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Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Service Intellectual

BY RICHARD S. KIRKENDALL

President Franklin D. Roosevelt shocked many Americans in the 1930's by calling upon college professors to occupy positions of prominence and power in national politics.¹ To many people, these men, sadly lacking in "practical experience," seemed to be dominating the New Deal and pushing politics in radical directions. Actually, however, Roosevelt looked everywhere for advice, not just to the universities, and thus no single group dominated his regime. Furthermore, of greater significance than his tendency to employ academicians was the fact that they had developed a point of view useful to a man faced with the pressing problems of a land in depression. For two generations there had been a drive toward the "practical" in American higher education and the rise of what could be termed the "service intellectuals"—men of academically trained intelligence whose work as intellectuals related closely to affairs of great importance and interest to men outside of the university. Contrasting sharply with those men of ideas who could not tolerate the nearly overwhelming pressure of affairs in America, service intellectuals interpreted their role in terms of active service to their society.² Thus, the universities housed people who could attract a chief executive trying to tap all available sources of assistance.

¹ Grateful acknowledgment is made to the American Philosophical Society and the Research Council of the University of Missouri for grants and a fellowship that assisted an extended research project, of which this study is one product. I am grateful also for the critical attention paid to this essay by Merle Curti of the University of Wisconsin and Lewis Atherton, Allen F. Davis, and Walter V. Scholes of the University of Missouri.

² For treatment of an extreme form of the service intellectual see Loren Baritz, *The Servants of Power: A History of the Use of Social Science in American Industry* (Middletown, Conn., 1960). For definitions that assume that intellectuals need not be alienated see Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York, 1960), 310-12, and Richard Hofstadter, "A Note on Intellect and Power," *American Scholar* (New York), XXX (Autumn, 1961), 594-98.

In the days before the New Deal, this view of intellectual life appeared in a number of places,³ including the pragmatism of John Dewey and the practices of many University of Wisconsin professors. For Dewey, the idea of the service intellectual involved the removal of mutual distrust between intellectuals and the rest of society, something that he regarded as a carry-over from the class societies of the Old World. Attempting to alter the association of the intellectual with aristocracy, this philosopher criticized the assumptions that intellectual ability is confined to a small group and that the ivory tower is the proper abode for intellectuals. By putting their knowledge to work for the reform of society they could promote both intellectual and social progress. Denying that the change would mean “a surrender of the business of thought, for the sake of getting busy at some so-called practical matter,” Dewey insisted that the new relation would “signify a focusing of thought and intensifying of its quality by bringing it into relation with issues of stupendous meaning.”⁴

Wisconsin during the Progressive Era provided one of the outstanding illustrations of the service intellectual in action. There, faculty members from the state university participated in almost every aspect of the reform movement. The list included major figures like John R. Commons and Richard T. Ely who made important contributions to the social sciences at the same time that they served political leaders.⁵

Franklin Roosevelt both accepted and promoted the development of the service intellectual, increasing his prominence and power by calling upon professors to play key roles in politics.⁶ Roosevelt has been compared—and accurately—with Governor La Follette in the

³ For discussion of “The Uses of Knowledge in America” see Merle Curti, *American Paradox: The Conflict of Thought and Action* (New Brunswick, 1956), chap. 1.

⁴ Joseph Ratner (ed.), *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York, 1939), 462. See also Merle Curti, “Intellectuals and Other People,” *American Historical Review* (New York), LX (January, 1955), 279; Lewis S. Feuer, “John Dewey and the Back to the People Movement,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (New York), XX (October-December, 1959), 545-68, and Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York, 1961), 115-26. For a view of Dewey as a promoter of anti-intellectualism, rather than a type of intellectual life, see J. R. Watmough, “Anti-Intellectualism,” *Hibbert Journal* (Boston), LVI (July, 1958), 357-60.

⁵ For brief discussions see Cremin, *Transformation of the School*, 161-68, and Robert S. Maxwell, *La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin* (Madison, 1956), 128-52.

⁶ William E. Leuchtenburg, “Anti-Intellectualism: An Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Social Issues* (New York), XI (September, 1955), 12-13.

use of “trained experts,”⁷ for Roosevelt enlarged the practice that the elder La Follette, more than anyone else, made a part of American governmental procedures.⁸ Developing the habit during his years as governor of New York, Roosevelt made no effort to break it as he moved toward the presidency. His ability and willingness to learn from other people helped academic intellectuals to play roles for which they had been preparing themselves.⁹

While Roosevelt ridiculed those who saw him as “a Brain Trust ruled Dictator,”¹⁰ he made no effort to conceal the fact that he used and admired intellectuals. He praised them for their contributions to the New Deal, alerted politicians to the work of the professors, urged co-operation between the two groups, and commended Rexford Guy Tugwell, a professor from Columbia University, “for the way he stood up under fire.”¹¹ At Yale in June, 1934, just after a period in which the professors had come under particularly heavy attack, Roosevelt noted that “today, more than ever before in our public life, it is true that we are calling on the teaching profession, on the graduates of scientific schools and other schools.” To him, this development did not seem unwise: “While there is a certain amount of comment about the use of brains in the national government, it seems to me a pretty good practice—a practice which will continue—this practice of calling on trained people for tasks that require trained people.”¹²

⁷ Bernard Bellush, *Franklin D. Roosevelt as Governor of New York* (New York, 1955), 229.

