hawley’s utility reform ‘skirmish,’ Neuberger’s article predicted ‘warfare’ ‘to control the world’s greatest single source of electricity’ – the Columbia River. Neuberger dismissed the previous New Deal struggle against private utilities waged by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), as a prelude to ‘the real battle.’ The New Deal dams on the West Coast would harness almost unimaginable amounts of electricity. Neuberger stated: ‘in the turbulent Columbia, as it surges through granite canyons ... there is more water power than in any other three rivers of the continent combined.’¹⁴⁸ Looking back on these years, Bone estimated that Washington State alone possessed 20% of US HEP potential.¹⁴⁹ The companies and geographical areas that secured this electricity expected to achieve a golden age of prosperity. Outside Washington and Oregon, similar prodigious supplies of electricity were at issue between private and public companies in California, from New Deal dams on the Sacramento and Colorado rivers. Therefore, the construction of HEP dams by the New Deal on, or near, the West Coast, which would be ready to deliver electricity after 1937, galvanized an existing progressive movement there. It resolved that the electricity would go to public power not private utilities. In this manner, the West Coast became the most promising region for the realization of New Deal utility reform objectives.

Furthermore, unfolding events increased the importance of the West Coast to the New Deal. Historians often regard 1937 as the year when the New Deal began to go awry. Fortified by the decisive 1936 presidential election, Roosevelt was keen to press on with progressive initiatives. However, at a macro-level his reforms were often frustrated by an obstructionist Congress. In monopoly reform, 1937 had appeared propitious for the achievement of public power nationally. Roosevelt appointed a National Power Policy Committee, in January, 1937, headed by Ickes,

¹⁴⁸ Richard Neuberger, ‘Power Play,’ October 22, 1938, *Colliers*, box 1, Bone Papers (Seattle)

¹⁴⁹ Bone to Ogden, September 9, 1948, box 1, Bone Papers

which envisaged eight regional planning authorities to bring about public power across America. Moreover, Congressional legislation was introduced to duplicate the TVA, the New Deal's only fully-developed regional public power scheme. The 'seven sisters' proposal would have meant another six regional schemes added to the TVA.¹⁵⁰ However, both initiatives failed, the legislation rejected by an increasingly anti-New Deal Congress, critical of Roosevelt's Court fight, his labour policy, as well as the monopoly reform campaign. By the close of 1937, New Dealers could not expect public power to be boldly rolled out nationally. Consequently, the West Coast's highly motivated public power movement enjoyed a raised profile as it engaged with federal government power schemes coming to fruition at this time. In practice, how did the Progressive era beliefs of this movement shape and implement policy regarding a particular West Coast dam, 1937-1938?

Progressive Era Influence on the Shaping and Implementation of Bonneville Power Legislation, 1937-1938

Bonneville Dam (Oregon) on the Columbia River became crucial to the objectives of the public power movement, because in 1937 it was nearing completion, and decisions taken about its electricity supply would set the pattern for the other West Coast dams. Almost certainly, New Deal difficulties nationally strengthened the determination of West Coast progressives to achieve a successful public power policy in their region. In March, 1937 the Bonneville Power Bill was presented to the Senate.¹⁵¹ On the Democratic side, Bone, with his connections to the West Coast public power leaders and the wider movement, helped shape policy. As with conservation, the co-operation of Republican minority leader Charles McNary of Oregon was also vital for New Deal monopoly reform success on the West Coast. McNary had originally proposed the Bonneville Dam in 1933, and was so much associated with it at the time that FDR, who enjoyed good relations with this progressive politician, declared, 'I've got to give Charlie his dam.'¹⁵² Bone and McNary led the group of senators who introduced the Bonneville Power Bill. Progressive era ideology significantly shaped this legislation.

¹⁵⁰ Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 339-340.

¹⁵¹ Bonneville Power Bill, March 29, 1937 (Legislative file), container 37, Charles L. McNary Papers, Manuscript Collections, Madison Building, Libraries of Congress, Washington DC

¹⁵² Steve Neal, *McNary of Oregon: A Political Biography* (Portland: The Press of the Oregon Historical Society, 1985), 145.

It is immediately apparent that the Bonneville Power Bill overtly championed the progressive principle of public power. In the distribution of Bonneville electricity, ‘priority’ would be given to ‘public bodies and co-operatives.’¹⁵³ Accordingly, ‘not less than 50% ... of the electric energy’ produced at the dam, was allocated to urban or rural public power bodies. The progressive concept that reform should assist the ‘many, not the few’ was also recognized. Bonneville would be ‘operated for the benefit of the general public.’ Therefore, the contracts of private utilities, which had secured distribution rights, could be cancelled ‘upon five years notice,’ if the public wanted a switch to a public provider.¹⁵⁴ An Administrator was to oversee this whole strategy, in charge of a new body – the Bonneville Power Authority. He would fulfil the progressive ‘stewardship’ role, acting in the best interests of the public. For instance, private utilities would be required to charge the consumer ‘reasonable’ prices and keep the Administrator reliably informed of electricity rates.¹⁵⁵

As the Bonneville legislation progressed towards becoming law, Bone succeeded in reaching a ‘progressive consensus’ with two New Deal agencies at odds over the dam’s electricity. The PWA constructed West Coast dams located upstream on river systems, like Grand Coulee on the Columbia, or Shasta on the Sacramento. However, the Corps of Engineers built Bonneville because their duties included downstream dams. Unlike Ickes’ PWA, the Corps of Engineers invariably sold electricity to the highest bidder, which frequently meant industry or private utilities. True to his progressive convictions, Ickes was keen to have the new Bonneville Power Authority produce and sell the dam’s electricity, because it would promote public power. In May 1937, Ickes wrote to McNary to enlist his support for that position. Ickes enclosed a press statement in which he argued that dividing responsibility for Bonneville electricity between the Corps of Engineers and the Power Authority invited ‘discord and trouble.’¹⁵⁶ Yet, Ickes’ intervention was in many ways unwelcome. Ickes’ sincere but conspicuously undiplomatic progressivism often alienated his colleagues – his feud with Wallace over the proposed Department of Conservation was a typical case in point. Indeed, someone once described Ickes as having the ‘soul of a meat ax’ in his dealings. Fortunately, Bone was strongly conscious that

¹⁵³ Bonneville Power Bill, container 37, McNary Papers

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ickes to McNary, May 15, 1937 (with press statement, May 10, 1937), container 37, McNary Papers

public power in the Progressive past was seriously weakened by ‘factionalization,’ which private utilities readily exploited.¹⁵⁷ He therefore arrived at a sensible compromise with the Corps of Engineers, in the final analysis a New Deal agency. He proposed that they ‘should operate the ... power producing facilities and deliver the current to the (Bonneville Power Authority) substation,’ which would negotiate electricity sales.¹⁵⁸ Bone maintained the goodwill of the Corps of Engineers by making a small concession to them. That allowed him to achieve bigger concessions for public power. Not for the first time, a 1930s reformer learned from the Progressive era – that a progressive consensus was essential to achieve policy success. The ‘Bone Compromise,’ or ‘Bone red line,’ was written into the final legislation – the Bonneville Power Act, August, 1937.¹⁵⁹

Although Bone shaped the Bonneville Power Act, he was undoubtedly interacting with the wider public power movement, especially in Washington. They desired two main concessions to give Washington public power companies access to Bonneville power. Firstly, electricity sales should be based on ‘widest possible use’ i.e. regardless of distance from the dam site, electricity should be sold at one rate. Secondly, public power should be promoted over private utilities. Bone and his close ally Washington Congressman Magnuson received a heavy mail-bag about the Bonneville legislation from the wider public power movement. However, two letters stand out because of the public power messages they convey. In January 1937, CC Garland of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of municipal companies, wrote to Bone. Garland warned that Pepco, the private utility in Portland, Oregon, might secure a preferential electricity rate, because of its proximity to Bonneville. If that happened, he feared: ‘It will ruin the municipal plants in this part of Washington’ (i.e. Tacoma Light and City Light).¹⁶⁰ The Bonneville Power legislation decisively rejected the ‘zone system’ Pepco lobbied for, and Bonneville’s ‘widest possible use’ rate assisted Washington’s municipal companies founded in the Progressive era. During February, MM Moore, of the Washington Public Utility District Association, backed by the State Grange, contacted Congressman Magnuson. Following Bone’s 1930 law, Washington public utility districts (puds) proliferated in rural areas. By 1937, they

¹⁵⁷ Note by Seelig, Bone’s secretary, July 31, 1940, box 2, Bone Papers

¹⁵⁸ Bone to Ogden, September 9, 1948, box 1, Bone Papers

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.; *Oregonian*, August 21, 1937, container 37, McNary Papers

¹⁶⁰ CC Garland to Bone, January 7, 1937, box 24, Bone Papers (Tacoma)

covered 75% of Washington's population, and were hungry for electricity. Moore's letter urged that in federal schemes like Bonneville 'public agencies' (should) 'be granted a ... right of *priority ... to electric ... power.*'¹⁶¹ The next month the Bonneville legislation pledged that 'priority' would be given to public power in Bonneville Dam electricity. Washington puds, based on a Progressive era structure, therefore, became major beneficiaries of Bonneville power. It is difficult to assess the wider public power movement's influence in shaping the Bonneville legislation. At the very least, it pressured progressive politicians who shaped policy. At most, the wording of its demands found direct expression in policy decisions.

Nonetheless, sometimes the aims of the public power movement were unsuccessful over Bonneville. During 1937 California progressives attempted to insert a Boulder Dam provision into the Bonneville legislation, which would have given public power priority access to Boulder Dam electricity. Senator Hiram Johnson, perhaps the most important surviving old Progressive, was heavily involved in this endeavour. By 1937 he was an arch critic of Roosevelt's New Deal, but in his home state he still continued to promote progressive New Deal ideas like public power. However, the House rejected the Boulder Dam proposal in July 1937, and the Senate looked likely to follow suit.¹⁶² At the start of August, Scattergood, always resourceful about his company's interests, arrived in Washington DC, and audaciously tried to turn opinion towards the provision.¹⁶³ With his years of political experience, Johnson told Scattergood that his belated intervention would not succeed. Johnson rather ruefully commented: 'But Scattergood knew better ... and gave a dinner to everybody.' Apparently, even the force of Scattergood's personality – and his hospitality – failed to change enough minds.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the attempt by California utility reformers to plug their plan for Boulder Dam electricity into the Bonneville legislation demonstrates the interconnectedness of the West Coast public power movement.

The West Coast public power movement also contributed to the selection of the Bonneville Administrator – the man who would implement the policy. JD Ross quickly became the favourite for the post. Ross was born in Oregon, had spent most of his working life heading

¹⁶¹ MM Moore to Magnuson, February 17, 1937, box 9, Magnuson Papers

¹⁶² Johnson to Doherty (telegram), July 29, 1937; Johnson to Doherty (letter) July 27, 1937, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

¹⁶³ Johnson to Doherty, August 1, 1937, Johnson Papers

¹⁶⁴ Johnson to Doherty, August 10, 1937, Johnson Papers

Washington's City Light Company, and in the mid 1930s was a commissioner nationally for the New Deal's anti-monopoly body, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). These national New Deal contacts extended to FDR. For example, Ross thanked Roosevelt for a gift of trees from his Hyde Park estate to landscape City Light's Skagit Valley dam development.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the choice of Ross as Bonneville Administrator was, in part, as a result of local pressure. Neuberger, the Oregon journalist, a close ally of McNary and other Oregon progressives, campaigned hard for Ross's appointment. He had met Ross in Seattle during 1936 in company with Washington public power enthusiasts, Congressman Lewis Schwellenbach and Howard Costigan.¹⁶⁶ Neuberger cultivated Ross's acquaintance, and provided a 'running commentary' of the campaign. In July, 1937, Neuberger wrote to Ickes, saying that Ross was 'ably qualified to be Bonneville Administrator.'¹⁶⁷ The next month, the Oregon Commissioner of Public Utilities suggested Ross for the job to Roosevelt.¹⁶⁸ On August 19, Neuberger telegrammed Ross that Robert La Follette Jr., of the Wisconsin Progressive era political dynasty, was supporting 'Jaydee for Administrator.'¹⁶⁹ The power trust tried to stop Ross' appointment, but, in the opinion of Neuberger, they were not 'getting to first base with the people.'¹⁷⁰ When Neuberger contacted Ross, October 10, 1937, to congratulate him on his appointment as Bonneville Administrator by Ickes, the public power movement had in place a man who would represent their ideas.¹⁷¹ Ross was now emphatically in the foreground of the New Deal. Ross' implementation of the Bonneville Power Act, and related public power issues, 1937-1938, are now looked at, in order to supplement the historiography, which largely ignores a Progressive era influence on his actions as Bonneville Administrator.

There are several views about Ross' implementation of policy at Bonneville (1937-1938). The most detailed version of events, a PhD by Wesley Arden Dick, considers Ross achieved a

¹⁶⁵ Roosevelt to Ross, May 15, 1937, box 81, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁶⁶ Neuberger to Ross, December 3, 1936, box 76, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁶⁷ Neuberger to Ross, July 26, 1937, box 76, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁶⁸ Ralph Clyde to Roosevelt, August 12, 1937, (Roosevelt replied, August 17, 1937), box 81, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁶⁹ Neuberger to Ross (telegram), August 19, 1937, box 76, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., September 16, 1937, box 76

¹⁷¹ Ibid., October 10, 1937, box 76

balanced system, but does not delve deeply into Ross' Progressive era background. According to him, Ross attempted to create a balance between competing claims – so no one interest would prevail.¹⁷² This approach might be considered a very progressive concept. However, we need to realize that utility reform policy since the Progressive times was radical. For example, Robert La Follette Snr. believed in state ownership of utilities. Dick's account supplies key facts about Ross' implementation of Bonneville power policy. In a November 1937 address to business leaders, Ross 'suggested that ... 20% of Bonneville's initial energy supply should be utilized' for industry. This concession placated pro-business elements in Portland, including Pepco, the Oregon private utility monopoly. Ross honoured his promise in 1938.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, in March, 1938, Ross announced the general principle of the 'widest possible use' rate for the vast majority of Bonneville electricity.¹⁷⁴ That decision appealed to municipal companies, and rural puds, especially in Washington. In line with the Bonneville legislation, Ross was going to favour public power, without giving it exclusive access. Over conservation, Ross showed a 'wise user' progressive sensibility, arguing for industry in the Columbia River Gorge near Bonneville. However, he aimed to raise economic standards 'without impairing the aesthetic values that make life full and rich.'¹⁷⁵ Therefore, he ruled out a 'Pittsburgh of the West' beside the dam, quoting from Roosevelt, who had visited Bonneville the previous year. In Dick's account, Ross achieved the difficult balancing act of recognizing the needs of not only consumers, but also industry; public power and private utilities; conservationists and resource developers; Oregon and Washington. In Dick's opinion, Ross did not force the public power issue beyond what the legislation required.

A second view of Ross agrees with Hofstadter's view that the New Deal was essentially pragmatic. Ficken contended that New Deal public power policy at Grand Coulee, and on the West Coast generally, was mainly concerned with creating sufficient demand for electricity to justify the capital outlay on the big dams. Consequently the 'widest possible use' principle needed to apply, and Washington, as well as Oregon, should benefit from Bonneville or Grand Coulee power. Above all else, the delivery of electricity to centres of population, like Seattle

¹⁷² Wesley Arden Dick, 'Visions of Abundance: The Public Power Crusade in the Pacific North-west in the Era of JD Ross and the New Deal' (PhD, University of Washington, 1973), 307.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 307-308.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

and Tacoma, resulted in sufficient uptake of power to validate the New Deal's dam building policy.¹⁷⁶ Certainly, Governor Olson of California in 1940 pointed out that 'when the Bonneville project was completed in 1938' ... (near the dam site) 'only a private power distribution monopoly was prepared to bid for Bonneville power.'¹⁷⁷ Pragmatically, it made poor political and economic sense to deliver power solely to Pepco, which supplied a minority of Oregon's population. The other Oregon-oriented solution would use Bonneville electricity for industrialization. Governor Charles Martin of Oregon originally conceived Bonneville would have that purpose in 1933, saying, 'this power is intended for metallurgical reduction plants whose first consideration is cheap power.'¹⁷⁸ However, using Bonneville power exclusively for industrial uses seemed perverse, again from an economic and pragmatic political angle. There were cities on the West Coast which could absorb much of the power, and whose customers were voters. In this way, Ficken's argument, that the New Deal's concentration on 'widest possible use' had more to do with political and economic imperatives, although plausible, diminishes Ross' role at Bonneville to that of a technocrat.

The third view of Ross' behaviour, 1937-1938, that this work develops, shows him as far more of an ideologue – a man with a mission to promote public power. It demonstrates he had another set of motives, which connected with his progressive past. We need to understand his mentality for this interpretation. It does not necessarily replace the interpretations of Dick or Ficken. Rather, it supplements the motives they discovered behind implementation of New Deal public power on the West Coast. True, Ross did include all major groups in his decisions, and the position he held as a government bureaucrat involved justifying New Deal spending on the West Coast dams. Yet, these interpretations without the Progressive era context provide an incomplete explanation for Ross' behaviour as Bonneville Administrator, and the West Coast public power situation more generally between 1937 and 1938. Factors from the Progressive era give authenticity to Ross' behaviour at this time.

¹⁷⁶ (Ed) Richard Lowitt, *Politics in the Postwar American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995) Ficken chapter, 282-283.

¹⁷⁷ Olson CBS broadcast, January 28, 1940, carton 1, Olson Papers

¹⁷⁸ Neuberger to Ross, July 28, 1937, (Neuberger says Martin made this statement during 1933 in Congress), box 76, Seattle Lighting Department Records

Photographs of JD Ross, as a youngish or middle aged man show a round, contented face and neatly groomed hair. His steely-eyed look and the suggestion of a scar on his chin are perhaps clues to another side of Ross. In the Progressive era, he headed a new municipal utility company - City Light - competing with the Eastern holding company Stone and Webster for control of Seattle's electricity. City Light, struggled for supremacy with Puget Sound Power and Light, the private utility subsidiary of Stone and Webster. A report on the war of attrition waged by Puget Power against Ross for over 'twenty years' was sent to Hiram Johnson in 1928. It is a 'story of the persecution of JD Ross.' During the Progressive era, the private utility placed spies in his office, and home, in an attempt to find, or plant, incriminating evidence against him. They trailed 'his every movement.' A Dictaphone was even hidden in a room he occupied. Half a million dollars was expended to try and 'defeat the municipal movements ... (in) Seattle and Tacoma.' For a period of six years, Seattle councilmen, in the pay of the private utility, drastically docked Ross' salary.¹⁷⁹ Ross exemplified one of the victims Bone referred to at the start of this chapter, who suffered private utility 'attacks' merely because they wanted 'their ... city to produce power.' Years later, in 1937, the Portland municipal company informed Ross of their proposed takeover of the private utility Northwestern Electric. He replied with feeling: 'You have a tremendous opportunity, for you do not have the prejudice born of a bitter fight of 35 years.'¹⁸⁰ Ross, like many West Coast public power leaders, was a battle-scarred veteran of a 'bitter fight.' To him, public power was an ideological belief, which, because of his life experiences, he had considerable emotional investment in. In his implementation of the Bonneville legislation, Ross' experiences were not conducive to making him conciliatory towards private utilities, who he viewed with enmity.

Ross' progressive past incentivized him to privilege Seattle and other Washington public power bodies in the distribution of Bonneville electricity. In July 1937, in the run-up to his appointment as Bonneville Administrator, Mayor Carson of Portland wrote to Ross. Carson feared that if Ross were appointed administrator he would favour Seattle over Portland. He drew attention to Ross' remarks to Seattle City Council in 1934, that Bonneville Dam electricity could

¹⁷⁹ Report of FW Greer, August 6, 1928, carton 8, Johnson Papers

¹⁸⁰ Ross to Portland municipal company, 1937, box 79, Seattle Lighting Department Records

both damage Seattle and be the making of Portland.¹⁸¹ Ross drafted a reassuring reply, saying Carson's apprehensions were misplaced. However, the letter was never sent, perhaps because his reassurances would bind him to a course of action – fairness to Portland – which he had no intention of carrying out.¹⁸² In fact, Ross did want to aid Seattle above Portland, most obviously because the latter's electricity supply was mainly provided by private utility, Pepco.

There were additional reasons why Ross wanted to 'provision' City Light especially with cheap Bonneville electricity. By 1937, Ross' City Light Company of Seattle was heavily in debt, and envisaged further high spending during the years ahead. Federal government had allocated City Light a \$3 million grant for its new Skagit project – the Ruby Dam. However, the company would need to raise another \$5.5 million itself. City Light also planned to take over its rival Puget Sound Power and Light. It would need a massive \$37.37 million for a realistic bid.¹⁸³ Ross had good reason to boost City Light's profits by providing Seattle with cheap electricity, and ration Portland's supplies, which would disadvantage Pepco, and help discredit private utilities. As Bonneville Administrator, Ross had the opportunity to help both City Light and other Washington public companies, including the puds, to create an economically efficient public power system in the state.

An article by Neuberger in *The New Republic* (May 1938) described what actually happened after Ross became Bonneville Administrator in October 1937. It demonstrates how Ross quickly finessed the administrator's remit to favour public power into favouritism for Washington. Neuberger approvingly described the Washington puds as 'the largest public power network in America.' He adds 'Ross intends to give them the first "crack" at the ultimate 500,000 kilowatts to be generated by the giant (Bonneville) barrier.' Later, the article shows how Ross was working towards realizing the long-held Progressive era aim of an integrated urban and rural public power system in Washington. Neuberger writes 'Since Seattle and Tacoma already have efficient municipal plants, and with eighteen new' (public utility) 'districts serving the hinterlands, Ross believes the state of Washington will soon show the entire nation what public

¹⁸¹ Mayor Carson to Ross, July 29, 1937, box 79, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁸² Ibid. Ross to Carson, draft of letter, (with note that it was not sent)

¹⁸³ Ross radio speech on KOL, January 15, 1937, box 127, Seattle Lighting Department Records

ownership means.’¹⁸⁴ Washington would become a beacon for public power that the rest of the US might emulate. This information on Ross’ actions in 1938, together with the histories of Bone, Ross, the municipal companies and the puds already outlined, demonstrate the unequivocally ideological nature of Ross’ actions at Bonneville.

