



Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital, and the State

Rhonda F Levine

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In this provocative reassessment of New Deal policymaking, Rhonda Levine argues that the major constraints upon and catalysts for FDR's policies were rooted in class conflict. Countering recent neo-Marxist and state-centered theories, which focus solely on administrative and bureaucratic structures or on the "fragmented character of the state apparatus," she contends that too little attention has been paid to the effect of class struggle on New Deal policymaking.

Drawing on a vast array of archival sources, Levine shows that Roosevelt's plans for economic recovery reflected compromises not only between capitalist and working classes, but also among factions within the capitalist class itself. The National Labor Relations Act, for example, was passed to defuse the increasing militance of the working class, while the National Industrial Recovery Act was created not only to overcome obstacles to industrial expansion but also to unify the sharply divided ranks of big business.

Levine demonstrates that the NLRA and related programs were a direct response to both unemployed workers' demands for federal relief and employed workers' resistance to decreased wages and increased hours. These concessions were linked to the Democratic Party's realignment with and assimilation of the working class, which, ironically, resulted in organized labor's support of the existing political and economic order. Ultimately, these policies and shifts laid the foundation for a new and more accelerated phase of industrial development after World War II.

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