Ross’ actions at Bonneville also uncover unexplored broader aspects of progressivism. An historian of the Progressive era, Gabriel Kolko accused progressives of succumbing to ‘political capitalism’ where monopoly leaders used politics to perpetuate their socio-economic status.¹⁸⁵ More recently, Colin Gordon has written a similar critique of the New Deal.¹⁸⁶ Yet, perhaps there were also dangers when progressives went into business on behalf of the public. Possibly, after a time they began acting like businessmen. It is a matter of debate whether public power advocates needed to acquire the characteristics of private business to succeed against them. Nonetheless, the way Ross valorized Washington municipal power companies and puds is a possible cause for concern. There is a suspicion he was using requirements placed upon him for: giving priority to public power, stimulating sufficient electricity demand, and overcoming the lack of Oregon puds, to serve his first loyalty – City Light. When a progressive privileged his special interest above other interests, was he necessarily acting entirely for the common good? Certainly, Ross’ conflation of individual and corporate identity, because he was the former head of City Light, gave him a strong motive to assist the debt-laden company with cheap Bonneville electricity. Public power practitioners, like Ross, also exposed a weakness in progressivism, if their corporate identity overrode the common good – the *raison d’être* for public power.

Even so, Ross fully intended that Bonneville electricity should reach farther afield than Washington. On account of his progressive past, Ross conceptualized the public power question as a pan-West Coast issue, in which he worked with allies across the region. This pattern of behaviour was well-established on the West Coast, encouraged by communication through the Public Ownership League, and inter-company contacts. For example, the exchange of ideological ideas and methods between Washington and California dated back to 1918 when San

¹⁸⁴ Richard Neuberger article, ‘Bonneville,’ May 25, 1938, *The New Republic*

¹⁸⁵ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1967), 3, 6, 196, 200.

¹⁸⁶ Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

San Francisco municipality exchanged information with City Light.¹⁸⁷ These Progressive era contacts signified a support network for struggling public power companies, a coalition of the weak, if you will, against the powerful private utilities. After 1913, San Francisco built the contentious O’Shaughnessy Dam in the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, part of Yosemite National Park. This issue became even more iconic to progressives when in the 1920s private utility Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) gained control of the dam. Correspondence reveals City Light was still vexed by this issue in 1936 when it sought from San Francisco municipality information about an enlargement of the dam.¹⁸⁸ In the sympathetic environment of the New Deal, Scattergood had attempted to utilize the Bonneville Dam Power Bill for the benefit of California public power, and Ross used California examples to bolster the public power case in Washington. In a January 1937 radio speech, Ross cited a legal ruling (December 1936), giving Scattergood’s Los Angeles municipal company the go-ahead to take over their private utility rival, Southern Californian Edison. Ross argued that the ruling justified City Light’s planned buy out of their enemies, Puget Sound Power and Light.¹⁸⁹ The pan-West Coast dimension of public power company contacts stretching back to the Progressive era, promoted by Ross among others, deserves emphasis because it challenges many assumptions.

Too often research assumes that California was fundamentally different from the other West Coast states. Over monopoly reform – and indeed all three tenets of progressivism – California, in many ways, was surprisingly similar to its neighbouring states. Therefore, regarding public power, California’s exceptionalism needs to be queried. Since Frederick Jackson Turner, and indeed before him, exceptionalism became a useful academic tool to fashion explanations for American society. Thus, America itself was portrayed as exceptional among nations, the South deemed exceptional compared with the rest of America, and California judged exceptional when set against the other West Coast states. There were, and are, good grounds for these claims; nonetheless in many areas the alleged exception had numerous commonalities with the whole. Accordingly, the Progressive era and New Deal public power movement, to an extent unacknowledged by scholarship, bound together the three West Coast states, and California was not a state apart. In implementing the Bonneville Power Act, Ross sought to build on that

¹⁸⁷ San Francisco municipality to City Light, July 16, 1918, box 82, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁸⁸ City Light to San Francisco municipality, 1936, box 82, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁸⁹ Ross radio speech on KOL, January 15, 1937, box 127, Seattle Lighting Department Records

existing state of affairs. Furthermore, Turner reinforced the belief in a west-east axis to explain American history. Previously, the Eastern seaboard and Europe beyond were considered the dominant influences on America and the American West. Turner reconfigured this thinking to show the influence of the West on the East of America and the nation as a whole. In 1992, Donald Worster argued that greater attention should be given to the north-south geographical axis in explaining American history, both within America, e.g. the Northern Tier states, and trans-nationally.¹⁹⁰ The present argument – showing Washington, Oregon, and California connections – contributes something to Worster’s exhortation to develop this historiographical approach.

Accordingly, during 1937, Ross made a speech at a Portland mass meeting which showed he wished to ‘key’ Bonneville power into a pan-West Coast system. He was able to think in terms of a pan-West Coast framework largely because in this region public power advocates since Progressive times were ideologically aligned and used to co-operating. Ross’ West Coast regional power grid would not only facilitate electricity supply, but also solidify ideological ties. He outlined his vision of how it would mutually benefit municipal companies. Ross described how ‘Bonneville and’ (Grand) ‘Coulee’ (dam electricity) ‘should be inter-tied as part of the Columbia system ... From Bonneville a line would go through Portland’ (municipality) ‘down as far as Eugene’ (Oregon) ... ‘That would tie-in the municipal plants of Seattle and Tacoma and would go southward into California ... to tie later with the’ (municipal) ‘plants all down the coast to Los Angeles.’¹⁹¹ Similarly, in the name of efficiency, private utilities were already integrating state wide systems, to allow exchange of electrical current. For instance, in July 1937, the Federal Power Commission approved a merger between Chelan Electric Company and Washington Water Power Company which ‘owns ... an extensive interconnected transmission system ... This ... network makes interconnection with Pacific Power and Light Company ... at Taunton, Washington ... and also connects with *Puget Sound Power and Light Company* near the Chelan River.’¹⁹² Therefore, the plan to construct a pan-West Coast public power system, reliant on Bonneville, and other New Deal dam, electricity was a natural response to contemporaneous

¹⁹⁰ Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 226.

¹⁹¹ Ross to Portland mass meeting, 1937, box 128, Seattle Lighting Department Records

¹⁹² Federal Power Commission press release sent to Magnuson, July 22, 1937, box 20, Magnuson Papers

state-wide developments among private utilities, for example, involving City Light's rivals Puget Sound Power and Light. However, the West Coast public power ideological network, with its Progressive era origins, made that regional grid network far more likely. The intellectual meeting of minds between the public power leaders assisted and encouraged the tie up of their power operations in a regional grid.

Consequently, the years 1937 to 1938 demonstrated how public power movements with a Progressive era lineage on the West Coast and nationally co-operated to advance the New Deal's agenda. Ross, a public power leader with a progressive past, established a prototype at Bonneville for how electricity would be distributed from the West Coast dams. It involved 'widest possible use,' raising the prospect of a Washington municipal and rural public power system, and more ambitiously a pan-West Coast grid for municipal companies. The West Coast public power movement maintained its focus even in the difficult year of 1938.

The ideological tenor of the West Coast's public power movement also dictated responses by Ross and others to developments in 1938. At the time, public power seemed to be both advancing and becoming stalled. Cuts in New Deal spending, in part as a result of congressional pressure, helped prompt the 'Roosevelt Recession,' and ate into PWA funding. Meanwhile, the utility reform campaign nationally showed signs of slowing, as Roosevelt avoided provoking anti-government power trust propaganda before the mid-term elections. Additionally, momentous foreign policy developments increasingly diverted the government's attention. In these circumstances, Bone delivered a series of speeches during the spring and summer of 1938 that helped legitimize Ross' unapologetic pro-public power policy at Bonneville. At the same time, they argued for a continuation of the national public power campaign, because private utilities were portrayed by him as the main danger to US democracy. For Bone, the power trust was no longer just the monster with tentacles reaching into society – the Progressive era and New Deal trope – by 1938 it had become a dangerous predator, preying on public power and democracy itself. In March 1938, Bone stated: 'It is tied in with all the other exploiters, but because of its vast resources ... it has become the leader of the wolf pack.'¹⁹³ During July of the

¹⁹³ Franklin-Bone broadcast on WOL; March 10, 1938, Bone speaking, box 1, Bone Papers (Seattle)

same year, he argued before the Washington State Democratic Convention that only public power competition against power monopolies could meet their threat, because attempts ‘to regulate the (power) monopolies were as futile as ... attempt’(ing) ‘to regulate the appetite of a Bengal tiger.’¹⁹⁴ Bone’s demonization of private utilities was a rehearsal for similar language used, 1939-1940, inspired by public power fear and loathing of the power trust.

In the event, New Deal spending was gradually restored from spring 1938, and eventually surpassed in 1939 previous levels. However, progressives remained apprehensive about federal government resolve to sustain a reformist agenda throughout 1938. A right-wing commentator on the eve of disappointing mid-term elections in November 1938 accurately noted their mood. He said progressives were worried about Roosevelt’s ‘recent gestures towards the (private) utilities and private industry. They fear they may lose him as their radical ancestors lost Woodrow Wilson twenty years ago through the impact of a foreign war.’¹⁹⁵ Even so, against the trend of the 1938 election set-back, new hope illuminated the West Coast public power movement. In November, Culbert Olson was elected California’s governor – the first 20th Century liberal Democrat governor of that state. Olson’s progressive beliefs were not only a product of his time as a state senator in California during the 1930s; they went back to Progressive era experiences when he was a Utah state senator. Furthermore, Olson’s biographer, Robert Burke, considered that the California governor’s commitment to the public power movement outstripped all his other political beliefs.¹⁹⁶ Burke calls public power Olson’s ‘favourite cause.’¹⁹⁷ The ascendancy of a progressive governor in California, at a time when decisions about power supply from Boulder and Shasta Dams were imminent, together with an increasingly orchestrated anti-public power campaign by private utilities, set the scene for a new phase in the utility reform struggle. In 1940, the New Deal re-dedicated itself to public power, and the private utility interests went from posing a political threat regionally, on the West Coast, to the national level, in the presidential election of that year. Bone’s 1938 warnings about the dangers of the power trust to democracy assumed a new relevance in 1940.

¹⁹⁴ Bone speech to State Democratic Convention, reported in *Tacoma News Tribune*, July 13, 1938, Coffee Papers

¹⁹⁵ Ray Tucker article, November 4, 1938, McClure Newspaper Syndicate, box 248, Ickes Papers

¹⁹⁶ Robert E Burke, *Olson’s New Deal for California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 148.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

Challenges to West Coast Public Power, 1939-1940

The public power movement, 1939-1940, faced a series of challenges that only assume full clarity in a Progressive era context. Firstly, a searching discussion occurred within the public power movement about its future direction, and the need for that debate and the nature of it connected with the Progressive era. Secondly, the power trust mounted a concerted attack on public power at this time concerning a Progressive era funding device – revenue bonds – that revived memories of earlier conflicts. Thirdly, the public power versus private utility struggle reached a climax in the 1940 presidential election, which vindicated Progressive era-sourced warnings about the dangers of the power trust.

The successes of public power on the West Coast, 1937-1938, prompted a debate among progressives, 1939-1940, about how far to take public power. This debate reveals a new self-confidence in the public power movement, as it was discussing future directions for public power, not merely attempting to survive against the power trust. This evidence runs counter to recent historiography, which views the later New Deal as a retreat from a reformist agenda. Alan Brinkley in *The End of Reform* argued that ‘reform liberalism’ i.e. progressivism, after 1937 was gradually supplanted by ‘new liberalism.’¹⁹⁸ He contended that up till then many New Dealers although muddled in their thinking about adopting a single Progressive era approach to monopoly reform, nonetheless, wanted to restructure capitalism. Either the ‘planners’ approach or ‘trust-busters’ would have achieved that objective. ‘New liberalism’ abandoned that quest, in favour of creating a mass consumer society. The combination of efficient business, and economic stimulus by federal government, delivered increasing affluence in wartime and post-war American society.¹⁹⁹ Brinkley’s work follows Hofstadter’s paradigm of a pragmatic New Deal. It articulates important truths about the origins of American consumer society, yet also perhaps exaggerates the extent the New Deal lost its reformist drive, 1937-1942.

Brinkley’s argument, as with Hofstadter’s, under-estimate Roosevelt’s and more widely New Deal fidelity to progressivism. For these historians, Roosevelt was the master politician, with the implication that Roosevelt abjured ideological consistency because it got in the way of winning

¹⁹⁸ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1995), 4-10.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

elections, maximizing his voter base, and entrenching presidential and Democratic Party power. Yet, FDR's expediency was largely a product of a flexible progressive ideology. Roosevelt's heterogeneous use of New Nationalism and New Freedom in monopoly reform was neither necessarily muddled thinking, nor signifying a politician without an ideological compass. Instead, different methods towards quasi-monopolistic US business were a recognition that no one approach was suitable across the gamut of large business. As argued earlier in this work, both TR and Wilson, the progressive presidents associated with New Nationalism and New Freedom respectively, employed the two methods simultaneously, and paradoxically ended up favouring their rival's method when in power.

Brinkley argues that reform liberalism i.e. progressivism, wished to re-shape the structure of capitalism, and so did many New Dealers until c.1937. However, progressivism was ultimately about re-shaping behaviour, and resorted to restructuring capitalism as a last resort. Therefore, sometimes big business needed regulation – New Nationalism – to persuade its unruly elements into acting responsibly. Other business so abused the public, the market, the political process, (and in some instances, the environment), it needed restructuring – New Freedom. The financial sector, and the private utilities, from the early and later New Deal were cases in point. In the latter example, trust-busting was not only deployed against utility holding companies well beyond 1937, but public bodies encouraged to compete with private utilities as a countervailing power. Other Progressive era devices were also brought into play, like utility commissioners recommending electricity rates to power monopolies. Consequently, New Deal progressivism, facing the myriad problems of US business in the Great Depression context, could only ever realistically tackle the most flagrant monopoly abuses. New Deal monopoly reform did address the problem of over-powerful private utilities as America electrified, and was enabled to do so successfully on the West Coast because federal government controlled the destiny of the great dams.

The evidence indicates that by 1939-1940 in utility reform on the West Coast the New Deal did not retreat from curbing the private utilities, but was debating how far to take federal government intervention. All ideologies have a harder and more moderate wing, and therefore progressivism was not alone in that characteristic. In progressive utility reform there was a 'statist' and a 'localized' tradition. However, in progressivism's case it had never formed an

enduring party or achieved sustained power, so neither tradition had gained a clear ascendancy. After the successes of 1937-1938, between 1939 and 1940 progressives debated the way forward for public power. As I have contended already, the intellectual contours of progressives followed three principal tenets. Bearing out that contention, those who participated in this public power debate constructed their arguments within the framework of those three tenets.

The most ‘statist’ form of public power involved nationalization, and at this time some proposed reforms pointed in that direction. Washington Congressman John Main Coffee presented the National Natural Resources bill to Congress, and delivered a radio broadcast in April 1939 on its aims.²⁰⁰ It would have set up a Natural Resources Corporation ‘to acquire all coal, water-power, oil, and natural gas properties of the United States.’ He based his argument for this legislation on the three tenets of progressivism. It involved monopoly reform, because ‘the sources of power ... were in the control of a(n) ... ever-narrowing group.’ That group threatened conservation and ‘had gutted our mines and drained our oil wells.’ In social justice terms, the power trust’s workers and consumers were frequently the same people, and, therefore, ‘those who are underpaid are also overcharged.’²⁰¹ Presumably, like fellow-Tacoman Bone, Coffee’s sweeping reform envisaged only nationalization of production e.g. public power companies would still distribute electricity. Coffee’s bill, which he described as part of his ‘progressive program’ eventually failed. In a similar vein, during 1940, Ickes also contemplated federal government control of water power, this time on the Columbia River. His Columbia River Authority would have assigned Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dams, along with other proposed dams on the Columbia River, to the Interior Department, so that although municipal and private companies, and puds, distributed the electricity ultimately Ickes would make all decisions on the dams’ electricity allocations.²⁰²

Significantly, Ickes’ suggestions put him on a collision course with the main public power leaders on the West Coast; another example perhaps of Ickes the progressive ‘meat ax.’ Ross died in April 1939, but his views were sustained by public power advocates like Bone and Scattergood. These progressive leaders had no intention of substituting their own ‘local’ public

²⁰⁰ Coffee radio broadcast, April 29, 1939, Coffee Papers

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Bone News Release, 1940, box 2, Bone Papers

power control of West Coast electricity with federal government monopoly. A shared sense of ‘states’ rights,’ home rule, and the great distance between the West Coast and Washington DC caused them vehemently to oppose such moves. Of course, in the case of Scattergood and Ross their strong commitment to municipal companies was also a business interest. In a City Light report to Seattle City Council during 1934, Ross had summarized their ‘localized’ public power position succinctly: ‘We want City and District control of power. There is no possible need or excuse for a State or Federal power system west of the Cascades.’²⁰³

Bone re-entered the legislative fray in 1940, putting forward the Bone-Smith bill to establish a Columbia Power Authority controlled within the West Coast, rather than from Washington DC. In this way, he hoped to forestall Ickes’ bill. However, as with Coffee, Bone, a progressive speaking to a progressive constituency, couched his arguments for the Columbia Power Authority in the framework of the three tenets. He rejected the monopoly of federal government control, which envisaged operating ‘a vast business enterprise from three thousand miles away ... Cities ... such as Tacoma and Seattle ... do not want the Authority to run their affairs for them.’ Bone raised social justice concerns that the Ickes’ bill did not provide unions with collective bargaining, so negotiations would take place across ‘the width of the continent.’ On conservation, the Bone bill, unlike Ickes’, provided ‘a definite formula for ... a portion of the power revenues from Grand Coulee Dam to aid (in) ... reclamation of basin lands.’²⁰⁴

Likewise, the progressive Dr. Paul Raver, who took over as Bonneville Administrator in August 1939, continued Ross’ policies of assisting public power through puds and municipal companies, and creating a Washington public power grid. Raver’s outlook accorded with the localized Progressive era stance of Ross, Scattergood, and Bone. *The Oregonian* reported that ‘(Bonneville) engineers and line crews drove desperately throughout the year to complete vital parts of the transmission grid ... toward Puget Sound ... to Grand Coulee for a hook-up this summer, and ... into south-west Washington to serve puds.’²⁰⁵ At times, Raver appeared to be making extra concessions to private utilities, for instance, at the end of 1939 extending Northwestern Electric’s contract, and signing a deal with Pepco for electricity supplies to

²⁰³ Ross statement in City Light report to Seattle City Council, 1934, box 2, Bone Papers

²⁰⁴ Bone News Release, 1940, box 2, Bone Papers

²⁰⁵ Herbert Lundy articles, *Oregonian*, end of 1939, box 22, Magnuson Papers

Portland.²⁰⁶ However, when those two companies announced an electricity rate below City Light's, as the newspaper article reveals, their rate reductions were 'on the order of the public utilities commissioner.'²⁰⁷ Therefore, localized pressure was being exerted on private utilities both by the Progressive era-inspired public companies, and recommendations by a commissioner – very Progressive era means for achieving reform.

Moreover, in a speech during September 1939, Raver typically located his policies within a the tradition of the three tenets. With an edge to his remark, in more ways than one, he stated: 'As to the private utility (monopolies) ... I have no ax sharpened for any of them ... if ... they can meet the rates of the public systems, they will survive ... If not, they will be their own executioner.' He stated about social justice: 'Coming west with my family two weeks ago, we saw car after car of families heading this way. They want another chance' (of developing farms) ... 'At Grand Coulee, power will help ... pay for irrigation ... With Bonneville power I hope ... we can encourage ... supplemental irrigation by providing a low rate.' In conservation, he declared: 'the phosphate beds of the North-west area are far greater than ... any other region, and there is a desperate need for a vastly expanded fertilizer industry to preserve the soil of the nation.'²⁰⁸

Consequently, the public power movement had made such gains it was motivated to discuss its future, 1939-1940. That debate was challenging, as it revealed very different ways forward – the 'statist' or 'localized' solutions. Like all ideologies, progressivism showed it had two wings, but its ideological options were also products of its Progressive era past. Participants in the public power debate demonstrated the Progressive era mentality by following the intellectual contours of the three tenets. In contrast to Brinkley's standpoint, the public power movement certainly showed no sign of being on the wane, 1939 -1940. On the contrary, it was ready for yet further challenges.

In 1940, the power trust mounted a new offensive against public power. Aware New Deal responses would be more cautious during an election year, to avoid the charge of federal government extremism – a vote loser – private utility interests began a major campaign aimed at

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Raver speech, September 29, 1939, box 20, Magnuson Papers

undermining the public power movement. This public power and power trust struggle in West Coast states was centred on public power funding of rural electrification. The area of conflict related back to the Progressive era. In West Coast states, rural puds or their equivalent needed to raise money for electricity distribution infra-structure. Gail Radford has recently pointed out, since Progressive times revenue bonds became the main funding mechanism for public power on the West Coast, initially by cities, and in the 1930s also for rural districts. She singles out Los Angeles municipal company and Seattle's City Light as leading exponents of this method from the Progressive era. As she writes: 'In 1916, Seattle issued millions of dollars of revenue bonds to develop the vast utility empire known as City Light.'²⁰⁹ Essentially, revenue bonds were popular with the public. They would finance power projects, and bring good returns for investors. Moreover, the debt that the municipal company incurred would be paid off out of the company's profits, rather than being a municipality debt passed onto the taxpayer. Similarly, pud debts would be paid for out of the companies' revenue. However, if revenue bonds were outlawed or rendered ineffective for puds, rural areas would again be made dependant on private utilities for electricity.

During 1940, Bone once more became pivotal. As with Ross, 1937-1938, so with Bone in 1940, an understanding of the Progressive era assists making sense of unfolding events. The linkage between the Progressive era and the New Deal was clear. Bone stated at the outset of this chapter that 1908 was the starting date for his interest in public power. In 1937, Ross wrote to the Portland municipal company of the 'bitter fight' between public power and private utilities in Seattle lasting thirty-five years. Bone described attempts by private utility interests in 1908 to stop Tacoma producing its own electricity as 'a bitter fight.'²¹⁰ That 'bitter fight' continued into the 1910s and 1920s. Indeed, during the 1920s it inflicted on Bone the most traumatic experience of his life. Like Ross, Bone's life experiences gave him a hardened ideological resolve. When in 1940 he found himself confronted with a similar situation between private and public power, and the same tactics by the power trust, he was equal to the struggle.

²⁰⁹ Gail Radford, 'From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities: Institutional Factors in the Shaping of American Public Enterprise' *Journal of American History* Vol. 90 No 3 (December 2003)

²¹⁰ 'Bone on Power' speech, August 2, 1940, box 1, Bone Papers

In 1911 Washington municipal companies were given the right to sell electricity to the countryside, freeing rural areas from dependency on private utilities. By 1913, legislation instigated by the power trust ended that freedom, and in 1924 private utilities upheld that position by successfully campaigning against a referendum – Initiative 52. In 1930, Bone’s pud Act permitted rural areas to raise revenue bonds, liberating them at last from private utilities.²¹¹ During 1940, his speech ‘Bone on Power’ alleged the power trust intended returning rural areas in Washington to dependency on private companies. Initiative 139 would go before voters in the election year, apparently just requiring the new puds to seek democratic backing for raising revenue bonds. In reality, Bone argued the Initiative would prevent puds from operating as going concerns.²¹²

Bone’s Papers reveal parallels with the Progressive era. Bone pointed out power trust lawyers in 1913 inserted ‘jokers’ into an innocent-looking irrigation bill, which re-imposed rural area reliance on private utilities.²¹³ In 1940, he stated ‘jokers’ were put into Initiative 139 by the power trust, so an ostensibly democratic measure would result once more in rural areas becoming reliant on utility monopolies.²¹⁴ Furthermore, in 1924, as a Washington state senator, Bone forwarded the referendum enabling municipal companies again to sell electricity to rural areas, thereby overturning the 1913 law. A power trust pressure group, the North-western Electric Light and Power Association, successfully helped defeat Bone’s referendum – Initiative 52.²¹⁵ During 1940, the power trust formed a new type of pressure group, a citizens’ committee, the ‘Let the People Vote League,’ which campaigned on behalf of Initiative 139.²¹⁶

Most flagrantly, in 1924, private utilities told newspaper editors all over the state that they would only place lucrative full-page adverts in their papers if editors agreed to ‘canned editorials’ written by the power trust, attacking Bone’s Initiative 52, and an anti-Bone cartoon.²¹⁷ Bone affixed these identical editorials to a board, and at town hall meetings explained that his views were being traduced through a concerted campaign by the power trust. However, he lost the

²¹¹ Bone to Ogden, September 9, 1948, box 1, Bone Papers

²¹² ‘Bone on Power’, August 2, 1940, box 1, Bone Papers

²¹³ Bone to Ogden, box 1, Bone Papers

²¹⁴ Bone speech (undated), box 2, Bone Papers

²¹⁵ ‘Bone on Power’, box 1, Bone Papers

²¹⁶ Bone speech (undated), box 2, Bone Papers

²¹⁷ ‘Bone on Power’, box 1, Bone Papers

referendum. Years later, in 1940, his memory of that experience had not dimmed. Bone stated: ‘I was held up to ridicule and scorn in every corner of the State and emerged a ruined man.’²¹⁸ During 1940, Bone seized on the fact that the power trust was using the same methods to push for Initiative 139, which would have hamstrung puds. Bone’s Papers contain a pink US Senate memorandum slip on which he wrote: ‘Note identical Editorials in different papers. These are typical. These editorials appeared throughout the state.’ Accompanying that slip is a sheet covered in identical pasted on pro-Initiative 139 editorials.²¹⁹ In 1940, Bone helped defeat the position the power trust supported.

The tactics of the power trust on the West Coast were the same in the Progressive era and its aftermath, and the later New Deal. Over the issue of freeing rural areas from private power monopolies, the power trust attempted to restore their control by deception, with ‘jokers’ inserted into an innocent-sounding law or referendum. It established a pressure group or citizens’ committee, to influence the electorate, and create the impression of higher levels of support than really existed for its case. The power trust bribed newspaper editors to include their propaganda in identical editorials which promoted their cause. Bone would neither have had the consuming interest in Initiative 139 during 1940, nor been equal to the power trust’s methods, had he not experienced the setbacks of the Progressive era in 1913, or the related personal humiliation of 1924.

During 1940, the pan-West Coast aspect of public power once more is striking. Scattergood’s Los Angeles municipal company had long posed a threat to the private utility Southern Californian Edison. As early as 1927, Hiram Johnson’s colleague in the House of Representatives, Phil Swing, expressed a future concern that the Edison Company would oppose Los Angeles municipal company competing with them by selling Boulder Dam electricity to small towns out in the countryside.²²⁰ Therefore, the same tension between public and private utilities prevailed in both California and Washington over rural electricity supply. Private utility fears were strengthened in 1935 when state senator Olson succeeded in passing the Revenue Bond bill that would have set up a pud system in California, financed from revenue bonds, to

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Bone Senate memorandum slip; sheet with pasted on editorials, box 2, Bone Papers

²²⁰ Swing to Boulder Dam Association, May 25, 1927, carton 8, Johnson Papers

match Washington's. Although the measure was vetoed by Governor Merriam, in 1937 Olson and Garrison passed similar legislation, which Governor Olson upheld in 1939. Yet, during 1940, approximating to the situation in Washington, California's power trust put forward a referendum, Proposition 13, about rural areas being funded through revenue bonds. Its rejection would return them to reliance on private utilities.²²¹ Later on, Olson's 1942 re-election organizers described the methods private utilities had used, and were using, to undermine public power. 'Their tactics,' comparable to the Washington situation, included 'heavy purchase of "institutional" or "good-will" advertising in newspapers ... in the hope of influencing the' (papers)' 'editorial policies.'²²² In 1940 the public power movement helped frustrate attempts by the power trust to return rural areas to dependency on private utilities, through California's Proposition 13 and Washington's Initiative 139. The marked similarities of private utility tactics in these referendum campaigns must surely show some co-ordination among the West Coast power trust against public power. Moreover, the success of the public power movement shows its ideological robustness, 1939-1940, which kept the New Deal moving forward, contradicting Brinkley's argument. Finally, the struggle over public power in West Coast rural areas is a vivid example of ideological continuity between the Progressive era (and its immediate aftermath), and the later New Deal.

The presidential campaign of 1940 provided the culmination of the public power versus private utility struggle, when Wendell Willkie became the Republican presidential candidate. Roosevelt's opponents were clever to choose him. Up till then, Willkie was the head of Commonwealth and Southern (C&S) one of the biggest and most successful private utility holding companies in America, whose area of operation included the south and mid-west. However, Willkie's company, in some respects, challenged New Deal perceptions of exploitative private utilities. Remarkably, C&S halved its electricity rates between 1933 and 1939.²²³ In other respects, C&S had a far more chequered record, over labour relations and manipulation of regulatory devices. For Olson, among others, Willkie 'seemed ... to symbolize the "power trust".'²²⁴ Many progressives believed their warning that the power trust was intent on political

²²¹ Olson NBC radio address, October 21, 1940, carton 1, Olson Papers

²²² Speakers' manual for Olson's 1942 re-election campaign, carton 5, Olson Papers

²²³ 'Indiana Advocate' article, *Time* (July 31, 1939)

²²⁴ Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California*, 148.

power could no longer be dismissed as rhetorical hyperbole; rather it was a manifest reality. If Willkie won, Washington and Californian progressives feared a major power trust offensive against public power. In a July 1940 conversation between Bone and an Interior Department official, they agreed that ‘if Willkie is elected the power companies will feel that a new era is being ushered in’ ... (and) ‘success with putting Initiative 139 over would be indicative of the possibility of knocking out municipal owned systems.’²²⁵ Similarly, Olson argued in an August 1940 radio speech from Napa Valley that if Roosevelt lost and Proposition 13 was defeated, private utilities, especially PG&E, would be resurgent.²²⁶ They would gain the lion’s share of electricity from Central Valley Project dams i.e. Shasta and Keswick Dams. Likewise, the electricity allocation to Scattergood’s Los Angeles municipal company from Boulder Dam would be drastically reduced in favour of Southern Californian Edison.

A further cause for anxiety was Willkie’s decision to select McNary as his vice-presidential candidate. Undoubtedly, Willkie’s main reason for choosing McNary was the Oregon senator’s great influence with western farmers – a vital constituency – and McNary’s standing in the senate. However, Willkie was well-aware of McNary’s strong public power views. Willkie either wanted to lessen voter polarization during the election, thereby appealing to public power supporters through McNary, or, as likely, to muzzle McNary on the topic, in the name of party unity. Willkie’s aides certainly asked McNary to avoid discussion of public power in his vice presidential acceptance speech. However, McNary refused, and in his speech explicitly reiterated support for public power.²²⁷

Consequently, in the election campaign, the Republicans expressed a mixed message over public power, so regarding this one issue, probably McNary’s presence on their ticket aided Democrat electoral prospects. Furthermore, from a non-electoral perspective, Willkie’s choice of McNary as his running-mate furnished evidence for the normalization of public power as a mainstream political view, in both political parties. It showed public power’s continued high profile in the later New Deal, and the importance of the West Coast’s public ownership movement. In fact, with all three tenets of progressivism in mind, Neuberger went so far as to

²²⁵ Seelig note about Bone meeting with Goldschmidt, Assistant to Undersecretary Wirtz, Interior Department, July 30, 1940, box 2, Bone Papers

²²⁶ Olson Napa Valley radio speech, August 17, 1940, carton 1, Olson Papers

²²⁷ Neal, *McNary of Oregon*, 190.

describe McNary as ‘the most progressive Republican on a national ticket since Teddy Roosevelt.’²²⁸

The 1940 election was fiercely fought, and, notwithstanding McNary’s presence on the Republican ticket, progressives appeared genuinely alarmed that a Willkie win would mean power trust control of the presidency. Ickes was constantly supplied with anti-private utility information throughout the New Deal, especially from his Chicago and other mid-west contacts, which fed his existing public power convictions. During 1936, a prominent mid-west academic reminded Ickes of their longstanding Progressive era public power experience: ‘I am writing because of ... the common cause for which we have labored so long in the past.’²²⁹ In November 1939, Ickes was told of malpractices by Willkie’s C&S. C&S had been manipulating Michigan Power Company share activities while pretending this C&S subsidiary was free to sell shares as it pleased.²³⁰ Roosevelt copied a letter to Ickes in September 1940 from nineteen congressmen alleging widespread political corruption by the power trust during the election. Congressmen Coffee and Magnuson, and several Californian representatives, stated: ‘Private ... utility corporations ... are contributing very large sums of money ... to elect men to Congress who will vote for the(ir) interests.’²³¹ Against this ideological back-drop, in an October speech, Ickes railed that the private utilities represented ‘the real power behind Wendell Willkie, and that they are trying to seize control of the Federal Government.’²³² Another Ickes speech shortly afterwards directly linked Progressive era and New Deal political corruption, in a manner that was particularly apposite for California. He declared political corruption’s ‘grandfather is the railroads of America. Its father is the (private) utilities.’²³³

Ickes’ and Olson’s views were in harmony both over public power decisions, 1939-1940, and the power trust’s threat to democracy. In December 1939, public power was prioritized for Boulder Dam electricity – aiding Scattergood’s Los Angeles municipal company.²³⁴ The following month, Ickes met Olson in a special session over the CVP, and said the Californian

²²⁸ Ibid., 188.

²²⁹ Professor Paul Douglas to Ickes, August 26, 1936, box 248, Ickes Papers

²³⁰ Cyrus Eaton to Ickes, November 25, 1939, box 248, Ickes Papers

²³¹ Congressman Frank Havenner to Roosevelt, September 20, 1940, copied to Ickes, box 248, Ickes Papers

²³² *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 19, 1940

²³³ Ibid., October 20, 1940

²³⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1939

state should be ‘ready to act as a power distributor or ... in the interests of public power distributors.’²³⁵ Olson’s more ‘statist’ public power outlook accorded well with Ickes’. Olson, an ‘apostle of public ownership,’ ‘took great delight in fighting against Wendell Willkie.’²³⁶ In fact, at the July 1940 Democratic Convention in Chicago, Olson was a member of the ‘resolution committee,’ and ‘urged his colleagues to insert a plank in the ... (election) platform pledging the party to complete government ownership and distribution of electric power.’²³⁷ Although his proposal failed, the vehemence that Olson and Ickes brought to the public power struggle, directed especially at Willkie, was a legacy of their Progressive era and New Deal experiences. Along with the efforts of the whole public power movement, it helped defeat Willkie in 1940, and sustain the New Deal.

The Relevance of the Public Power Movement in the Lead-into War, 1941-1942

Historians conventionally regard the years 1941 to 1942 as the time when, in FDR’s famous December 1943 press conference phrase, ‘Dr. New Deal’ was replaced by ‘Dr. Win the war.’ Recently, Brinkley, among others, has stressed the later New Deal and war years institutionalized the business- government co-operation which deprived Roosevelt’s government of its reformist edge, but was a vital cause of post-World War II affluence. In a West Coast context, the discourse is about the reasons the region reached its ‘take off’ stage, to employ Walt Rostow’s term. Opinion fluctuates between either crediting that success to the later New Deal, i.e. a direct result of the big dams, or the war years, during which the West Coast emerged as a crucial region for the military-industrial complex. However, two other factors need emphasis in the light of Progressive era influence on monopoly reform. The public power movement used the war-time emergency as a means to facilitate and accelerate their aims. Progressives, always adaptable to new circumstances, were able to continue, or counsel the continuation, of the New Deal under the guise of war. At the same time, while many, but not all, progressives became converted entirely to the war time struggle, ongoing public power objectives were pursued regardless of the war-time situation. Therefore, the New Deal was not entirely discarded in favour of entering and

²³⁵ Mary Montgomery and Marion Clawson, *History of Legislation and Policy Formation of the Central Valley Project*, (New York: Arno Press, 1946)

²³⁶ *Sacramento Bee*, quoted in Burke, *Olson’s New Deal for California*, 62; *Ibid.*, 148.

²³⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 16, 1940

winning the war. Progressives utilized the war for their own purposes, and carried on with some of their aims notwithstanding war time conditions.

Concerning utilization of the war emergency by progressives, the public power leadership and wider movement re-asserted the importance of the West Coast projects. They feared these projects might be swept aside, or put on hold, during the transition from a peace time to war economy. Conversely, they realized that New Deal projects could be facilitated by the emergency. For example, Ickes wrote to Roosevelt in September 1940 referring to ‘complications ... due to the national defence program.’ He said ‘inroads ... made in technical staff of the Bureau of Reclamation’ would delay ‘completion of Grand Coulee Dam, the CVP, (and) Boulder Dam.’ Instead, he urged extra funding ‘to *expedite* installations at Grand Coulee and Boulder Dams’ pointing out the benefits of additional electricity for ‘defence purposes.’²³⁸ It would seem Roosevelt readily acquiesced in Ickes’ proposal, and the multiple aims behind it – helping defence, and public power, while combating the Depression– must have appealed to his supple mind. The next month, October 1940, the Water Project Authority of California sent a resolution to Roosevelt ‘requesting the CVP ... be declared a national defence measure ... so that electric power (from Shasta Dam) for domestic, irrigation, and industrial purposes can be furnished to the central valley.’²³⁹ Like Ickes’ proposal, this letter also suggested work should be speeded up. Roosevelt asked Ickes to prepare his reply, which stated that the New Deal had already re-categorized the CVP, Boulder and Grand Coulee Dams as ‘National Defence Projects.’²⁴⁰

John Boettiger, Roosevelt’s son-in-law, kept up pressure against private utilities into 1942, employing the war situation as a pretext for public power. Boettiger was in the political background, but the political stance of his newspaper the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* supplies interesting clues about Roosevelt’s opinions on the three tenets. *The Seattle P-I* was a Hearst newspaper, at a time when Hearst had grown antagonistic to the New Deal. Often, though, the paper favoured policies Roosevelt was sympathetic to. For instance, in March 1942, an article in

²³⁸ Ickes to Roosevelt, September 11, 1940, Official File 483, Roosevelt Papers

²³⁹ Water Project Authority of the State of California letter forwarded by Congressman Englebright to Roosevelt, October 29, 1940, OF 483, Roosevelt Papers

²⁴⁰ Roosevelt to Congressman Englebright, November 26, 1940; Ickes prepared Roosevelt’s reply, November 25, 1940, OF 483, Roosevelt Papers

the *Seattle P-I* read like a manifesto for public power and the perpetuation of the New Deal. It argued for ‘the acquisition of ... Puget Sound Power and Light ... to allow their inclusion in the rapidly growing public power system ... because the expanding war program requires much more power.’²⁴¹ It reasoned: ‘The public power movement ... has advanced ... as a result of ... the establishment of puds and municipal power plants, and ... action by the federal government.’ The article concluded, ‘Now that war has produced demands beyond all previous imagining, the most hard-bitten opponents ... must admit ... in ... Washington at least public power is here to stay.’²⁴²

The proposed Columbia River (or Power) Authority was also presented as a ‘war need,’ and commandeered as an argument for replacing private utilities with public power in Washington and Oregon. The extent FDR identified himself with the Columbia Power Authority’s aims, and made connections to the West Coast public power movement, was proof of his strong progressive ideological beliefs that reached back into the Progressive era. He did not exercise a vague or remote control over this scheme, but took a decidedly ‘hands on’ approach to it. In May 1941, he sent letters to Bone and McNary asking them to put forward a Columbia River Authority bill.²⁴³ Writing to Senator Norris, the inspirational force behind the TVA, Roosevelt talked about the ‘tremendous public power movement in the Northwest.’ The situation remained, as in 1940, that both Bone and Ickes were initiating Columbia River bills, but Roosevelt signalled he favoured Bone’s approach. He wrote to Norris that he intended ‘local people will be distributing the power that is sold to them by the Federal authority.’²⁴⁴ In a June 1941 letter Bone said he would like to consult Roosevelt before he introduced the bill to Congress, ‘but hesitates to ask the President.’²⁴⁵ Roosevelt’s July 1941 reply stated he was ‘very much interested in the Columbia Power bill and will be glad to go through the Senator’s draft in advance of its introduction.’²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Article in *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 4, 1942, box 14, Magnuson Papers

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Roosevelt to Norris, May 29, 1941, with copies of letters to Bone and McNary, President’s Personal File 2677, Roosevelt Papers

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Bone to Roosevelt, June 13, 1941, PPF 2677, Roosevelt Papers

²⁴⁶ Roosevelt to Bone, July 3, 1941, PPF 2677, Roosevelt Papers

As plans were finalized on Bone's bill, in October 1941 Roosevelt supplied public power solutions to West Coast congressmen and senators (including Bone). The president said he wanted a permanent 'Northwest (dam) administration.' However, he thought as a stop gap measure that existing legislation should be amended to allow the 'acquisition of ... private power properties ... in connection with the Bonneville-Grand Coulee project.'²⁴⁷ When Bone introduced his Columbia Power bill in April 1942, Boettiger's *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* gave resolute support for it, again using the rationale of the war emergency. Boettiger's newspaper was once more a conduit for Roosevelt's public power views. *The Seattle P-I* article asserted that Roosevelt supported Bone's proposed Columbia Power Administration, and that its 'acquisition ... of private utility corporations ... will aid us to win this war.'²⁴⁸ A *Seattle P-I* editorial on this subject from the same month re-enacted themes of the Progressive era public power struggle, and shows how Bone attempted to 'trump' his longstanding enemies. During 1908 Bone was motivated to enter the public power struggle partly because of aspersions on the patriotism of those wanting municipal utilities. The April 1942 *Seattle P-I* editorial quotes Bone saying: 'The ... most ...efficient ... and ... *patriotic* way to handle the (Columbia power) problem is to purchase existing private systems.'²⁴⁹ Through the Progressive era, and intervening 1920s, progressives had tried to establish a public power system using revenue bonds, while private utilities sought ways of thwarting that effort. In the editorial Bone stated that his Columbia Power bill 'proposes a revenue bond plan for financing acquisition' of private utilities.²⁵⁰

The fact that Bone's Columbia Power Authority bill failed in Congress during 1942 is not a valid reason for saying progressivism, or the New Deal, ceased at the outbreak of war in December 1941. Since 1937 the New Deal had experienced increasing difficulties in Congress, but New Dealers continued to attempt reforms. Bone himself blamed 'the fortunes of war' for his bill's defeat.²⁵¹ However, he was not saying by 1942 progressives, locally or as high as the White House, had stopped trying to reform American society. In reality, many factors conspired against his bill. For example, the big drive for public power stirred up some localized opposition, either self-generated, or not entirely a product of power trust propaganda. A Spokane newspaper

²⁴⁷ Roosevelt to Congressman Smith, October 13, 1941, PPF 2677, Roosevelt Papers

²⁴⁸ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 9, 1942, box 15, Magnuson Papers

²⁴⁹ Editorial, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 3, 1942, box 15, Magnuson Papers

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Bone to Ogden, September 9, 1948, box 1, Bone Papers

in Washington reported March 1941 that the 1940 elections in Seattle and Portland rejected proposals for the ‘further spread of public ownership.’²⁵² Public power’s ‘bitter fight’ had always confronted the opposition of the power trust, and major or minor shifts in public opinion. Nonetheless, 1941-1942, the ‘New Deal,’ (including West Coast public power leaders and the wider movement, alongside the national movement), was still trying to pull all the levers at its disposal – new and existing ones – to expand public power, and curb the size of private utilities. For instance, in March 1941 Jerome Frank of the SEC contacted Bone to tell him that Puget Sound Power and Light fell within the purview of the Public Utilities Holding Company Act (1935).²⁵³ In 1934 Stone and Webster reorganized Puget Power as a result of anti-trust action. However, Frank had established that in this complex corporate world by 1941 Puget Power was a subsidiary of the large holding company Engineers Public Service Company, and therefore faced dismantlement.²⁵⁴ Referring to August 1942, the SEC informed Bone that a clutch of companies including Washington Water Power and Oregon’s North-western Electric were subsidiaries of American Power and Light. The latter in turn was part of Electric Bond and Share Company, the biggest utility holding company in the United States.²⁵⁵ Therefore, well into World War II, across Washington and Oregon, power trust companies were still subject to break up by New Deal legislation from 1935. Eventually, in 1943 the ‘wartime New Deal’ succeeded against Puget Sound Power and Light. The private utility separated itself from holding company control and restructured as an entirely Washington-based corporation.

Likewise, public power leaders were only too alive to the possibilities of the war emergency as an agent for industrial expansion. Some scholarship runs the risk of creating the false impression that West Coast public power was primarily concerned with electricity for domestic consumption as opposed to private utilities championing its industrial uses. By 1941-1942 the power question had moved on from the Bonneville Dam situation where private utilities argued that its electricity should be used exclusively for industrial purposes, while public bodies pushed the case of the domestic consumer. In fact, all public power leaders recognized the opportunities the war emergency would provide to the West Coast for industrial expansion, and did not view

²⁵² *The Spokane Spokesman-Review*, March 30, 1941, box 1, Bone Papers

²⁵³ Jerome Frank to Bone, March 13, 1941, box 1, Bone Papers

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Ganson Purcell, Chairman of SEC Philadelphia to Bone, February 1943, refers to August 22, 1942 SEC order under 1935 Act, box 1, Bone Papers

industrial or domestic uses of electricity as a ‘zero-sum game.’ Quite the opposite, progressives welcomed wartime industrialization by the military-industrial complex as a solution to high West Coast unemployment, exacerbated by Dust Bowl migration.

Moreover, in California, for example, Scattergood had long wished to encourage the expansion of both Los Angeles’ population and industry. In March 1940 he met Roosevelt to provide him with information about ‘National Defence Power.’²⁵⁶ With Scattergood’s acute sense of exploiting conditions to suit his municipal company and the growth of Los Angeles, his eager involvement in the war effort was not surprising. Significantly, though, Roosevelt’s government, 1941-1942, steered National Defence Power in a public power direction. During July 1941 a special power unit was established in the Office of Production Management (OPM), to handle all defence power problems. Julius Krug from the TVA headed the new unit.²⁵⁷ Scattergood was described as ‘actively participating in the program.’²⁵⁸ Harry Slattery from the Rural Electrification Administration also took part in its decision-making.²⁵⁹ Clearly, the continuing New Deal intended that public power leaders should have a decisive role over defence decisions about electricity, and not be sidelined, as happened in World War I. Once more, the Progressive era provided lessons for the later New Deal years.

The extent progressive New Deal values were perpetuated, 1943-1945, is beyond the scope of this work. The historiography argues strongly that for the duration of the war, 1941-1945, the military-industrial complex largely controlled the economy, and government monopoly reform ceased. At first, the OPM, and, then from 1942, the War Production Board (WPB), i.e. the main organizations charged with co-ordinating war production, could do little against the tightening grip of monopoly corporations. When Krug was appointed head of the WPB in 1944, this trend proved irreversible.²⁶⁰ Contradicting that pattern, though, there is evidence that the trajectory of the New Deal – opposing private utility monopolies and favouring their nemesis, public power – was not abandoned during the war emergency, at least up to, and beyond, 1942. Examples include the speeding up of West Coast HEP projects, FDR’s steer towards public power in the

²⁵⁶ Memo about Scattergood from General Watson to Roosevelt, March 1940, OF 483, Roosevelt Papers

²⁵⁷ Press Release, July 21, 1941, box 162, Ickes Papers

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 198.

power unit of the Office of Production Management (1941), Puget Power's reorganization away from holding company ownership (1943), and the benefits that government-aided public power companies derived from wartime industrialization and population growth. Especially on the West Coast, the spirit and substance of the Progressive era-inspired New Deal persisted.

As a final example of Progressive era influence, 1941-1942, another round was played out, almost regardless of the war emergency in perhaps California's bitterest public power fight, which dated back to the Progressive era. The Hetch Hetchy controversy (1913), whereby San Francisco municipality built the O'Shaughnessy Dam in the Yosemite National Park became iconic for public power when private utility PG&E purchased the dam (1925). Throughout the peacetime New Deal Ickes pounded away with Progressive era ardour at San Francisco to enforce the Raker Act (1913), which should have prevented the sale of a public power facility to PG&E. In 1936, Ickes forced the issue before a federal judge, who ruled in his favour (1938).²⁶¹ San Francisco appealed the decision. During 1938, Ickes withheld PWA funding to San Francisco as leverage to gain their compliance with the Raker Act.²⁶² Mayor Rossi called upon Hiram Johnson to intercede; pointing out San Franciscans had rejected five municipal referendums for buying out PG&E over the O'Shaughnessy Dam.²⁶³ In October 1939, the US Supreme Court definitively stated that San Francisco was in violation of the Raker Act.²⁶⁴ Still a democratic mandate could not be secured.

Between 1941 and 1942 the imminent completion of a New Deal project re-activated the progressive feud against PG&E, and the issue of Hetch Hetchy. With the Shasta Dam due to be completed in 1943 as part of the CVP, the question of whether public or private utilities would benefit from its electricity became pressing. PG&E dominated the northern Californian electricity market in and around San Francisco. As a countervailing power Olson wanted to encourage Washington-style puds. During 1942 matters came to a head. Olson representatives warned that PG&E 'need (only) ... delay ... the development of local public ownership' to monopolize Shasta electricity and dictate its wholesale and retail price.²⁶⁵ When Ickes gave

²⁶¹ Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West*, pp192-193

²⁶² Ickes to Johnson, July 5, 1938, box 45, Johnson Papers

²⁶³ Johnson to Ickes telegram, July 6, 1938, box 18, Johnson Papers

²⁶⁴ Copy of US Supreme Court ruling, October 1939, box 2, Bone Papers

²⁶⁵ Speakers' manual for Olson's 1942 re-election campaign, carton 5, Olson Papers

evidence to the Public Lands Committee (January, 1942), which discussed relaxing the Raker Act because of the war, he argued successfully against such a move.²⁶⁶ Furthermore, he declared PG&E should sell the O'Shaughnessy Dam back to San Francisco municipality to help the war effort.²⁶⁷ Olson faced a gubernatorial election in 1942. Although his opponents attacked him on several fronts, the CVP and Hetch Hetchy controversies certainly featured prominently in the election. The power trust lobby, a major component in what Olson termed 'the third house of the legislature,' had obstructed the progressive governor throughout his administration, 1939-1942.²⁶⁸ In the election year the power trust took its anti public power propaganda onto the campaign trail. When Olson lost, he pointedly claimed that power trust propaganda was a major determinant of the election result. The 1942 election, therefore, played its part in the latest round of the public power versus private utility 'bitter fight' that dated back to the Progressive era. Of course, the war emergency exerted an enormous impact on the election. Even so, the longstanding public power struggle against PG&E, which was involved in both the Hetch Hetchy and CVP controversies, significantly influenced the 1942 election result in California.

The West Coast in the late 1930s was a crucial part of New Deal monopoly reform, regarding public power. The pan-West Coast public power movement was an ideological creation of the Progressive era, and exercised considerable influence shaping and implementing policy in co-operation with the national movement. Public power leaders: Ross, Scattergood, and Bone brought a hardened ideological resolve from the Progressive age to 1930s utility reform. Bone's 'bitter fight' against private utilities, 1900-1924, was strongly paralleled by events in 1940. Public power advocates conducted their discourse within the intellectual framework of progressivism's three tenets. Their aims were not discarded at the start of the war emergency, 1941-1942, but gained greater urgency, or continued unabated.

²⁶⁶ Statement by Ickes before the Public Lands Committee of the House, January 26, 1942, box 149, Ickes Papers

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Olson speech August 7, 1940 in San Joaquin Valley, carton 6, Olson Papers

Chapter Six: Social Justice on the West Coast, 1937-1942

In March 1939, Howard Costigan, head of the Washington Commonwealth Federation, declared: ‘If we don’t break the back of the Associated Farmers, they will break the back not only of labor ... (and) the farmer, but the entire New Deal by 1940.’ Costigan was warning about the dangers posed by the Associated Farmers – an anti-union organization - to the farmer-labour voting alliance which, if successful, would destroy the New Deal in the 1940 elections. The struggle against the Associated Farmers was part of a wider social justice conflict. It centred on unionization, but incorporated problems associated with reformist governments since Progressive times: communism, the farmer-labour alliance, and the status of the small farmer. The conflict in the late 1930s was at its most explosive on the West Coast.

This chapter explores, in a West Coast context, why late New Deal social justice policy caused such conflict. It argues that the points of disagreement are best comprehended through the lens of Progressive era ideology. The chapter is in sections. Section one concentrates on the period 1937 to 1938, and the fierce argument within progressivism about the direction of New Deal social justice policy, especially concerning CIO unionization. Section two considers how the problems associated with unionization, helped produce a reactionary response, 1937-1939. Section three explains how these combined factors prompted an ideological repositioning of the La Follette Committee during the California investigation, 1939-1940. Section four looks at a contemporaneous crisis in Washington State with strong situational similarities to the Progressive era. Section five covers the years 1940-1942, as progressivism adapted its arguments during the onset of war, but still retained an influence on government policy.

The Argument within Progressivism over Social Justice Policy, 1937-1938

Hiram Johnson’s old Progressivism disapproved of late New Deal social justice policy. Fellow Californian Culbert Olson, a radical progressive, strongly approved of it. This section looks at these two representative progressive figures and their ideological disagreement. It shows that despite the historiography, inspired by Hofstadter, recognizing a clear dividing line between the

Progressive era and the New Deal regarding social justice policy, the differences, as exemplified by Johnson and Olson, have been exaggerated.

Californian US Senator Hiram Johnson emerged as an implacable opponent of Roosevelt during 1937. Up till then he was a New Deal ally. For decades Johnson had harboured towering political ambitions. He was vice presidential candidate in Theodore Roosevelt's failed 1912 election bid to become the first Progressive Party president of America. During 1920 Johnson ran unsuccessfully for the Republican presidential nomination. Previously, Johnson was an inspirational reforming governor of California, 1911-1917, and later became a long-serving progressive Republican senator, 1917-1945. Photographs of him, and correspondence in Johnson's Papers, portray a man very conscious of his own worth and political standing. He even declined Roosevelt's offer to become Secretary of Interior in 1933.²⁶⁹ Equally, Johnson's Papers reveal his passion for furthering social justice and protecting progressive values.

In June 1936 Johnson suffered a cerebral vascular stroke.²⁷⁰ He convalesced over several months, unclear whether the stroke had ended his political career. However, he made a remarkable recovery, and returned to the Senate at the start of 1937. His re-induction into active politics coincided with Roosevelt's 'Court Plan.' Johnson commented: 'I got back just in time to hop into a hot fight.'²⁷¹ He fought against the Court Plan with the supercharged energy of one granted a new lease of life, grasping the momentous issues at stake. Johnson observed: 'The struggle in which we engaged was the most important of the decade.'²⁷² Superficially, the Court Plan – the reason for Johnson's estrangement from Roosevelt – related to constitutional matters. At a deeper level, it was about progressivism, and especially social justice.

Between 1935 and 1936 the Supreme Court ruled most of the First New Deal unconstitutional. Roosevelt believed its decisions did not uphold the US Constitution – the Court's role in the American political system – but were politically-motivated. The Second New Deal strongly emphasized social justice reform e.g. the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations

²⁶⁹ Anthony J Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 82.

²⁷⁰ Michael A Weatherson and Hal W Bochin, *Hiram Johnson: Political Revivalist* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America Inc, 1995), 180.

²⁷¹ Hiram Johnson to Frank Doherty, February 14, 1937, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

²⁷² Johnson to Mrs. Ferne Mattei, President of California Chapter of Pro America, September 17, 1937, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

Act (NLRA). The latter guaranteed unionization as a civil right, and elections held by a government body, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), gave the union that won a majority of votes in any workplace balloted exclusive bargaining rights. As Roosevelt feared that the Supreme Court would strike down his new social justice legislation, on February 5, 1937 he announced the Court Plan, to retire Supreme Court justices at seventy. If a justice refused, he would be allowed to appoint replacements.²⁷³ In this way, Roosevelt sought to curb the ageing Supreme Court's anti-Administration stance.

For Johnson, Roosevelt's Court Plan was the bellwether of a pattern of behaviour that challenged progressive values. Lawsuits had prevented NLRB assistance towards unionization in 1936, so up to the spring of 1937, when the Supreme Court ruled the NLRB constitutional, the La Follette Committee publicized the case for unionization. However, the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee was only able to urge unionization, unlike the NLRB which could legally enforce it. In these circumstances, the breakaway Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) labour movement took matters into its own hands. On February 11, 1937 it achieved a victory as disturbing to Johnson as Roosevelt's Court Plan proposal barely a week earlier.²⁷⁴ The CIO's United Automobile Workers (UAW) won union recognition at General Motors, the car giant, which built nearly half of America's automobiles.²⁷⁵ This stunning victory was achieved by using 'sit-down' strikes, directly occupying factories to force acceptance of unions on hostile employers. The victory over GM in the Mid West was the prelude to a spring and summer of sit-down and conventional strikes, which were often met with violence, and edged America towards industrial warfare. On progressive ideological grounds, Johnson opposed both sit-down strikes and the Court Plan. Yet, other progressives, like Olson, fully endorsed these developments. How can we explain this disagreement within progressivism?

From the outset, Johnson looked upon the Court Plan and the sit-down strikes as two sides of the same coin. At the end of February he wrote: 'The other day ... (Congresswoman) O'Day let the cat out ... the bag (she is a great friend of old Mrs. Roosevelt) ... by saying, "of course the

²⁷³ Patrick Renshaw, *Franklin D Roosevelt: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), 127-128.

²⁷⁴ William E Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 240.

²⁷⁵ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 308.

President want(s) ... control of the Supreme Court” ... The power we are giving him ... in conjunction with ... the sit down strike(s), with which he is sympathetic, is mighty ominous.’²⁷⁶

By March, Johnson had conceptualized these perceived threats into an argument with strong Progressive era overtones. He wrote to a West Coast acquaintance: ‘You are dead right about the labor situation. You may think that I have been crazy in talking about dictatorship, but when these sit down strikes are successful, and the President has taken control of the Supreme Court, there is going to be a dictatorship of the Proletariat, or ... the President himself ... It will not be apparent at first, but just as certain as I am writing to you, it ... (will) come.’²⁷⁷

In many respects, Johnson’s opposition was puzzling. He supported unionization, and did not hold judges in high esteem. For instance, in April 1937, he remarked with typical candour: ‘I used to say that judges were only men after all, and damned poor men at that.’²⁷⁸ Rather, Johnson’s opposition can only be satisfactorily explained by his Progressive era beliefs. From its inception, progressivism was motivated by a fear that one element in society would become preponderant over others. Under the New Deal, in Johnson’s opinion, an office of state – the presidency – and a group – the CIO labour movement – threatened to tyrannize over society. Progressives had always been most exercised by the abuse of power, whether by monopolists, exploitative employers, or irresponsible resource developers. Johnson believed that during 1937 the shifts in power he was witnessing within society towards FDR and the CIO would create sooner or later a tyranny by an individual or a group over the majority.

In relation to what he viewed as the misuse of union power, and its distortion of social justice aims, Johnson stated bluntly in April 1937: ‘I yield to no man in adherence to union labor ... But I am opposed to the sit-down strike ... to the idea that a... body of men can come into my house, or ... yours ... and say that they will keep possession of our homes (until) ... we ... yield to (their) ... demands.’²⁷⁹ Moreover, Johnson believed that Roosevelt was implicitly supporting the sit-down strike campaign by failing to take forceful action against it. Johnson kept a copy of Woodrow Wilson’s 1919 Annual Congressional Message, referencing Progressive era ideology

²⁷⁶ Johnson to John Francis Neylan, February 26, 1937, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

²⁷⁷ Ibid., March 26, 1937

²⁷⁸ Ibid., April 13, 1937

²⁷⁹ Congressional Record, April 1, 1937, Johnson’s speech in support of amendment condemning sit-down strikes, carton 8, Johnson Papers

as a template for presidential behaviour over the sit-down strikes. Wilson stated: ‘No Government worthy of the name can “play” these elements (management and labor) against each other, for there is a *mutuality of interest* between them which the Government must seek to express. The right ... to strike is inviolate ... but ... Government ... (must) assert its power ... against the challenge of any class.’²⁸⁰

Certainly, American society appeared to be careering towards class warfare in 1937. Developments alarmed progressives who prized harmony between classes. In March, the CIO unionization campaign achieved a climb-down from US Steel. However, the smaller steel companies resisted successfully. In this heated atmosphere, violence, and the language of violence, were freely used. Girdler, the steel boss, sneeringly said of the strikers: ‘What do you think (their) pickets have clubs for, to chase butterflies?’²⁸¹ After the Memorial Day Massacre (May 30, 1937), where police shot dead ten strikers outside Girdler’s Chicago steel mill, CIO leader Lewis thundered: ‘Is labor to be protected or is it to be butchered?’²⁸² Although Roosevelt’s Court Plan was defeated in Congress (July 1937), and the CIO retreated from its sit-down strike tactic during 1938, the rift in progressivism remained.²⁸³ The Supreme Court ruled the NLRB constitutional (April 1937), but increasingly bastions of old Progressivism, like the craft-oriented AFL viewed the NLRB, and the La Follette Committee as pro-CIO organizations.²⁸⁴ Unionization campaigns in which the CIO and AFL unions competed perpetuated rancour within the labour movement during the late 1930s. For Johnson, the New Deal seemed to be promoting strife.

The historian Otis Graham Jr. writing in *An Encore For Reform* considered during the 1930s that most old Progressives - e.g. Johnson - were stuck in a Progressive era mindset.²⁸⁵ They favoured paternalism towards the working class, and abhorred the confrontational CIO labour movement backed by the New Deal. Basically, they were incapable of moving with the times. The views of Graham replicated Hofstadter’s work, de-emphasizing Progressive era-New Deal

²⁸⁰ Extract from 7th Annual Message of Wilson to Congress, December 2, 1919, carton 8, Johnson Papers

²⁸¹ *New York Times*, June 2, 1937

²⁸² Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 318.

²⁸³ Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 237-238.

²⁸⁴ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 335-336.

²⁸⁵ Otis Graham, *An Encore For Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

continuity. Hofstadter believed that over social justice the ‘real impulses’ (of Progressive era reformers) ‘were deeply conservative,’ aimed at heading off socialism by dispensing very limited concessions to a grateful multitude.²⁸⁶ Graham charged that Johnson, specifically, in both eras stood for an anachronistic Turneresque individualism, threatened by big business in the Progressive era, and, during the later New Deal, by government and militant unions.²⁸⁷ While there is some truth in these perspectives they ignore Johnson’s longstanding belief in unionization, i.e. collective action. His union links in California stretched back almost thirty years to 1910 when the Teamsters endorsed him.²⁸⁸

Probably, New Dealer condemnation of Johnson, and others, for breaking with Roosevelt during 1937, had a lasting influence on New Deal-generation historians like Hofstadter, who, in the post-war world, raised doubts about Progressive era reformers. After 1937, New Dealers sought to diminish Johnson and portray him as reactionary. Ironically, contradicting Hofstadter’s argument, Johnson’s harshest critics were often Progressive era survivors like Ickes and Olson, who had become radical progressives during the New Deal. They, and younger New Dealers, considered Johnson a progressive apostate. When Johnson accused the late New Deal of betraying progressive ideology, they countered that he had abandoned progressivism. For each side, establishing ownership of progressivism necessitated legitimizing their own, and discrediting the other side’s, meaning of the contested term. In 1939, Ickes commented that Johnson had ‘moved much further to the right than he had ever been to the left.’²⁸⁹ During 1940, Governor Olson of California, who was a progressive in Utah throughout the 1910s, went further, stating that Johnson ‘hasn’t a progressive hair on his head.’²⁹⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, Hofstadter and Graham continued and completed this direction of travel, deploying an argument that accommodated old Progressives who had embraced the later New Deal, while excluding critics of it like Johnson. They asserted with finality that Progressive reformist instincts were ultimately backward-looking, while the New Deal had attained an authentic progressivism, the source of modern ‘liberalism.’

²⁸⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 236-237.

²⁸⁷ Graham Jr., *An Encore for Reform*, 44-45.

²⁸⁸ Richard Coke Lower, *A Bloc of One: The Political Career of Hiram W Johnson* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 33.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.

²⁹⁰ Robert E Burke, *Olson’s New Deal for California* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1953)

Johnson's most recent biographer, Richard Coke Lower, rejects the allegation that Johnson had abandoned his progressive beliefs post-1937. Lower asserts he retained 'his sympathy for the nation's needy.'²⁹¹ Therefore, the historiography is starting to recognize Johnson, in a general sense, maintained his progressive convictions over social justice. However, in the particular, it does not provide an ideological explanation for Johnson's rift with Roosevelt, or acknowledge that Johnson's views were consistent with Progressive era ideology over sit-down strikes, perhaps the most contentious social justice issue during the late New Deal. In this issue, Johnson's concern for the economically disadvantaged was not going to stop him criticizing the sit-down strikes, with the backing of Wilson's 1919 Progressive era speech for his position.

Another layer of understanding about Johnson can be added concerning his West Coast links. Johnson's convictions remained consistent, but his perceptions of Californian social justice realities were being gradually altered by those in the political background with whom he interacted. For example, up to April 1936, his main political confidant, revealed in Johnson's correspondence, was Charles McClatchy. As editor of the *Sacramento Bee* newspaper in the Progressive era, McClatchy had campaigned tirelessly for unionization and labour rights. Right up to his death, on April 27, 1936, his enthusiasm for FDR remained undimmed, when Johnson already was having doubts about Roosevelt's intentions before the presidential election of that year. In the robust language of the Progressive era, McClatchy wrote: 'I have been thinking a great deal about Roosevelt ... There is no public battle for the president ... It is time for Roosevelt to ... give ... (his opponents) a ... two-fisted fight ... and knock (them) ... down.'²⁹² From 1937 onwards, Frank Doherty replaced McClatchy as Johnson's principal political confidant. Doherty was the attorney to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Although he resolutely opposed the reactionary politics of southern California, as exemplified by Harry Chandler, owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, Doherty inevitably was more business-oriented than McClatchy.

Likewise, Philip Bancroft was a personal friend of Johnson. He had acted as his campaign secretary in Johnson's bid for the Republican presidential nomination during 1920.²⁹³ Bancroft was an alumnus of Harvard, and, like Johnson, a trained lawyer. He farmed in Walnut Creek,

²⁹¹ Lower, *A Bloc of One*, 297.

²⁹² Charles K McClatchy to Johnson, April 3, 1936, box 56, Johnson Papers

²⁹³ Lower, *A Bloc of One*, 142.

near Johnson's San Francisco power base. Bancroft ran as the Republican candidate in California's 1938 US Senate election, and lost to Sheridan Downey, the radical progressive Democrat. In the late 1930s, Bancroft was increasingly drawn into the anti-union stance of large farmers in California. At that time, he became vice president of the Associated Farmers, the most notorious anti-union organization on the West Coast. Although Johnson never supported the Associated Farmers of California, he was being plied with their ideas by Bancroft. Johnson's progressive convictions did not change, but inevitably his perceptions about social justice conditions on the ground in California, as viewed from three thousand miles away in Washington DC, were subtly swayed by Doherty's business-oriented perspective, and Bancroft's large farmer outlook.

Even with these provisos, we can acknowledge that, in spite of his detractors, Johnson sustained his Progressive era beliefs. Similarly, there is a case for saying Johnson's opponents in the New Deal Administration, and those espousing an even more radical progressivism 1937 onwards, continued also to articulate values that were recognizably derived from the Progressive era. Confirmation of that point establishes another Progressive era-New Deal ideological continuity.

Olson, who won California's governorship for the Democrats in November 1938, represented a radical progressive outlook over social justice policy, despite his Progressive era past. Indeed, he was the antithesis of Johnson, by supporting Roosevelt's Court Plan, and the CIO's sit-down strike movement. His progressivism had been greatly radicalized by the Great Depression. Although Johnson fully backed Roosevelt's programmes to combat chronic unemployment, his Progressive era belief that government should be a neutral referee between business and unions emerged intact from the 1930s experience. For Johnson, the need for government to minimize social divisions was self-evident, at a time when economic conditions exacerbated them. However, Olson drew the opposite conclusion from the Depression – that government must favour unions over business to rebalance the socio-economic structure. The Depression was caused by overproduction, not scarcity. Perhaps inevitably, the 'poverty in the midst of plenty' paradox produced an intellectual response which argued that government should encourage unions to empower poorer groups.

On the West Coast there was a group of radical progressive leaders who wanted to go further than the New Deal. Culbert Olson, Howard Costigan, and Monroe Sweetland - in California, Washington State, and Oregon respectively - had utopian plans for an ‘economy of abundance,’ and ‘production-for-use.’ Apart from supporting unionization, these radical progressives believed government should give the unemployed the means of production to supply their needs on a non-profit basis, both food and manufactured goods. They would either use the goods they produced –i.e. production-for-use – or exchange surplus goods in central warehouses, for those they were short of. These highly idealistic, and unrealized, plans stemmed from a conference of the Farmer Labor Political Federation (FLPF) in Chicago during 1935, which formed the American Commonwealth Political Federation.²⁹⁴ It wanted to push the New Deal towards greater radicalism, or, as a party, replace it in government. An ephemeral ‘Third Party’ initiative, like the short-lived Progressive Party itself (1912-1916), the ideas of the American Commonwealth Political Federation continued to influence radical West Coast progressives during the second half of the 1930s. Costigan founded the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF) in 1935, inspired the Oregon Commonwealth Federation (OCF), set up by Sweetland during 1937, and advised Olson both before and after he was elected governor of California in 1938. Yet, significantly, these radical progressives, notably Olson, faithfully followed the intellectual contours of the Progressive era.

Olson’s campaign speeches around his 1938 election triumph express characteristic Progressive era social justice beliefs. Taken in conjunction with ideas from 1940, when he had two years of executive office behind him, they show that radical progressives thought within a Progressive era ideological framework. For instance, Turner’s frontier thesis had provided an intellectual foundation for Progressive era reform, and Olson considered it was also the source of the New Deal. The closed frontier deprived Americans of fertile land for settlement to escape social justice problems. It transformed rugged individualism from being an independent virtue into an exploitative vice. In the 1938 campaign, Olson stated, ‘As the land became settled, (and) wealth ... lodged in fewer hands ... we ... discovered ... as the New Deal so strikingly showed us ... (that) the rugged individualism of our pioneer days ... result(ed) in millions of ... starving

²⁹⁴ Badger, *The New Deal*, 287.

individuals.’²⁹⁵ During 1940, Olson asserted definitively that the closed frontier constituted the New Deal’s intellectual basis. He said: ‘When the American frontier disappeared in the 1890s; that was when the New Deal was conceived ... When Wall Street crashed in October 1929; that was when the New Deal was born.’²⁹⁶

Although progressives warred over social justice policy after 1937, they had not developed into separate political species, despite their ‘family feud.’ For instance, in both eras, progressives tried to awaken a social conscience among the public. Meaningful social justice reform would only take place if widespread public support for it existed. In 1938, during a campaign speech, Olson reasoned that people should develop broader sympathies than the old attitude which ‘considered ... social responsibility was discharged when ... (a man) could bar the door of his home against want and provide for the security of his family.’²⁹⁷ Olson was echoing Johnson, who in 1911 had encouraged a social conscience about the poor, saying: ‘I have ... little patience with the man who closes his front door and ... as he sits by his fireside thinks the whole world warm.’²⁹⁸ This attitude of mind entailed thinking beyond individual requirements to those of wider society; only then would the electorate be inclined to vote for reformist politicians.

On monopoly reform, in his post-1938 election Inaugural Address, Olson compared his government with Johnson’s in the 1910s. He said, ‘There is a marked analogy in the circumstances of the present ... administration in California and that which occurred over twenty-five years ago.’²⁹⁹ Olson wanted to drive from politics private utility interest Southern California Edison, as Johnson rid Californian politics of the Southern Pacific railroad.³⁰⁰ Both politicians were motivated by the political corruption of profiteering monopolies that impoverished the public. Despite differences over CIO unionization, Olson’s reformist 1930s Californian government was following in the footsteps of Johnson’s Progressive era governorship during the 1910s. As governor, he even had a portrait of Johnson hanging in his office.³⁰¹

²⁹⁵ Third Olson radio speech delivered in 1938 election campaign, carton 1, Olson Papers

²⁹⁶ Olson to Democratic State Convention, Sacramento, September 19, 1940, carton 1, Olson Papers.

²⁹⁷ Olson radio speech delivered to women in 1938 election campaign, carton 1, Olson Papers

²⁹⁸ Johnson to Los Angeles YMCA, May 22, 1911, box 43, Johnson Papers

²⁹⁹ Olson’s Inaugural Address, January 2, 1939, The Governor’s Gallery, California State Library

³⁰⁰ Johnson’s Address to the people of California, at Berkeley, October 14, 1910, box 43, Johnson Papers

³⁰¹ Doherty to Johnson, July 11, 1940, box 35, Johnson Papers

Olson was also committed in his Inaugural Address to the Progressive era's three tenets. On social justice, he said: 'Unemployment and poverty ... need not prevail in bountiful California,' and that he would deliver 'ample production and distribution of the things of life.' Over monopoly reform, Olson stated: 'private corporations ... (should not be) controlling the natural resources of the State.' Regarding conservation, he promised policies 'to conserve ... our great natural resources ... in the common interest.'³⁰² During 1940, Olson combined the three tenets, graphically conveying social justice conditions. He declared: 'Monopolies ... own ... our natural resources ... At the head of this economic blind alley, we find a wall of ... monopoly ... Huddled in this alley, groping for a way out ... (are) millions of small-scale farmers trying to maintain American agriculture ... in competition with industrialized ... farming ... and labor unions struggling desperately to win for workers their ... just share of the wealth they create.'³⁰³

By bracketing together 'small-scale farmers,' and 'labor unions,' Olson showed his awareness of the farmer-labour alliance, central to western progressivism. Like all western progressives, he viewed it as an ideological concept and a constituency. In the Progressive era, Johnson achieved a farmer-labour voting alliance during the 1910s, comprising small farmers in the San Joaquin Valley and the urban proletariat of San Francisco. Therefore, across social justice policy, notwithstanding their fierce disagreement over unionization, progressives, as exemplified by Johnson and Olson, broadly agreed. Their views coincided over: the frontier thesis; developing a social conscience among the public; opposition to big business political and socio-economic malpractice; support for the three interconnected tenets; and adherence to the farmer-labour alliance. There was no dividing line in social justice policy between the Progressive era and the New Deal.

The CIO-AFL 'Civil War,' and the Reactionary Backlash

This section challenges the assumption that CIO unionization on the West Coast differed in ideological terms from the AFL unionization campaign. It also shows the potency of the backlash by reactionary organizations which sought to exploit problems resulting from

³⁰² Olson's Inaugural Address, January 2, 1939, The Governors' Gallery, California State Library

³⁰³ Address by Olson before Oregon Commonwealth Federation, February 17, 1940, carton 6, Olson Papers.

unionization. On the West Coast, the CIO unionization drive produced a matching AFL campaign for union membership, 1937-1939. These campaigns: put great strains on the farmer-labour alliance, became caught up with anti-communism, and threatened to lead small farmers into deserting the New Deal. The La Follette Committee had to contend with these problems in the California hearings, 1939-1940.

During 1937-1939 the CIO's unionization drive was not confined to manufacturing industries which the La Follette Committee highlighted in the Mid West. Lewis, the CIO's leader, launched a multi-front assault on un-unionized areas, or those controlled by his AFL rivals, across the American economy. On the West Coast, the CIO attempted to supplant an AFL union in the lumber industry, vital to Washington State and Oregon. In July 1937, the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) was founded as a CIO affiliate.³⁰⁴ Moreover, throughout the agriculturally rich West Coast region, the CIO also targeted un-unionized sectors like food processing and the related transportation sectors. In these areas, the AFL fought back with vigour against the rise of the CIO, and the Teamsters led the AFL counter-attack.

Large expanses of California and Central Washington State contained some of America's most fertile land, provided they were irrigated. California in the 1930s had developed a farming industry of staggering variety. Terms like 'peach bowl,' 'rice bowl,' and 'salad bowl,' encompassed some of the state's farming activities. There were also vineyards and cotton lands, as well as dairying, livestock, cereal and vegetable production. The Yakima Valley in Central Washington was similarly blessed with an abundance of agricultural products. This agriculture was mostly labour-intensive on extensive farms, so large workforces were necessary to harvest crops, as well as process, and transport them. Highly perishable products could easily be destroyed by strikes.

Dave Beck, the AFL leader on the West Coast, controlled Teamster operations from Seattle.³⁰⁵ Business, and many farmers, viewed his long-established truckers union as the lesser of two evils compared with the CIO. Johnson had good relations with the Teamsters. Beck's great rival in transport unionization was Harry Bridges, the militant Australian left-wing leader

³⁰⁴ Albert Anthony Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation: Reform Politics and the Popular Front,' (PhD, University of Washington, 1975), 185.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

of the CIO International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), based in San Francisco. Already, Bridges had won negotiating rights for all West Coast ports, but he had greater ambitions in the interior of the Pacific states. During 1937, as West Coast Director of the CIO, Bridges persuaded national leader Lewis to permit an aggressive unionization drive across West Coast states into food processing by the CIO's United Canning, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA).³⁰⁶ Bridges of the ILWU, and the UCAPAWA leader Donald Henderson were both Marxists, so there was a class struggle dimension to their unionization. In the same year, according to West Coast CIO organiser, Richard Francis, AFL President William Green had selected Washington, and the wider West Coast, for a showdown against the CIO, with the Teamsters taking the lead.³⁰⁷

During 1938, Bridges' plans for the UCAPAWA campaign entailed unionization of canneries, packing houses, dairies, and haulage. Once UCAPAWA controlled the fate of produce off the farms, the CIO could force upon the farmers the unionization of their poorly paid farm labour. As Bridges expressed his scheme, unionization would 'march inland ... from the packing sheds to the fields.'³⁰⁸ In 1939, as reported by the La Follette Committee, UCAPAWA was associated with two Californian stoppages: the Marysville fruit pickers strike and the Madera cotton strike in the San Joaquin Valley.

In 1938, the Teamsters pan-West Coast campaign spread to California. For example, they began a unionization drive in the Imperial Valley. Across this prosperous valley, field workers faced an eighteen hour day, for a pittance, in temperatures that reached 130 degrees Fahrenheit. The Teamsters first attempted to seize control of all transport in and out of the valley. They could then unionize the packing sheds by threatening transportation of food, and bring unionization to the exploited fieldworkers. A farmers' leader in the Imperial Valley, Hugh Osbourne, stated later to the La Follette Committee that in 1938 Teamsters said 'they were not overlooking the agricultural industry, and proposed to unionize it through transportation.'³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Lovin, 'Toward a Farmer Labor Party in Oregon, 1933-1938,' *Oregon Historical Society* Vol. LXXVI, 42 (June 1975): 146, box 6, Costigan Papers

³⁰⁷ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 211.

³⁰⁸ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 278.

³⁰⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1940

The farmer-labour alliance originated in the Progressive era, and involved the ‘mutuality’ of industrial labour and small farmers, whose poverty was a world away from wealthy Californian large farmers. Both groups wanted higher incomes. During the late 1930s, unionization of food processing and transport, and, by implication, farm labourers, threatened the farmer-labour Progressive era alliance. Through much of the west the alliance between small farmers and labour unions had persisted since the Progressive era. It held for Johnson in California; it was the basis of La Follette Jr.’s power in Wisconsin. However, as soon as unionization drives began c. 1937 in food processing and transport, farmer-labour mutuality was put under pressure, which caused La Follette’s California investigation major problems during 1939-1940.

That the farmer-labour alliance began to unravel during the later New Deal did not signify an ideological discontinuity from the Progressive era. In some respects, this alliance was always a *marriage de convenance* based on shared poverty, rather than a precise congruence of interests. Small farmers owned their means of production unlike industrial workers; while unionization of food processing and transport would inevitably hit farm income as employers faced with unionization costs paid farmers less for their produce. The farmer-labour alliance was always vulnerable and a flawed progressive concept.

Likewise, the CIO, a product of the New Deal, did not represent a unique threat to the farmer-labour alliance, as the Progressive era-oriented AFL claimed. Large farmers in California and Washington’s Yakima Valley were never the natural constituency of the farmer-labour alliance. Yet, in parts of California’s San Joaquin Valley, most of Washington, and all of Oregon small farmers predominated and supported the alliance. The aggressive CIO unionization drive in food processing and transport undoubtedly created severe problems. In May 1937, Kelly Loe, editor of the ‘Oregon Labor Press,’ accused the OCF and CIO of destroying good relations between the AFL and the small farmers’ Oregon Grange organization. He warned that if the farmer-labour alliance fragmented, poorer people would lose the ‘balance of power to determine elections.’³¹⁰ However, the AFL Teamsters’ campaign posed similar problems. Richard Neuberger disclosed

³¹⁰ Kelly Loe, ‘Shall Organized Labor Submit to Political Sterilization?’ Oregon Labor Press leaflet, quoted in Lovin, ‘Toward a Farmer Labor Party in Oregon’: 144.

in 1939 that throughout Oregon small farmers believed the Teamsters would force them to hire union truck drivers to haul their produce to market.’³¹¹

Ironically, radical progressives who supported or represented the CIO were as ideologically committed to the farmer-labour alliance as the AFL. ‘Underconsumptionist theory’ influenced Second New Deal union policy. It argued that unionization would benefit the ‘nation as a whole’ by forcing up wages, which would stimulate demand, solve the depression, and create an economy of abundance.³¹² Radical progressives maintained that underconsumptionist theory and the farmer-labour concept were in harmony. Costigan’s WCF was termed the ‘triple alliance of labor, farmers, and progressives.’³¹³ Sweetland, head of the OCF, had come into radical politics from the Oregon Grange.³¹⁴ CIO leader Lewis contended that the ‘interdependency in purchasing power’ of small farmers and labour would allow them to raise incomes, buy each others’ goods, and create economic prosperity.³¹⁵ In this manner, he hoped to preserve the mutuality of the farmer-labour alliance which his unionization drives were, in other ways, jeopardizing. Both union movements adhered to this progressive alliance, but their unionization campaigns jointly undermined it with unintended consequences for the New Deal.

Unionization campaigns helped inspire a powerful reactionary movement. As a result of the Court Plan and Roosevelt’s failure to condemn outright CIO militancy, a conservative bipartisan bloc emerged in Congress composed of southern Democrats and ‘stalwart’ Republicans. Significantly, the southern Democrat Congressman Martin Dies proposed a congressional resolution to investigate CIO sit-down strikes in March 1937.³¹⁶ This conservative movement became a legislative barrier against further New Deal reform. It also spawned anti-New Deal committees, for example, the Dies Committee, which was formed in June 1938 to investigate un-American activities. Although Dies’ task was to expose Nazi and Communist groups which endangered US democracy, his principal interest was directed against communists. In fact, his

³¹¹ Richard Neuberger, ‘Who Are the Associated Farmer?’ *Survey Graphic* (September, 1939)

³¹² (Ed) Sidney M Milkis and Jerome M Mileur, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002) chapter by Nelson Lichtenstein, ‘Politicized Unions and the New Deal Model,’ 136.

³¹³ Acena, *The Washington Commonwealth Federation*, 94.

³¹⁴ Barbara Costigan interview with Sweetland, box 2, Costigan Papers

³¹⁵ John L Lewis, ‘What Labor is Thinking,’ *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 1 No 4 (October 1937): 26-28.

³¹⁶ Clyde Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party in the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 178.

committee became an instrument for the conservative bloc, to allege communist infiltration of New Deal agencies and CIO unions. In the Dies Committee's first hearings during August 1938, the La Follette Committee was arraigned for employing communists and having communist sympathies. Some Popular Front Communists were unknowingly employed by La Follette Jr., because they infiltrated New Deal agencies which critiqued capitalist behaviour.³¹⁷ Nonetheless, as an ardent New Deal opponent, Dies shrewdly realized that communism stirred popular emotions like few other issues. His revelations about communism impacted negatively on New Deal results during the 1938 mid-term elections, and promised to continue causing progressives difficulties.

Western progressives – e.g. La Follette Jr., Herbert Hoover, or Culbert Olson – typically viewed accusations of communism in the workplace as largely a specious charge, or as inappropriate to US labour relations. John Steinbeck's iconic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, about farm labour in 1930s California, showed that unscrupulous large farmers, when facing union resistance to wage cuts, always claimed 'red agitators ... (were) spark-pluggin' the thing.'³¹⁸ At the University of Wisconsin, La Follette had imbibed John Commons' teachings which argued that Marxism was irrelevant to American workers, who were 'wage conscious' not 'class conscious.'³¹⁹ Accordingly, La Follette led Senate opposition against Dies' bill to deport foreign communists resident in America (August 1938). The law would have considerably weakened two key CIO West Coast unions, by deporting Harry Bridges, the Australian head of the longshoremen (ILWU), and Harold Pritchett, the Canadian president of the woodworkers (IWA). However, by 1939, the year of the California hearings, La Follette was not only facing escalating anti-communism by reactionaries, but also questioning his own stance towards the communist issue.

Between 1937 and 1938, West Coast farming groups also coalesced against the unionization threat to agriculture. The Associated Farmers of California were founded during 1934 in the trough of the Depression to protect the interests of large farmers. The unionization drives, 1937-

³¹⁷ Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966), 121; Ronald Seth, *The Sleeping Truth: The Hiss-Chambers Affair* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968), 250.

³¹⁸ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), 270, 346.

³¹⁹ John R Commons, *History of Labor in the United States* (New York: Beard Books, 1918)

1939, resulted in an expansion and re-direction of the tactics of this reactionary organization. During 1937, the Associated Farmers began a membership campaign in the other Pacific states. A Farmers Protective Association was set up in Washington's Yakima Valley, March 1937. Within months, it was rebranded the Associated Farmers of Yakima County.³²⁰ In December 1937, delegates from Washington and Oregon attended the convention of the Associated Farmers of California. As a result, the Associated Farmers of the Pacific Coast was formed.³²¹ The Associated Farmers, at first, had their greatest success with large farmers. However, small farmer apprehension about unionization in agriculture, and allied industries, meant the policies of the Associated Farmers began to have a wider appeal. Indeed, the Associated Farmers adapted their policies to win over small farmers, who they tried to prise away from the farmer-labour alliance.³²² The Associated Farmers broadened their appeal to business as well by a pan-West Coast campaign against unions. Referendums sponsored by the Associated Farmers were put forward during 1938 in Oregon; Washington, Initiative 130; and California, Proposition One. They aimed to sabotage the effectiveness of strikes. In Oregon, the referendum succeeded; Washington's Initiative 130 failed, as did Proposition One in California.

By the end of 1938, despite AFL and CIO commitment to the Progressive era farmer-labour alliance, perversely their unionization campaigns had undermined this vital western electoral grouping. Moreover, reactionary forces, like the Associated Farmers, were attempting to destroy the farmer-labour alliance, exploit anti-communist sentiment, and win over small farmers. La Follette had to grapple with these problems when his committee began its California hearings.

The La Follette Committee in California

The La Follette Civil Liberties Committee held the California hearings between December 1939 and January 1940, to look at civil liberties violations by employers in the agricultural, food processing, and transport sectors. In California, La Follette's committee was also deployed to counter the ideological message of the anti-New Deal Dies Committee. Senator La Follette had

³²⁰ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 262.

³²¹ Richard Neuberger, 'Who Are the Associated Farmers?'

³²² Ibid.

not only to cope with the consequences of unionization and reactionary organizations, but also his own ideological responses to developments within and outside America. Historians have had difficulty pinning down La Follette Jr.'s personality and motivations. This fundamentally cautious man was overshadowed by his father and brother whose daring, combative characters had defined western progressivism in the 1900s and 1930s respectively. His father 'Fighting Bob' La Follette attempted, unsuccessfully, to push progressivism in more radical directions during 1912, 1917, and 1924. Philip La Follette, the governor of Wisconsin was defeated during 1938 attempting to recreate a national Progressive Party. In Robert La Follette Jr., the tension was palpable (1939-1940) between a sense of ideological commitment, and a realization that both the careers of his father and brother self-destructed. The dynamic between La Follette's caution and ideological commitment, in the face of unfolding circumstances, meant he repositioned his committee from a radical ideological stance to a more moderate progressivism. This section considers how that repositioning affected the outcome of the California hearings, and presents a new interpretation of them.

The La Follette Committee California hearings were judged harshly by opinion at the time. Carey McWilliams, an expert on California's migrant farm labour problems, had castigated employers for their treatment of farm workers in his 1939 book *Factories in the Field*.³²³ During the La Follette Committee hearings, McWilliams was dubious about their effectiveness. He wrote: 'The Liberals in California have pinned great hopes upon the La Follette Committee during the last year ... it is likely this hope will soon be dissipated.'³²⁴ After the hearings ended, McWilliams judged them a failure, saying 'the basic weakness of the (California) investigation ... was its failure to connect the waterfront situation' (about transporting farm produce) 'with the farm labor problem.'³²⁵

McWilliams' 1940 commentary influenced the historiography, which considers the California hearings a failure. Jerold S Auerbach's monograph on the La Follette Committee, and Patrick J Maney's biography of La Follette Jr. draw attention to the California investigation's pragmatic

³²³ McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*

³²⁴ McWilliams, 'Civil Rights in California' *The New Republic* (January 22, 1940)

³²⁵ McWilliams, 'La Follette Hearings: Final Sessions' *The New Republic* (March 25, 1940)

organizational problems.³²⁶ The committee was ineffective in California because of underfunding, and failure to compete with the sensationalist Dies Committee.³²⁷ Moreover, Maney mentions that La Follette wanted to terminate the Civil Liberties Committee, so he could concentrate on opposing US entry into war.³²⁸ Kevin Starr's history of 1930s California shows America's preoccupation with defence issues, caused by the start of war in Europe rendered La Follette's findings irrelevant.³²⁹ Auerbach makes very important general ideological observations about the La Follette Committee's significance in the shift from individualistic citizens, to group-oriented citizens.³³⁰ However, the historiography omits any Progressive era ideological influence on La Follette's committee in California. That ideological interpretation posits that the hearings were a strategic success.

In their aftermath, La Follette confessed he had been 'an outsider from Wisconsin who had everything to lose and nothing to gain by coming to sunny California.'³³¹ This chance remark conveys a situation in California that was bristling with dangers for La Follette, e.g. his committee's vulnerabilities over communism, and his own electoral reliance on farmer-labour support. Another comment by La Follette is equally revealing. Towards the end of 1940, La Follette wrote to Harry Fowler, the committee's attorney, an influential background figure during the lead-up to the California hearings, and in their conduct. La Follette congratulated Fowler on 'the splendid job which you helped to make possible in California.'³³² La Follette writes as though, in his estimation, the California hearings were successful. How then was La Follette able to convert such an unpromising situation into a success, over: communism; the farmer-labour alliance; and the Associated Farmers?

³²⁶ Jerold S Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty: The La Follette Committee and the New Deal* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966); Patrick J Maney, *'Young Bob' La Follette: A Biography of Robert M La Follette Jr.* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1978)

³²⁷ Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty*, 185.

³²⁸ Maney, *'Young Bob' La Follette*, 225.

³²⁹ Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 269.

³³⁰ Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty*, 218.

³³¹ La Follette to Alfred Eames, March 1, 1940, box 1:C-37, La Follette Family Papers

³³² La Follette to Fowler, October 6, 1940, box 1:C-37, La Follette Family Papers

Indisputably Californian agriculture merited an investigation because of its dire social justice needs. Indeed, there was official concern that Dust Bowl migrants might resort to communism, something that might have happened had they not generally-speaking clung to an individualistic creed.³³³ The ‘chronic powerlessness of farm-workers in California’ was particularly noticeable.³³⁴ Indigenous Californian food processing workers were badly paid, and Mexican field workers experienced among the lowest wage rates in America. Entering this labour market, a huge influx of Dust Bowl migrants from the mid 1930s onwards considerably worsened conditions. It was a pan-West Coast phenomenon. As Leuchtenburg writes: ‘By the end of the decade, a million migrants, penniless nomads ... had overrun small towns in Oregon and Washington and pressed into the valleys of California.’³³⁵ In California, the ‘Okies’ often struggled to survive in sun-baked ditch camps by the side of the road, and their desperate despair is summed up in this migrant workers’ song:

‘Rather drink muddy water
An’ sleep in a hollow log
Than to be in California
Treated like a dirty dog.’³³⁶

Sometimes, the same workers picked fruit crops through California’s valleys, and made the strenuous journey into Oregon and Washington, ‘working the hop and beet fields of the north.’³³⁷ Un-unionized West Coast farm labourers fell outside the provisions of the NLRA. However, the First Amendment to the US Constitution protected freedom of association as a civil liberty, so the La Follette Committee could advocate farm labour unionization. With more authority, the La Follette Committee was able to call for the enforcement of the NLRA in food processing industries and transport involving inter-state commerce.

³³³ Walter J Stein, *California Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973), 260-268.

³³⁴ Cletus E Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farm-workers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 282.

³³⁵ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 138-139.

³³⁶ Henry Wallace to Roosevelt, song from collection of Margaret Valiant, September 9, 1939, PPF box 41, Roosevelt Papers

³³⁷ Tom H Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 202.

Auerbach observes that the Dies Committee ‘sparked ... (Roosevelt’s) appreciation of the La Follette Committee ... as a political instrument.’³³⁸ On January 4, 1939 Ickes suggested to Roosevelt at a cabinet meeting that a West Coast investigation by the La Follette Committee would counteract the impact of Dies.³³⁹ If the Dies Committee was smearing New Dealers with the charge of communism, La Follette would show the public that the reactionary Associated Farmers were depriving workers of their rights. Therefore, La Follette and Dies led partisan committees, respectively for the New Deal and against it. For example, Johnson wrote that the La Follette Committee ‘went after one thing and tortured its testimony (to find it).’³⁴⁰ In California, though, the La Follette Committee did not act as a flagrant propaganda tool.

Auerbach considers the California investigation ineffective because the public was more interested in the Dies Committee. In an interview conducted by Auerbach, Robert Wohlforth, secretary of the La Follette Committee, contended ‘Dies had a real going thing; everybody is absolutely afraid of communism. We’re dominated by this fear. No other country is as fearful as we are.’³⁴¹ However, it is an incomplete explanation for the failure of the California investigation as a propaganda device to say simply that the public had a greater fascination with the communist menace than employer abuses against labour. More to the point, the Dies Committee contributed to the La Follette Committee’s changing its behaviour over communism, as La Follette appreciated that the communist issue could be electorally disastrous.

At the start of August 1939, progressive Senators Schwollenbach and Downey of Washington and California, strongly backed by Oregon’s Senator McNary, introduced a resolution to fund a West Coast investigation, although Congress voted only half the sum they requested - \$50,000.³⁴² By the end of the month, an extraneous factor altered the course of the investigation. On August 30, 1939, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, which brought about co-operation between the two European dictatorships, and committed them to the conquest of Poland, a

³³⁸ Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty*, 170.

³³⁹ Harold L Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1939* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 548-549.

³⁴⁰ Johnson to Doherty, November 11, 1939, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

³⁴¹ Auerbach interview with Wohlforth, ‘La Follette Civil Liberties Committee,’ 1964, Columbia Oral History Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, NYS

³⁴² Neuberger, ‘Who Are the Associated Farmers?’

democracy. Almost overnight, America's ideological atmosphere was transformed. If the Dies Committee helped change La Follette's behaviour over communism, the Nazi-Soviet Pact triggered that change. Mid 1930s Popular Front communism had believed in class struggle, but was pledged to working with democratic institutions for social justice and against the right-wing. By the end of 1939, the American Communist Party (CPUSA) clearly backed the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and manifested a renewed hostility to democracy. La Follette's progressive belief in democratic reform meant he decried US communism's reversion to a revolutionary path, and this last of cumulative pressures caused him to change the ideological position of his committee.

The Dies Committee was considerably enhanced by the developments in Europe, and the CPUSA. Its warnings about the security risks of communists suddenly achieved heightened credibility and traction with the public. From a patriotic and democratic standpoint, the Dies Committee seemed to be on the right side of history. In a throwback to the Progressive era, FBI head J Edgar Hoover announced to Congress in November 1939, that he had revived the General Intelligence Division, which was used to seize suspected communists during the 'Red Scare' Palmer Raids of 1919.³⁴³ On January 5, 1940, Hoover revealed that he had compiled an 'index' of people he would seize during a state of emergency.³⁴⁴ Consequently, as the La Follette Committee was planning and conducting its hearings in California, the situational similarities between the Red Scares of 1919-1920 and 1939-1940 became abundantly clear.

Harry Fowler was sent to California in the fall of 1939, to decide areas the hearings would investigate, and witnesses to be subpoenaed. Fowler's reports sent back to the Education and Labor Committee, but mainly addressed La Follette, show how the communist issue was shunned. Costigan, as head of the WCF, visited Fowler – weekly report October 1-7 – and urged the committee to investigate 'agricultural and processing industries' in Washington's Yakima Valley.³⁴⁵ The following week, his colleague, Dennett reinforced that message when he saw Fowler.³⁴⁶ Although costs might have prohibited inclusion of Washington, Fowler probably also

³⁴³ Richard Gid Powers, *'Not Without Honor: The History of American Anti-communism'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 160.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Fowler to Education and Labor Committee, October 13, 1939, report for week October 1-7, box 1:C-405, La Follette Family Papers

³⁴⁶ Fowler to Education and Labor Committee, October 26, 1939, report for week October 7-15, box 1:C-405, La Follette Family Papers

wished to keep the committee clear of Costigan's WCF, around which pro-communist allegations swirled. Instead, between October 15-22, Fowler welcomed Neal Haggerty, the AFL's chief in California, a pivotal figure in Johnson's 1940 re-election campaign, and an arch-critic of CIO tactics and communist links.³⁴⁷ Fowler told Haggerty the committee was 'anxious ... to receive any information upon violations of civil liberties that they (the AFL) had to submit.' While La Follette did not denounce radical progressives over unionization, Fowler, on his behalf, was edging the committee towards Johnson's progressivism.

When the hearings began, in December 1939, McWilliams presents the failure to connect the 'waterfront situation' and 'farm labor' almost as an oversight. However, this contention is untenable. La Follette was quite aware of the connection that McWilliams pointed out. On December 15, 1939, Dr. Theodore Norman, the committee's economist, explained at the hearings: 'One of the most interesting features of ... Californian agricultur(e) ... is the extent ... it is part of an integrated system ... The shippers (and) canners ... of Californian farm products ... reach back to control ... their raw materials ... through ... contracts by which farmers ... deliver all produce ... to a certain canner (or) shipper.'³⁴⁸ Further proof was provided to the committee of the extent large farming interests were tied in with business two days later. A table of contributions to the Associated Farmers for the five years up to October 1939, showed the Industrial Association of San Francisco, and the Canners League, as their biggest donors.³⁴⁹

The first half of the committee hearings, December 1939, was held in San Francisco, and this fact demonstrates how La Follette avoided the waterfront situation because of the communist issue. A 53 day long water front strike by ship clerks was raging throughout the hearings in San Francisco.³⁵⁰ Bridges had 'tied up' the whole harbour of San Francisco with this strike.³⁵¹ It interrupted movement of farm produce, and caused great criticism of Bridges by employers. Yet during the entire San Francisco hearings the committee made no attempt to discuss the strike, and when the hearings resumed in Los Angeles just over a week later, on January 2, again the 'waterfront situation' was avoided. Only on the last day of the hearings, January 29, did Bridges

³⁴⁷ Doherty to Johnson, November 17, 1939; March 11, 1940; August 31, 1940, box 35; Johnson to Doherty, March 23, 1940, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

³⁴⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 15, 1939

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1939

³⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1940

³⁵¹ McWilliams, 'Civil Rights in California'

make a belated appearance. Even then, he gave no spoken evidence, but was merely sworn in, and submitted to the committee a written statement about labour relations in the port of San Francisco.³⁵²

During the hearings, reactionary forces kept up a Greek chorus about communism. The Associated Farmers attempted repeatedly to steer the hearings towards the communist issue, and their evidence about it ‘bookended’ the hearings. A few days in, Philip Bancroft, Vice President of the Associated Farmers, stated: ‘I have not done anything in the past twenty years except try to keep the communists from taking over our farms.’³⁵³ On the final day of the California hearings, John Watson, the newly-appointed President of the Associated Farmers, claimed that the Associated Farmers were formed in 1934 after riots organized ‘in almost every instance ... by communists.’³⁵⁴ Outside the hearings, the Dies Committee also hammered home the communist theme. The anti-New Deal *Los Angeles Times* reported, December 24, 1939, Dies’ statement that his committee had discovered on the West Coast ‘the most serious situation.’ It comprised ‘communistic ... and “alienistic rings” involving ... CIO strikes, and Federal and State administrations on the West Coast.’³⁵⁵ At the same time, California’s ‘mini Dies Committee,’ the Metzger Committee, accused Governor Olson’s State Relief Administration (SRA), for the unemployed, of hiring communists. In January 1940, the Dies Committee announced that communist leadership was entrenched in leading West Coast unions: UCAPAWA, IWA, and ILWU i.e. the CIO farm labour, food processing, timber, and transport unions.³⁵⁶ While the California hearings proceeded, reactionary forces methodically inflamed anti-communist feeling.

La Follette had lived through the Progressive era, and knew the potency of the ‘Red Scare’ in 1919. Between 1939 and 1940, reactionary forces were inflicting electoral damage on the New Deal by connecting it and its agencies to the emotive issue of communism. As importantly for La Follette, the Nazi-Soviet Pact transformed relatively innocuous Popular Front communists into ideologues plotting the destruction of democracy at home and abroad. In these circumstances, La Follette and Fowler positioned their committee midway between the

³⁵² *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1940; McWilliams, ‘La Follette Hearings: Final Sessions’

³⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 5, 1939

³⁵⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1940

³⁵⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1939

³⁵⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1940

reactionary forces and Bridges over the communist issue. During the California hearings, McWilliams noted to Auerbach friction between ‘red tinged’ progressives on the committee and Fowler over this behavioural departure.³⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Fowler’s strategy of repositioning the committee away from the toxic issue of communism was sensible and limited damage to the New Deal, without denouncing Bridges’ legitimate demands.

The problems of the farmer-labour alliance also involved an ideological repositioning, as the issue of food processing unionization proved especially controversial to La Follette. As shown in chapters three and four, La Follette supported small farmers as archetypical Jeffersonian citizens, and the poorer dairy farmers of Wisconsin were La Follette’s most loyal voters. McWilliams disclosed during 1939 that the Associated Farmers had spread their membership to small farmers in La Follette’s mid-west, and intensified their threat level.³⁵⁸ At the start of 1940, Watson, their head, announced plans for a national organization.³⁵⁹ La Follette realized that small farmers were vulnerable to the Associated Farmers because of their unease at food processing unionization. He understood that this problem added to their sense of crisis. Small operators were already unable to compete with large farmers, and increasingly became tenants and farm labour. The Dust Bowl speeded up this process. After the California hearings, La Follette held follow-up hearings in Washington DC (May-June, 1940) covering national agricultural problems. On behalf of small farmers, he made an impassioned plea, saying: ‘Farming as a way of life is threatened ... New... opportunity (must be provided to) preserve the native values of our traditional system.’³⁶⁰

In the California hearings, McWilliams described La Follette as ‘quixotically indulgent’ towards the Associated Farmers.³⁶¹ Certainly, when the Associated Farmers claimed that they had reduced farm wages because of their economic situation, La Follette was decidedly conciliatory. He conceded: ‘I fully realize that ... (the position of the farmer) was ... the same (as)

³⁵⁷ Auerbach interview with McWilliams, ‘La Follette Civil Liberties Committee’, February 28, 1964, COHC

³⁵⁸ McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 261.

³⁵⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1940

³⁶⁰ La Follette statement, May 2, 1940, Washington Hearings, transcript: 3, (microfiche) British Library, London

³⁶¹ McWilliams, ‘Civil Rights in California’

or even worse ... than the industrialist during the depression.³⁶² However, La Follette was conscious that the remarks of the Associated Farmers were seeded with anti-progressive messages. At the start of 1940, Bancroft stepped down as vice president of the organization, but instead took charge of public relations.³⁶³ La Follette knew that on the West Coast, and in the wider west, they were trying to destroy the farmer-labour alliance. If small farmers gravitated to the politics of the Associated Farmers, Roosevelt, La Follette, and the West Coast congressional delegation would be defeated in 1940. Costigan's dire warning, which opened this chapter, that the Associated Farmers might 'break the back ... of ... the entire New Deal' would come true.

La Follette resorted to political contortions to protect the farmer-labour alliance. His family's newspaper in Wisconsin, *The Progressive*, denied there was any affinity between the Associated Farmers and small farmers. *The Progressive* stated: 'Labor strife in the agricultural areas of California does not involve average, workaday farmers, but centres almost exclusively on huge, industrialized ranches.'³⁶⁴ Likewise, La Follette did not attend most of the hearings in California on food processing, which occurred during the second half of January, 1940. He departed California, January 18, because of the imminent death of fellow progressive Senator William Borah. However, after Borah died, La Follette did not return, but left his co-chairman Senator Elbert Thomas in charge of the hearings until they ended, January 29.³⁶⁵ La Follette's absence was very convenient for him, as he was spared having to confront controversial subjects like the unionization of dairying, and *The Progressive* ceased to report the hearings as soon as he left California.

Wisconsin was recognized as America's most important dairy state. It was less well-known that dairying comprised California's largest food processing industry.³⁶⁶ In the California hearings, a farmer accused the CIO Dairy Workers Union of intimidating un-unionized workers. He said: 'They ... would break their hands, so they couldn't milk anymore.'³⁶⁷ In turn, the Associated Farmers tried to prevent Teamster unionization in the dairying industry by using

³⁶² *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1940

³⁶³ *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1940

³⁶⁴ *The Progressive*, December 16, 1939

³⁶⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1940

³⁶⁶ Bruce Cummings, *Dominion From Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 224.

³⁶⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1940

violence to deter employers from signing union contracts. Milk distributors were so fearful of the Associated Farmers' retaliation that they resorted to secret agreements with the Teamsters. The committee discovered that one involved a milk company in Los Angeles.³⁶⁸ In another case, a clandestine agreement between the Teamsters and Golden State Creamery in the San Francisco area was only broken when the Associated Farmers learned of the situation, and threatened the company.³⁶⁹ An Associated Farmers spokesman stated, 'Our fears have been more than substantiated that unionization of dairy farms will come from milk distributors in towns.'³⁷⁰ These words would have resonated with small dairy farmers across the West, but they remained unreported by La Follette's news outlet *The Progressive* in Wisconsin.

Small western dairy farmers did not receive the generous government financial support to reduce production that large arable farmers had secured. Moreover, monopolistic milk distributors like Bordens slashed prices paid to them. In these circumstances, they formed co-operatives to try and compete with the large distributors. Golden State in San Francisco – the company that made a secret agreement with the Teamsters – was a farmers' co-op. Unionization put co-ops under extra economic pressure. Angry Wisconsin farmers in 1938 forced dairy co-op workers to resign from a union they had joined.³⁷¹ During 1940, economic conditions caused Wisconsin's celebrated Milk Pool, which was run on a co-operative basis, to collapse in August of that year.³⁷² La Follette understood the plight of small dairy farmers squeezed out by big distributors, large farmers, and mass unions.

La Follette's work on the Civil Liberties Committee proved his commitment to industrial workers. Furthermore, in 1939 he introduced into the Senate the abortive Oppressive Labor Practices Bill to criminalize anti-union practices by industrial employers.³⁷³ La Follette's commitment to industrial workers was great. However, his ideological commitment to small farmers was greater. In truth, La Follette was caught on the horns of a dilemma regarding the farmer-labour alliance. Over unionization of food processing, his first loyalty was to small dairy

³⁶⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1940

³⁶⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1940

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*

³⁷¹ Paul W Glad, *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. V, War, A New Era and Depression* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 536.

³⁷² Ted McGillan to La Follette, August 6, 1940, box 1:C-527, La Follette Family Papers

³⁷³ Maney, 'Young Bob' La Follette, 221-222.

farmers, but his role as chairman of the Civil Liberties Committee obliged him to support unions. In California, he had side-stepped the issue, by absenting himself from the relevant hearings.

Yet, several months previously, La Follette clearly valorised small farmers over industrial labour. Under the Walsh-Healey Act companies doing business with the federal government had to guarantee their workers minimum wage and maximum hour protection. In spring 1939, an amendment to this Act proposed companies selling canned milk to the government should be exempt from these regulations. La Follette feared this amendment would mainly aid large processors, and distributors.³⁷⁴ Instead, he argued that only farm co-operatives should be exempted from the act. On a pink Senate memorandum slip, he wrote: ‘Co-ops could be excluded by saying “the provision of this act (should not) apply to contracts awarded to bona fide co-op(erative) ass(ociatio)ns of farmers.”’³⁷⁵ Consequently, La Follette was prepared to deprive industrial workers in co-ops of their labour rights, to give struggling dairy farmers a competitive edge. When La Follette contacted the Administrator in charge of Public Contracts at the Labor Department about his proposal, Metcalfe Walling provided information on three Washington State and two Californian co-ops which sold canned (evaporated) milk to the government. They included the Golden State Company in San Francisco. However, Walling rejected La Follette’s suggestion for exempting co-ops, for instance on the West Coast, from Walsh-Healey. He stated that as co-ops ‘compete with non-co-operative(s) ... and ... employ persons under factory conditions ... any action for this purpose would ... deprive (their) employees from the protection of ... the Act.’³⁷⁶

As we saw in chapter one, FDR demonstrated, over a canning industry law in the Progressive era, greater ideological commitment to small farmers than industrial workers. La Follette showed the same pattern of behaviour in the late New Deal. Therefore, La Follette would have been reluctant to support dairying unionization in the California hearings. Instead, Senator Thomas conducted those January 1940 hearings with a ‘balance’ that minimized alienation of either side in the farmer-labour alliance.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ La Follette to Morris Rubin, March 25, 1939, box 1:C-17, La Follette Family Papers

³⁷⁵ Handwritten note by La Follette, undated, box 1:C-17, La Follette Family Papers

³⁷⁶ Metcalfe Walling to La Follette, March 9, 1939, box 1:C-17, La Follette Family Papers

³⁷⁷ Auerbach interview with McWilliams, ‘La Follette Civil Liberties Committee,’ COHC

The repositioning of the La Follette Committee in California produced a final positive outcome. Only well after World War II, did Cesar Chavez's campaign transform migrant farm labour conditions. However, the committee's impact on the Associated Farmers can be deemed a success. Before the hearings, Fowler briefed *The San Francisco News* about the imminent hearings. The paper reported 'the findings of the inquiry ... (will be) made in the light of ALL the evidence, claims and counter-claims. The conclusions will be the more influential, because they have come from a fair search for truth.'³⁷⁸ Labour relations on the West Coast in the late 1930s had generated more heat than light, something Fowler wished to put right with the California hearings.

When McWilliams was interviewed by Auerbach in the 1960s that dichotomy still existed. Looking back at conditions in the New Deal era, McWilliams stated large farmer representatives 'would discuss farm labor problems with a candour that would curl your hair. If you ... sat in on ... the agricultural committee of the State Chamber of Commerce ... you couldn't become aware of that attitude without beginning to run ... a temperature yourself ... because ... their attitudes were so outrageous.'³⁷⁹ However, McWilliams also assessed the California hearings, with the knowledge of hindsight, and mellowed by age. He stated that La Follette was 'very well advised to demonstrate his own fairness about the Associated Farmers.' He elaborated: 'I'm quite sure in my own mind that the Associated Farmers never fully recovered from the La Follette investigation. They had had things their own way to such an extent ... that they'd become used to engaging in rough stuff ... that the shock of coming up against the La Follette Committee ... of having ... to sit there in the witness chair and answer some questions for a change ... I think that they never really recovered from it. They were never as ... powerful as they were prior to the La Follette Committee investigations.'³⁸⁰ Perhaps La Follette's committee was effective in California merely because it shone a light on the Associated Farmers. The committee did not need to exaggerate the evidence about the Associated Farmers, or present a

³⁷⁸ Fowler to Education and Labor Committee, October 13, 1939, report for week October 1-7, *San Francisco News*, October 9, 1939, box 1:C-405, La Follette Family Papers

³⁷⁹ Auerbach interview with McWilliams, COHC

³⁸⁰ Ibid

one-sided version of events. The Associated Farmers violent behaviour was enough to shock many Californians, and helped discredit them.

In particular, their vigilante actions were exposed by the California hearings, and reported in the press. It emerged that the Associated Farmers kept a permanent arsenal of weapons for strike-breaking purposes in the San Joaquin Valley.³⁸¹ During the UCAPAWA Madera cotton strike there in October 1939, they threatened ‘to take the law into their own hands if the strike leaders were not arrested.’ Then the Madera County Park riot took place. Three hundred Associated Farmers armed with pick handles and auto cranks savagely attacked strikers and their families in a public park. Law enforcement agencies, including the National Guard initially stood idly by as the violence unfolded.³⁸² This incident outraged even the sober-minded Fowler.³⁸³ Just before the hearings, Johnson began himself to comprehend the nature of their activities, after two AFL men told him the Associated Farmers represented ‘the various associations ... that are bitterly opposed to labor.’ Johnson confided uneasily that he condemned them unequivocally ‘if they have interfered with the civil liberties of any man in California.’³⁸⁴

La Follette achieved much in California with few advantages. He prevented his New Deal committee becoming a target for anti-communism, but upheld labour’s legitimate claims. The fragile balance of the farmer-labour alliance was maintained, due to Thomas’ moderation in the sessions on food processing unionization. Fowler’s policy of ‘light’ rather than ‘heat’ served progressivism well, as the hearings enabled the public to see the disreputable side of the Associated Farmers clearly, which dissuaded them from further vigilante actions against Dust Bowl, and other, farm labour.

The Climax of Anti-Communism in Washington State, 1939-1940

This section looks at a crisis in the Washington town of Aberdeen, Grays Harbor, which centred on the timber industry, and again involved vigilantism. The crisis reached its apogee while the

³⁸¹ *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1940

³⁸² Clarke A Chambers, *California Farm Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 78-79.

³⁸³ Fowler to Education and Labor Committee, October 31, 1939, report for weeks October 15-22, box 1:C405, La Follette Family Papers

³⁸⁴ Johnson to Doherty, November 23, 1939, Letters from Johnson, Johnson Papers

California hearings were being held. It demonstrated the virulent nature of the progressive versus reactionary clash on the West Coast before the 1940 elections. The events evinced strong situational similarities to the Progressive era, particularly its tail end, 1919. That observation was remarked on at the time, and the same forces were doing ideological battle on the West Coast. During the later New Deal, Costigan's radical progressives were not defeated, though, as happened to their Progressive era predecessors. Indeed, this crisis, in some ways, vindicated them.

Howard Costigan was one of the most singular characters to emerge from 1930s West Coast progressivism. Although trained as a teacher, in the early 1930s he was a barber, who became interested in Seattle's waterfront situation while talking to and cutting the hair of Fred Shorter, a radical Australian Christian.³⁸⁵ Costigan went onto lead the WCF, host a radio show, and gained a reputation as a mob orator haranguing crowds on Seattle's Denny Way. At the start of 1939, Costigan enjoyed national attention, albeit briefly, as he attempted, unsuccessfully, to organize a western states conference to campaign for a progressive candidate, preferably Roosevelt, in the 1940 presidential election. In January, 1939, Costigan embarked on a whirlwind tour of Washington DC. Having been introduced to Ickes, Costigan then met Roosevelt.³⁸⁶ New Deal journalists Pearson and Allen called Costigan 'the dynamic young crusader' as he was courted by politicians.³⁸⁷ Roosevelt was intrigued by the west, especially the Pacific states, as a 'hinterland of liberalism' which could help New Deal interests in 1940.³⁸⁸ Acena, the historian of the WCF, tends to view Costigan as a fantasist, who exaggerated the importance of his organization in Washington State, and 'craved to be the behind-the-scenes liberal string-puller in the West.'³⁸⁹ Subsequent to 1939-1940, Costigan admitted he had belonged to the communist party in those years. His organization contained other communists, and supported the woodworkers union (IWA) led by the Marxists Harold Pritchett, and Vice President OM Orton. Orton was Costigan's neighbour in Seattle. Rumours of the WCF's communist links were rife in the late 1930s. Costigan's fleeting national prominence at the start of 1939, gave way to the New Deal distancing itself from him by the end of the year because of the communist issue. Costigan

³⁸⁵ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 3.

³⁸⁶ John Boettiger to Ickes, December 27, 1938, box 17, John Boettiger Papers, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NYS

³⁸⁷ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 284.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

receded into the political background of the New Deal. However, he was still able to lead the progressive cause at Grays Harbor, December 1939-January 1940, in a crisis that involved mob violence and a murder.

Omens were good for radical progressives in Washington for much of 1939, with a Progressive era-New Deal overlap. Rappaport, the WCF strategist, who was a member of the International Workers of the World (IWW) during Progressive times, must have contemplated a bright future for their cause. In February, the WCF appointed a liaison officer, Mrs. Marion Bachrach, to work in Washington DC with her state's congressional delegation.³⁹⁰ Acena downplayed the WCF's political influence in Washington State's politics, but during the 1980s Costigan's former lieutenant Dennett told Costigan's daughter Barbara that, on the contrary, by the late 1930s the WCF drew support from one third of Washington Democrats.³⁹¹ Certainly, despite the reactionary backlash, radical progressivism had a momentum on the Pacific Slope. In January, 1939, Tom Mooney was pardoned by California's Governor Olson. Mooney was the IWW 'martyr,' who had been 'framed' by reactionary forces over the Progressive era Preparedness Day bombing in San Francisco, 1916. In September, Ray Becker was released from prison in Washington, and, Shorter, the radical Christian, greeted him at the penitentiary gates.³⁹² Becker was the last surviving member of the IWW 'murderers,' found guilty in the notorious Centralia massacre, 1919. During the summer of 1939 Norman Littell, the Assistant Attorney General, a Washingtonian, received a message from Roosevelt praising his efforts towards Costigan's western conference to elect a progressive president.³⁹³ It would have involved eleven states, with the three West Coast states as its driving force.³⁹⁴ The conference was set to cover: 'conservation of natural resources'; 'resettlement of shifting populations'; 'public development of water and power,' i.e. the three tenets.³⁹⁵ Radical progressives opposed American involvement in war, and in September, Costigan warmly welcomed John Boettiger, the *Seattle P-I* owner, and his wife Anna, Roosevelt's daughter, to a Seattle peace conference.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁰ Costigan to Magnuson, February 15, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹¹ Barbara Costigan interview with Dennett, September 26, 1986, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹² Unnamed newspaper article, September 22, 1939, box 3, Costigan Papers

³⁹³ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 303.

³⁹⁴ EL Oliver, Vice President of Labor Non-Partisan League, to J Vernon Burke, October 26, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹⁵ *Washington New Dealer*, November 9, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹⁶ *Seattle Times*, September 19, 1939, quoted in Acena

Sweetland noted to Barbara Costigan that the Boettiger connection gave Costigan access to the White House.³⁹⁷ Anna subscribed to the WCF paper, *The Washington New Dealer*.³⁹⁸

However, reactionary forces were also gaining ground, 1939-1940. Big business, and Californian corporate farming interests, controlled economic life, and greatly influenced politics on the West Coast. This reality gave substance to the radical progressive and communist dialectic that poorer people, and other disadvantaged groups, were engaged in a liberation struggle. Modelled on 'Red' Hynes Los Angeles Intelligence Bureau, police Red squads employed a policy of using the communist issue to crush independent unions.³⁹⁹ Although the Los Angeles Red squad was disbanded in 1938, by the end of 1939 the Portland Oregon Red squad was leading the fight for Bridges' deportation.⁴⁰⁰ In March 1939, an organization to extirpate communist influence in Washington was set up by timber employers in Grays Harbor. The Better Business Builders announced 'that the red element (in organized labor) ... (must) be removed or subdued.'⁴⁰¹ As La Follette prepared to investigate farm labour abuses involving the Associated Farmers of California, there were a clutch of other reactionary organizations on the West Coast. They represented an entrenched power structure, confident in its economic and political reach. In this context, the confrontational attitude of Bridges, and Costigan's 'selfless sincerity' for a re-ordered society become comprehensible.⁴⁰²

Radical progressivism in Washington suffered several hammer blows, from August 1939 onwards. The first blow was the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which intensified feeling against communist-led unions. Bridges' longshoremen were condemned in Washington for a proposed September 30 pan-West Coast waterfront strike, which would have impeded recovery of timber exports, even though Bridges called the strike off.⁴⁰³ On Grays Harbor three timber mills re-opened during October, and the anti-New Deal press raised fears that Pritchett's International

³⁹⁷ Barbara Costigan interview with Sweetland, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹⁸ Signed subscription fee from Anna Roosevelt Boettiger, September 15, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

³⁹⁹ Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 59.

⁴⁰⁰ *The New Republic* (December 13, 1939)

⁴⁰¹ *Washingtonian*, March 21, 1939, box 22, John Caughlan Papers, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

⁴⁰² Katherine Littell to Anna Boettiger, November 30, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

⁴⁰³ *The Grays Harbor Post*, September 30, 1939

Woodworkers of America (IWA) were intent on halting production.⁴⁰⁴ Changed circumstances made communism a byword again for subversion. Indeed, the same month, a Grays Harbor IWA local No 2 initiated opposition to the Marxists Pritchett, Orton, and local figure Dick Law at the union's Klamath Falls convention.⁴⁰⁵ In this atmosphere, Costigan's personality did not help progressivism. His haranguing style too often alienated people. The CIO leader Lewis 'loathed' Costigan after he met Lewis to discuss the western conference, and lectured him on political ideology.⁴⁰⁶ The wives of Littell and Boettiger provide an insightful womens' perspective on late 1930s West Coast labour relations. Katherine Littell wrote to Anna Boettiger that she believed there was too much 'one man domination' in West Coast union politics.⁴⁰⁷ Significantly, at this time, Labor Secretary, Frances Perkins, an old Progressive, wanted to open an educational extension service in Seattle helping inter-union dialogue to promote 'progressive legislation.'⁴⁰⁸ Having acknowledged the tough environment that Beck, Pritchett, Bridges, and Costigan inhabited, they never overcame the macho posturing that went with 1930s union affairs. It helped cause and prolong divisions among progressives and left them vulnerable to reactionary attacks.

These reactionary forces became menacing in November 1939. *Crow's Pacific Coast Lumber Digest* was the timber industry's official journal, and it demonstrated the pan-West Coast nature of the anti-union movement. On November 15, an editorial in it urged 'action independent of the federal government ... because the Pacific Coast has been selected as the nursery of Communism ... There should be an interstate vigilante society (to) act ... from the Canadian border to the Mexican line ... (so) that Harry Bridges and ... his like (shall) be removed.' The editorial went on: 'the time has come for ... militant action (so) ... that a vigilante group ... may go to their ... regional law-enforcing officers and not only ask for protection ... but demand it

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., October 14, 1939

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Acena, 'The Washington Commonwealth Federation,' 313; Barbara Costigan interview with Dennett, box 2, Costigan Papers

⁴⁰⁷ Katherine Littell to Anna Boettiger, November 30, 1939, box 2, Costigan Papers

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

(from) federal-backed reds (who) are bulldozing the ... people of the Pacific Coast into bankruptcy. Oregon, Washington and California have never had a better common cause.’⁴⁰⁹

On November 30, the Soviet Red Army invaded Finland, and this event delivered a second hammer blow to progressivism, which resulted in the violent action that Crow’s editorial threatened. The large Finnish American population in Aberdeen was already split into two factions, the socialist Red and the conservative White Finns. In the timber industry, the Whites often belonged to the AFL’s Sawmill and Timberworkers Union, while Red Finns were mostly in the radical IWA. White Finns were infuriated by the Soviet invasion, and held a rally and dance at their meeting hall on Saturday night, December 2, to raise money for Finland. Their opponents were also to hold a dance at the ‘Red Finn Hall,’ but cancelled it due to the gravity of the war in Finland. Later that night a mob of marauding White Finns, but reportedly containing many non-Finns, stormed the Red Finn Hall in Aberdeen. They ransacked it and burned its contents over three or four hours. No police appeared to stop the mob, even though there was a police station down the road from the Red Finn Hall.⁴¹⁰

There were several echoes from the Progressive era in the storming of the Red Finn Hall. Some months previously, Better Business Builders announced that workers in Grays Harbor needed to emulate their Progressive era counterparts, saying: ‘A quarter of a century ago good ... Americans of Grays Harbor took drastic action to clean out the IWW s who had kept up continual disturbances.’⁴¹¹ After the event, US Senator Bone, ‘referring to the outbreak of vigilantism,’ declared ‘that the recent destruction of the Finnish Workers’ Hall was not the first attempt to suppress the workers’ meeting place. In the bitter shingle weavers strike in 1912, lumber operators tried unsuccessfully to bar union meetings (at) ... the Finnish Workers’ Hall (which) was the only hall in Aberdeen where the ... shingle weavers could meet.’ In this

⁴⁰⁹ *Crow’s Pacific Coast Lumber Digest*, November 15, 1939, included in ‘Report on Abrogation of Civil Rights in Grays Harbor,’ Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee to US Attorney General, Robert Jackson, 1940, box 23, Caughlan Papers

⁴¹⁰ John C Hughes and Ryan Teague Beckwith, *On the Harbor: From Black Friday to Nirvana* (Las Vegas: Stephens Press LLC, 2005)

⁴¹¹ Better Business Builders statement quoted in ‘Report of Abrogation of Civil Rights in Grays Harbor,’ box 23, Caughlan Papers

Progressive era dispute, Bone acted as the union's lawyer, and won a legal judgement to keep the hall open.⁴¹² *

The crisis worsened at the start of 1940, with the murder of Laura Law in her own home. She was the wife of Dick Law, the IWA leader in Aberdeen, and had been formerly president of the IWA women's auxiliary. On the evening of January 5, she was attacked with an ice pick which smashed her skull in four places.⁴¹³ Law said he was at the union offices when the murder occurred. The police suspected Law, and accused him of murder. The coroner's inquest, during January, became the focus of the struggle between reactionary forces and radical progressives. In fact, it resembled Law's trial.⁴¹⁴ Costigan headed the Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee that included John Caughlan, the Seattle lawyer who was defence counsel for Law. The committee was able to turn the case into a *cause célèbre*, locally and nationally.⁴¹⁵

The prosecution claimed that Laura Law, a Finnish American, was furious about the Soviet invasion of her old homeland. They charged that she had either been killed by Law, an alleged Communist, or Soviet agents, for threatening to expose communist activities in the IWA. As a fall-back theory, Dick Law was accused of an affair with his secretary in the IWA. Bruises were found on his wife's limbs, which dated from before the murder, according to the coroner. Although an autopsy rejected this finding, the prosecution suggested a domestic row over Law's alleged affair might have resulted in murder. For their part, the defence argued that agents of reaction had killed Laura Law. They said that after her killing the Law home was ransacked by anti-communists seeking evidence of IWA communist activity to pass onto the Dies Committee. In his defence, Law also suggested that anti-communists might have been attempting to seize information he had collected about their involvement in the storming of the Red Finn Hall. He said they wanted 'to break the Labor movement.'⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² Unnamed, and undated, newspaper report, Tacoma, box 23, Caughlan Papers; *Shingle weavers did a particularly dangerous job cutting with power saws red cedar tiles for roofs and sides of houses. They cut up to fifty a minute, skilfully manoeuvring the wood like weavers. There was a horrifically high incidence of industrial accidents – lost fingers, hands, and limbs. Pritchett was an ex-shingle weaver.

⁴¹³ Hughes and Beckwith, *On the Harbor*, 100-123.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹⁵ Robert Saltvig, 'The Tragic Legend of Laura Law,' *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 78 No 3 (July 1987)

⁴¹⁶ *The Grays Harbor Post*, January 20, 1940

Costigan, in a December 1939 radio broadcast, had already compared the storming of the Red Finn Hall with Centralia (1919).⁴¹⁷ In a series of newsheets, three of which are extant, the Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee alerted the public to numerous parallels between events in Grays Harbor, 1939-1940, and the Progressive era. The first newsheet from January 25, 1940 stated that ‘murder and lawlessness in Grays Harbor county must be halted ... or this community will soon enter the ... the economic depression that almost ruined Centralia (during the Progressive era) following a similar reign of terror.’⁴¹⁸ Yet, again the Centralia massacre, and its aftermath, were referred to when the Civil Rights Committee wrote to the US Attorney General calling for his intervention. The committee warned that ‘the ... call to vigilante action against organized labor in the entire West Coast lumber regions ... (will) recreate the general abrogation of civil rights which followed the failure to guarantee civil rights in Centralia in 1919.’⁴¹⁹ The committee’s fourth newsheet, February 3, asserted that ‘a public officer’ had told Dick Law, ‘they plan to make another Tom Mooney out of you.’ The newsheet compares Law’s treatment to Mooney’s Progressive era trial, and imprisonment. It says that Mooney was ‘an innocent man, a fighter for toiling humanity, (who) was framed ... by forces who sought to destroy labor.’⁴²⁰

However, the position of radical progressives was significantly stronger in the 1930s than during the Red scare (1919-1920). Most importantly, federal government – the Justice Department – and New Deal agencies - the La Follette Committee – did not become hostile to radicals, despite anti-communist pressures. On January 13, 1940, *The Timber Worker*, the official journal of the IWA declared: ‘The reign of terror in Grays Harbor must end before it spreads.’ The journal called for ‘the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee to go to the roots of the terrorism in that community.’⁴²¹ This plea by the IWA was a forlorn hope, due to funding shortage in the Civil Liberties Committee, and La Follette’s ideological repositioning of the committee away from the communist issue. However, Washington radicals drew comfort from a national government which remained progressive, and regionally they were emboldened by the La Follette Committee’s spotlight on vigilantism in California. For example, during questioning at the coroner’s inquest, prosecution counsel Manley continually harassed Law and made

⁴¹⁷ Transcript of Costigan radio broadcast, December 9, 1939, box 47, Magnuson Papers

⁴¹⁸ Newsheet of Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee, Vol. 1, No 1, January 25, 1940, box 23, Caughlan Papers

⁴¹⁹ ‘Report of Abrogation of Civil Rights in Grays Harbor,’ box 23, Coughlan Papers

⁴²⁰ Newsheet of Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee, Vol. 1, No 4, February 3, 1940, box 23, Caughlan Papers

⁴²¹ *The Timber Worker*, January 13, 1940, as quoted in Hughes and Beckwith, *On the Harbor*, p103

insinuations against him. State Senator Morgan for the defence team interrupted, and pledged ‘to see the Constitution of the United States (is) supported, and that the officers of the law don’t ... violate the rights of ... men ... in this case.’⁴²²

On this occasion, progressivism stood firm. Law was effectively acquitted, and radical unions were not suppressed, as happened in the Progressive era. There were too many old Progressives, nationally e.g. Roosevelt, Perkins, and Ickes, who determined that progressivism’s retreat in 1919, which led to its electoral rout in 1920, was not repeated, 1939-1940. The federal government did not participate in a Red Scare during 1940. Locally, radical progressives like Congressman Coffee, but also old Progressive Senator Bone, Coffee’s father-in-law assisted in Law’s acquittal. The WCF did collapse later in 1940, but not as a result of police or government repression. Costigan became disillusioned with American communism’s support for a non-democratic route. He disbanded the WCF, but not before he had contained anti-communism in Law’s ‘trial.’ As Costigan claimed to have witnessed the Centralia massacre of 1919, his achievement in 1940 must have afforded him particular satisfaction. Progressivism learned by the mistakes of 1919-1920 when a reactionary backlash began in Centralia and spread to the rest of the West Coast. In 1939-1940, the storming of the Red Finn Hall and the murder charge against Law did not result in pan-West Coast vigilantism. Costigan helped prevent that, as the La Follette Committee combated a similar threat from the Associated Farmers in California.

Social Justice on the West Coast in the Onset to War

Most of the historiography considers war displaced the New Deal’s social justice objectives, and, in Brinkley’s phrase, caused ‘the re-legitimization of capitalism,’ that shifted attention onto higher consumer spending.⁴²³ More recently, Klausen has argued that because war greatly increased government’s capacity to direct the economy, scope for New Deal-sourced social reform expanded.⁴²⁴ Both interpretations accept that either the later New Deal or Roosevelt’s

⁴²² Transcript of Coroners’ Inquest into Laura Law’s murder, January 17, 1940, p116, box 22, Caughlan Papers

⁴²³ Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 96; Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 230-231.

⁴²⁴ Milkis and Mileur, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, chapter by Jytte Klausen, ‘Did World War II End the New Deal?’

wartime government shaped post-war America, and are intuitively as we would expect. However, something else happened, especially on the West Coast, in the years, 1940-1942. The following points should be emphasized. Even before America entered World War II at the end of 1941, radical progressives viewed an upcoming war as an opportunity to advance reform on the West Coast. Then, and later on, they employed a Progressive era argument – mutuality – to achieve aims that were derived ultimately not from the war experience or even the New Deal, but from the Progressive era. Those aims were upheld or realized – if only imperfectly – as the war ended or in post war America.

Two apprehensions weighed on progressives in the lead up to war. Firstly, that, as in 1917-1918, war would disrupt domestic reform. Secondly, a post-war crash would reproduce the conditions of 1919, which caused progressivism's defeat. Consequently, progressives intended war should be used not as an excuse to slow reform, but as an opportunity to accelerate it. Exemplifying these attitudes was a letter from Gardner Jackson to John L Lewis, in October 1940. Jackson cited conversations in which they agreed that during a war 'social and labor standards' must not be rolled back. Instead, Jackson said 'the crisis must be utilized to develop a far wider ... social and economic programme ... founded upon increased production and ... national income.'⁴²⁵ The economy of abundance ideas so important in the 1930s on the West Coast would not be abandoned.

The question of unemployment probably most exercised progressives during the 1930s. Even when all the New Deal programmes were deployed, unemployment remained stubbornly high. War mobilization solved the issue of unemployment on the West Coast, 1940-1942, and absorbed most Dust Bowl migrants into the burgeoning armaments industries. However, progressives at that time were convinced unemployment would return at chronic levels with peace, so war might be the time to prevent its re-emergence. The West Coast states played a particularly prominent part in the war effort, both as the biggest centre of war industries, and the area from which the Pacific war was fought against Japan. Therefore, West Coast Americans were very conscious of their region's contribution to the home front and the battle field, regardless of their political persuasions. This shared perception helped progressives encourage

⁴²⁵ Gardner Jackson to John L Lewis, October 27, 1940, box 206, Ickes Papers

mutuality - what amounted to a 'war contract' - whereby Americans would fight and labour for victory in return for a better future developed during and after the war. It allowed conservative patriots and progressives to unite behind socio-economic advances. Nonetheless, the social justice aims of progressives were not the product of war but derived from Progressive era origins. Progressives believed that only with raised incomes and potential among poorer people would the economy thrive long-term. Moreover, they envisaged government permanently prioritizing full employment in economic policy. Often their plans were thwarted by the war; sometimes, though, the war enabled the partial realization of progressive beliefs.

Sheridan Downey of California was a moving force behind solutions to unemployment during 1940. Worster labels him reactionary because in the 1940s he abandoned restricting water rights from federal irrigation schemes to small farmers. Yet, Downey was Upton Sinclair's running mate during his failed bid for California's governorship in 1934. Downey was still exchanging mutually supportive letters with the old Progressive Sinclair about economic revival as late as 1939.⁴²⁶ There is evidence to suggest Downey maintained the substance of his progressive ideology at this time, e.g. his sponsoring of La Follette's investigation in California. During August 1940, in the US Senate Downey argued that a massive public works project 'of supersafety highways throughout the United States' would both alleviate youth unemployment and speed up military transport. However, the debate ranged beyond the immediate issue, as America made contingencies for war, to Downey's view on federal government's post-war responsibilities. He contended that unless people have a real chance of employment when they return from war America will not get the fullest commitment from US soldiery. He continued: 'we are assuming a correlative duty ... on the part of Government (to servicemen) ... We ... ask military service of you ... but we ... (will) provide you with ... guaranteed opportunity to work... when you come (home).' Other notable West Coast senators gave support to Downey's proposals – Bone from Washington, and Oregon Senator McNary.⁴²⁷

The post-war Employment Act (1946) is conventionally considered a product of World War II. It committed federal government to full employment as its number one economic priority.

⁴²⁶ Sheridan Downey to Upton Sinclair, September 22, 1939, box 1, Sheridan Downey Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

⁴²⁷ Remarks by Downey 76th Congress, August 15, 1940, carton 2, Downey Papers

The Employment Act certainly stemmed from the wartime National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), which began a debate about economic prospects after the war, and an awareness of government's new capacities.⁴²⁸ However, one of the NRPB's leading economists was Alvin Hansen, who strongly adhered to Turner's 'closed frontier' theory, and advocated an economy of abundance as its remedy.⁴²⁹ Although Congress abolished the NRPB (1943), worried about the powers it was granting Roosevelt, Congressmen responded to the NRPB's concerns in the Employment Act. Yet, that legislation was not wholly a product of World War II. Downey and Hansen subscribed to economy of abundance ideas during the 1930s, aimed at solving unemployment. In ideological terms, Downey had anticipated the Employment Act in the August 1940 Senate debate, before the US entered World War II. Hansen's NRPB pamphlet *After the War – Full Employment* (1942) was not a product of war, but echoed his 1938 tract *Full Recovery or Stagnation*.⁴³⁰ War was the enabler of progressivism.

Downey's fellow Californian Democrat, Olson adopted a similar posture, using mutuality in a war emergency as a persuasive technique, when seeking a second term as governor of California in 1942. During May 1941, Olson vetoed the Hot Cargo Bill, and, after the legislature overturned his decision, he put the issue to a 1942 referendum.⁴³¹ This industrial legislation, lasting during the war emergency, prevented secondary strike action, whereby a union could strike at one business to prevent it trading with another already in a labour dispute. Olson opposed the legislation on two grounds. Firstly, it violated Taft's 1921 US Supreme Court decision. Taft said that a strike was a 'lawful ... struggle' between labour and capital about what they jointly produced, and that an effective strike would 'extend beyond one shop.' Taft was a Progressive era US president, 1909-1913, and served as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court, 1921-1930. During the 1920s, when the forces of reaction had revived, Taft contested their power with a broad interpretation of union powers to strike. Olson followed Taft's lead. Secondly, Olson's campaign quoted Progressive era President Wilson to legitimize his position over the hot cargo legislation. In 1917, Wilson stated during World War I that the 'best form of efficiency is the spontaneous co-operation of free people,' and in this spirit all parties 'agreed the

⁴²⁸ Milkis and Mileur, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, 200-207.

⁴²⁹ Gerald D Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1991), 43.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 204; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 786.

⁴³¹ 'Speakers Manual for Olson's 1942 Re-election Campaign', carton 5, Olson Papers

rights of labor should be preserved.’ In World War II unions banned strikes, so Olson argued that the Hot Cargo Act, by curtailing union rights ‘only serves to raise an issue which should not ... exist when there is unity of labor and management.’⁴³² Olson emphasized wartime mutuality to keep the hot cargo legislation off the statute book.

Similarly he pushed for ‘labor-management committees’ across all industries, at a time of high mutual trust, to give unions a say in businesses.⁴³³ In the event, Olson was defeated at the elections of 1942, and lost the referendum over the hot cargo legislation. Nevertheless, the principle of mutuality was not relinquished during the war, in part because progressives had popularized it. Californians rejected a 1944 referendum allowing non-union labour at unionized plants, and even the State Chamber of Commerce campaigned for its rejection ‘in the interest of national unity, (and as) ... a considered response to labor’s wartime no strike pledge.’⁴³⁴

La Follette Jr.’s active interest in the West Coast continued, 1940-1942, and his progressive ideas also helped ‘incubate policies’ and new attitudes.⁴³⁵ In 1940 La Follette enunciated the principle that ‘to make America strong from within we must build up our human resources.’⁴³⁶ His emphasis on people as resources echoed FDR’s beliefs, and reflected Johnson’s Progressive era comment that ‘the supreme duty of government ... is the conservation of its human resources.’⁴³⁷ Yet, ultimately mutuality provided the glue which would hold society together during war. In an October 1940 speech, La Follette counselled ‘we must learn the lesson taught by France’s collapse, that our ... people constitute a domestic front as important as our military front.’⁴³⁸ Although La Follette was an arch-isolationist, like a number of western progressives - e.g. Johnson - he urged a robust defence of America. He directly credited the tradition of government social reforms, i.e. stretching back to Progressive times, with binding Americans to the defence of their country.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ ‘Campaign for Re-election, 1942,’ pamphlet issued by San Mateo County Democratic Committee, carton 5, Olson Papers

⁴³⁴ John M Allswang, *The Initiative and Referendum in California, 1898-1998* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 82.

⁴³⁵ Nelson W Polsby, *Political Innovation in America: The Politics of Policy Initiation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984)

⁴³⁶ La Follette’s final campaign speech, Madison, Wisconsin, November 3, 1940, box 1: C533, La Follette Family Papers

⁴³⁷ Address of Governor Johnson, August 26, 1912, box 43, Johnson Papers

⁴³⁸ La Follette speech at Green Bay, for press release October 31, 1940, box 1: C533, La Follette Family Papers

Finally, in speeches (1941-1942), and his published report into the California hearings, La Follette revisited the issue of migrant farm workers, and argued that American democracy would be more secure for helping them. His ideas on this subject bring together progressive truths and misconceptions in social justice policy. In the early 1940s, progressives were still trying to convince Americans, as in 1900-1920, that the US was no longer a frontier land. Certainly, the vigilantism of the Associated Farmers etc. was akin to the ‘frontier justice’ which Turner tacitly approved of – ‘sudden and effective justice’ – but it had no place in a modern society.⁴³⁹ Similarly, in 1941, La Follette said farm workers were ‘truly the forgotten men of our economic democracy,’ contending their inferior work status, ‘encysted in law,’ had exclusively frontier origins. In particular, Western states regarded rural migrants as in the process of finding new land or urban jobs, and therefore unjustly excluded them from workplace, and other, protections.⁴⁴⁰ This analysis typifies western progressivism’s over-emphasis on the frontier thesis. Recently, Katznelson has updated understanding of the New Deal. He explains that American farm labour during the 1930s was kept disadvantaged for another reason: because the powerful southern bloc imposed its racial and economic imperatives on Congress.⁴⁴¹

The progressive analysis of society linked to the closed frontier theory was also guilty of other misconceptions. La Follette predicted after the war permanent high levels of people surplus to the west’s rural labour requirements – the surplus stood at five million during 1940.⁴⁴² Progressives consistently under-estimated capitalism’s dynamism – its ability to discover new products, processes, and markets. Post-World War II, West Coast capitalism proved itself conspicuously innovative and inventive. On the other hand, progressives like La Follette with a social conscience had detected capitalism’s biggest flaw – its continued reliance on a rural and urban underclass, however much sections of the working class underwent embourgeoisement. Perhaps La Follette addressed the far off future in his 1941 speech, when he said that the

⁴³⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1920) chapter vii, ‘The Problems of the West’

⁴⁴⁰ La Follette’s speech to Special Committee on Interstate Migration, June 2, 1941: La Follette Committee Report, 1942, ‘Employers Associations and Collective Bargaining in California, p38, box 1: C405, La Follette Family Papers

⁴⁴¹ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: WW Norton, 2013), 163.

⁴⁴² La Follette’s speech to Special Committee on Interstate Migration, June 2, 1941

desperate plight of ‘trailer life’ Americans must be tackled by progressive government action, which included educational, workplace, and medical protection.⁴⁴³

A trend in New Deal historiography has shown how Roosevelt’s government anticipated and encouraged post-war developments. Equally, in the years 1940-1942, progressives concerned with the West Coast promoted forward-looking social justice policies derived from the Progressive era past. They employed the concept of mutuality, and their attempted reforms often influenced government policy as the war ended or later in peacetime, even if sometimes their ideas overstated realities.

Progressive era influence on the late New Deal deepens understanding of social justice issues. Essentially, old Progressives and New Dealers remained committed to Progressive era social justice objectives, only CIO unionization divided them. Both AFL and CIO union movements supported the Progressive era farmer-labour alliance, although paradoxically their unionization campaigns jeopardized it. The repositioning of the La Follette Committee only makes sense by considering La Follette Jr.’s Progressive era beliefs about communism, and small farmers. Both the La Follette Committee and the Grays Harbor Civil Rights Committee helped contain vigilantism that had caused progressivism’s defeat on the West Coast during 1919-1920, and threatened the New Deal, 1939-1940. Progressives, focused on the West Coast, ‘incubated’ social justice policy into the war emergency, which bore fruit in the mid 1940s or much later.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Conclusion

During the 1970s, Rex Tugwell, a leading agricultural reformer in the New Deal, cast his mind back to that era. He commented: ‘The progressive tradition ... was the furniture of ... (Franklin Roosevelt’s) mind ... and his mind was never entirely purged of these preferences.’⁴⁴⁴ This thesis has attempted to show that the Progressive era was not just a vague background, but a vivid presence in the late New Deal. Roosevelt’s New Deal was strongly motivated by Progressive era ideology in conservation, monopoly reform, and social justice. The West Coast in the later New Deal was the arena in which this ideology found perhaps its most eloquent expression. In chapter one, my work showed that ‘ideological’ Progressive era presidential leaders were more pragmatic than the historiography suggests. Chapters three through six demonstrated that the ‘pragmatic’ New Deal was considerably more influenced by Progressive era ideology than the Hofstadter ‘discontinuity school’ indicated, establishing the basic continuity between the two periods.

The continuity of the ‘discontinuity school’ deserves a final comment. That Hofstadter’s contention of discontinuity between the 1900s and 1930s has survived in such rude health is remarkable, despite first being mooted in 1955. Of course, it contains many truths, and was intellectually daring in challenging what appeared to be intuitively obvious. It also permitted numerous permutations on the theme that these chronologically close historical reformist epochs were fundamentally different. By deploying Progressive era intellectual tools, we can go a step further into exploring the longevity of Hofstadter’s discontinuity idea.

Of all the many reasons for the survival of the discontinuity school, one is particularly striking – the strong influence of Columbia University historians - Hofstadter onwards - who perpetuated the discontinuity idea. Although they often became eminent and original historians in their own right, successive cohorts of Columbia academics quaffed at the fount of Hofstadter’s wisdom. Leuchtenburg added to his view of a pragmatic New Deal. Graham Jr. judged old Progressives as out of temper with the New Deal. Auerbach ignored the effects of the

⁴⁴⁴ Rexford G Tugwell, *In Search of Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 280-281.

Progressive era on La Follette Jr. and the Civil Liberties Committee, even though this politician was steeped in progressivism. Weinstein's New Left ideas portrayed a backward-looking Progressive era. Brinkley pointed the late New Deal forwards to influencing post-war America. Most recently, Katznelson has shown the validity of extending the New Deal to 1953. The ingenuity of Columbia University historians, who developed Hofstadter's hypothesis, is impressive, and established a distinctive tradition in New Deal history. As Turner adapted the frontier thesis throughout the Progressive era, the discontinuity theory shows how to sustain a single arresting idea over time, with numerous valuable accretions.

Nonetheless, the intellectual importance of Hofstadter in American historiography was reason enough for his great influence on generations of historians. Columbia academics did not benefit exclusively from Hofstadter's many historical contributions, although his *Alma Mater* must have nurtured, for instance, the discontinuity idea. Historians from elsewhere, like Hawley, Worster, or Sutter reached conclusions that accorded with Progressive/New Deal discontinuity. To be sure, they might have arrived at their arguments uninfluenced by Hofstadter, but we can probably accept that Hofstadter's discontinuity model had a significant impact on academia. It is also likely to have served a function in wider society.

Hofstadter wrote *The Age of Reform* at the height of the Cold War. Americans felt they were slaying ogres. They had helped defeat German Nazi ideology in World War II. During the 1950s, they were locked in a struggle with Soviet Communist ideology. The notion that the New Deal and post-war American society were free from the taint of ideology was an attractive proposition. Hofstadter found a receptive audience with the Right, initially, reassuring it when McCarthyism made many Americans think America was anything but un-ideological. The Right was less content with his 1960s work on McCarthy-like episodes in American history.⁴⁴⁵ Equally, and perhaps of more enduring significance, Hofstadter's ideas received a warm reception from the Left. The Progressive era formulated the need for a 'usable past.'⁴⁴⁶ Hofstadter's discontinuity idea served the purposes of the Left and Right, and that facilitated its survival.

⁴⁴⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965)

⁴⁴⁶ Van Wyck Brooks, 'On Creating a Usable Past,' *Dial* LXIV (April 11, 1918)

Hofstadter's 'idea' and Graham Jr.'s reinforcing of it created the impression that the New Deal began a Left tradition. When Graham Jr. showed the divergence between the late New Deal and old Progressives, many of whom were Republican, the New Deal was recast as overwhelmingly a Democratic Party phenomenon. The Democratic Party devoured progressivism and liberalism, and gained stature in the process. If the New Deal is re-connected to the Progressive era, showing its bi-partisan political complexion, we can appreciate the long progressive tradition in the Democratic *and* Republican Parties. Twenty-first Century American politics is characterized by deep rifts and widening polarities, often caused by fundamental disagreements over policy, but also misconceptions. In that discourse, progressive commonality provides some small bridge of understanding. The continuity argument can assist the present, but how does it aid understanding of the late New Deal on the West Coast?

By denying continuity between the two eras, a rich intellectual terrain is blocked from our vision. A few instances will illustrate that point. Using an ideological analysis, the late New Deal can be credited with more policy success than is normally conceded. What was deemed peripheral becomes central to the New Deal project. In conservation, preservationists achieved key objectives stemming from Muir's Progressive era ideology. Regarding the Olympic and Kings Canyon National Parks, they protected two of the three giant trees of the West Coast. Olson's 'Fire Disaster Plan' helped secure the welfare of the third – the Redwood. Similarly, utility reform was not a 'skirmish on the flanks,' to quote Hawley, but ideologically central to progressive monopoly reform. The public power movement, in Washington and California especially, manifested a hardened ideological resolve derived from the Progressive era that achieved the aim of prioritizing public power from the giant West Coast dams. Over social justice, La Follette Jr.'s Progressive era background enabled him to negotiate a safe passage through serious threats to the New Deal that built up before the 1940 elections; the kind that had defeated progressivism in 1920. Accordingly, the La Follette Committee in California was more significant than previous historians suggest; it helped the New Deal win through into the war years.

An ideological approach reveals that often where the post-1937 New Deal appears to have different concerns from the Progressive era, on closer inspection, they were the same. In conservation, Sutter's dichotomy between 'motorized recreation' and 'wilderness recreation'

seems to present a new situation during the 1930s. However, an ideological interpretation posits that the old Progressive era dichotomy persisted between ‘resource developers’ and progressives. The greater attention given to railroad cartels in Progressive era monopoly reform apparently contrasts with the New Deal’s concentration on utility reform. Yet, while railroads declined and electricity surged, it was the Progressive era public power tradition that drove late 1930s New Deal policy. Where larger differences were evident, for example, over social justice, the Great Depression was the chief cause. The scale of this socio-economic disaster caused a divergence in progressive thinking. New Dealers like Olson exhibited urgency in forcing unionization and higher wages on employers. Johnson, an old Progressive, viewed partisan government action as a dangerous misstep for progressivism. Yet, regarding a range of progressive metrics, Olson’s and Johnson’s progressivism converged.

As mentioned in chapter five, Worster suggested the need for more regional understanding of America on a north-south axis. The Progressive/New Deal connection reconstitutes the three West Coast states as an ideological unit, but not a reconstruction by artifice, rather a working reality in the 1930s. Progressives gained national parks in California and Washington State, but their Progressive era conservation objectives depended on support from McNary of Oregon, the Republican leader in the Senate. Progressivism achieved public power aims over the New Deal dams in monopoly reform, but their victory rested on a pan-West Coast public power movement established in the Progressive era, and the Pacific Coast Public Ownership League. In the social justice area, the ideological conflict of 1919 on the West Coast re-emerged during 1939-1940. At that time, radical ‘commonwealth federation’ progressives formed a West Coast network. Reactionaries were pitted against them, similarly configured – the Associated Farmers of the Pacific Coast, and the Pacific Coast lumber interests. La Follette Jr. was alert to the lessons of 1919 and the pan-West Coast dimensions to the struggle in 1940.

A last word is merited on the wider New Deal and how the Progressive era perspective alters perceptions of it. The concept of an ‘ideological’ New Deal does not deny the New Deal’s firm adherence to electoral realities. A reformer in a democracy must often make policy compromises to achieve ideological objectives, or defer reform until such time as the electorate accepts it. Equally, the need for pragmatism does not preclude an ideological thrust behind policy. The New Deal government appealed to the ‘vital centre’ both for electoral survival, and

as a means of achieving its Progressive era beliefs. In 1954, a year before Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, Freidel interviewed Eleanor Roosevelt. She recalled her husband FDR chiding her impatience at the slow pace of reform. He said: 'one must wait until the electorate was ready to support a change; otherwise if it was rammed through too soon the voters will go back on it.'⁴⁴⁷

Frequently, compromise was necessary to attain ideological aims, and avoid electoral pushback. New Dealers made concessions to 'resource developers' and 'motorized recreation' to create national parks. They granted private utilities and industrial users access to West Coast dam electricity, because their public power objectives were realized. La Follette repositioned his committee, but still dealt a decisive blow against the Associated Farmers. Moreover, as FDR recognized, sometimes progressives should 'incubate' reform, and gradually acclimatize the public and the peoples' representatives to a reform proposal. During the early 1940s, Progressive era-influenced individuals – the West Coast politician Downey and the economist Hansen – advocated government should prioritize full employment in economic policy. These proposals only became feasible in the Employment Act (1946), and the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act (1978). Pragmatic means, or more accurately tactics, did not negate the ideological purpose behind the policies of the later New Deal. Tugwell stated: 'Historians ... might consider Roosevelt's habit of differentiating means and ends; his carelessness about the one, his adamant holding to the other.'⁴⁴⁸

Indeed, Tugwell's comment supplies one more Progressive era resonance for the New Deal. In chapter three it was observed that the Progressive era provided the New Deal with, at least, two policy options for each of the three tenets: wise user or preservationist beliefs in conservation; regulation or trust-busting regarding monopoly reform; the path of radical or more capitalist-friendly trade unionism over social justice policy. These policy options remained fluid partly because no enduring Progressive Party arose from the Progressive age to crystallize beliefs. This apparent weakness was transmuted by progressives, during both eras, into a strength. For example, Roosevelt's New Deal, when pushed into tight corners by Congress, the Supreme Court, or foreign policy, demonstrated an ability to renew itself with fresh policies, derived from the

⁴⁴⁷ Frank Freidel interview with Eleanor Roosevelt, July 13, 1954, 21- B1, p2, Frank Freidel Research Interviews, Roosevelt Library

⁴⁴⁸ Tugwell, *In Search of Roosevelt*, 30.

Progressive era. Most historians consider such flexibility evidence of pragmatism, rather than ideological intent. Alternatively, each policy area presented a radical or gradualist means to the same end aimed at, respectively, greater responsibility: towards the environment, in business practice, and over the welfare of poorer workers. Accordingly, the New Deal developed a policy agility lacking among the majority of Republicans and conservative Democrats during the 1930s.

In various ways, my thesis has attempted to achieve its purpose – of showing Progressive era influence on the West Coast in the late New Deal. However, having reached this particular destination, I am aware that the exploration of connections between these two eras has not ended, but is only just beginning.

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