⁸ David A. Shannon has written that Eric Goldman’s “assertion that La Follette ‘exalted ‘the people’ over the educated and the expert’ simply does not fit the historical evidence. La Follette, perhaps more than any other figure in twentieth-century political history, was responsible for the now generally accepted practice of government office-holders seeking the advice and drawing upon researches by academic experts.” Shannon, “Was McCarthy a Political Heir of La Follette?” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Madison), XLV (Autumn, 1961), 4.

⁹ Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Triumph* (Boston, 1956), 101, 123, 196-97, 261, 265-66.

¹⁰ Roosevelt to Frederic R. Coudert, 1935, Roosevelt Library, President’s Personal File 269.

¹¹ Elliott Roosevelt (ed.) *F.D.R.: His Personal Letters, 1928-1945* (2 vols., New York, 1950), I, 309, 544; Roosevelt to Thurman Arnold, January 8, 1943, Roosevelt Library, President’s Personal File 8319; Roosevelt to Raymond Moley, August 27, 1933, *ibid.*, 743; Roosevelt to Tugwell, November 17, 1936, *ibid.*, 564; Milburn L. Wilson to Roosevelt, January 8, 1937, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary’s Correspondence, Under Secretary; Moley, *After Seven Years* (New York, 1939), 46; Roosevelt to Senator Thomas J. Walsh (Montana), August 30, 1932, Roosevelt Library, Group 27, Box 357; *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes* (3 vols., New York, 1953-1954), I, 692, II, 9.

¹² *New York Times*, June 21, 1934.

Some skepticism about the wisdom of businessmen and politicians influenced Roosevelt's decision to call academic people into public life. Early in 1932, one of Roosevelt's advisers, Samuel Rosenman, argued that the candidate, unlike his predecessors, should not rely upon industrialists, financiers, and political leaders, for they had "failed to produce anything constructive to solve the mess we're in today." Instead, Roosevelt should go to the universities. "You have been having some good experience with college professors," the adviser concluded. "I think they wouldn't be afraid to strike out on new paths just because the paths are new. They would get away from the old fuzzy thinking on many subjects, and that seems to be the most important thing."¹³

Although Roosevelt did go to the universities, Rosenman's advice did not persuade him to stop his practice of relying also on businessmen, politicians, and others. Bankers and businessmen did not fall back or wait in the anterooms, hat in hand, for the New Deal to get the stalled economic machine into motion again, as certain romantic conceptions of the Brain Trust would have it.¹⁴ Business leaders were conspicuous in Washington in 1933,¹⁵ and never dropped out of the picture completely during New Deal years. One student of Roosevelt's thought has concluded from a study of his appointment calendar and his personal correspondence "that a disproportionate amount of advice came from conservative business and professional men."¹⁶ Although Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., refers to the New Deal by the end of 1935 as "a coalition of the non-business groups, mobilized to prevent the domination of the country by the business community," he sees in the coalition certain "dissident businessmen"—"businessmen who felt themselves handicapped by Wall Street domination of the money market." These included "some of the ablest entrepreneurs in the country . . . like Joseph P. Kennedy who invested in both new regions and new industries and was willing to bet on the nation's capacity to resume economic growth." Obviously

¹³ Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt* (New York, 1952), 57-58. On Roosevelt's skepticism about the wisdom of the businessman and the growth of it during 1934 and 1935 see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston, 1959) 496-503, and Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston, 1960), 272-73.

¹⁴ Leo Gurko, *Heroes, Highbrows, and the Popular Mind* (Indianapolis, 1953), 107-108.

¹⁵ Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 4-5, 87-176, 423-33.

¹⁶ Thomas H. Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought: The Social and Political Ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (East Lansing, 1958), 101.

only “a powerful section of business” had moved out of the President’s circle.¹⁷

Lawyers, social workers, economists from government, business and the foundations, journalists, engineers, labor and farm leaders, and even some politicians also helped to shape Roosevelt’s policies.¹⁸ To view the New Deal as a professorial brainstorm, the journalist-historian Henry F. Pringle insisted in 1934, “ignores the obvious truth that this remains a political form of government and that Mr. Roosevelt is taking his objectives by political methods.”¹⁹ Roosevelt, Thomas H. Greer has written, “would have been the last to suggest that the government be turned over to a brain trust—his, or any other.”²⁰ His skepticism obviously extended to the professors.²¹ He surely had doubts that a democratic politician should rely exclusively upon this or any other group.

Evidence that “practical men” did not have to wait until World War II to regain power in Washington can be found in the testimony of the professors themselves. Some, like Raymond Moley, recognized and welcomed the influence of the political and economic leaders;²² other academicians, like Tugwell, with less confidence in such men, were not so pleased about their influence.²³ Tugwell wrote with obvious displeasure of the “businessmen galore” the “old war horses of politics,” and “the real power and might of finance and industry” that provided Roosevelt with ideas in 1932 and 1933.²⁴ In his diary,

¹⁷ Schlesinger, *Politics of Upheaval*, 411, 443, 586.

¹⁸ See, for example, the development of Roosevelt’s technique of using both economists and farm leaders to develop farm policy. Gertrude Almy Slichter, “Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Farm Problem, 1929-1932,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids), XLIII (September, 1956), 238-58, and Slichter, “Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Farm Policy as Governor of New York State, 1928-1932,” *Agricultural History* (Champaign, Ill.), XXXIII (October, 1959), 167-76. On Tugwell’s unhappiness in 1932 with Roosevelt’s reluctance to commit himself to the economists’ farm plan and put pressure on the farm groups to support it, see Tugwell, “Notes from a New Deal Diary,” December 31, 1932, Roosevelt Library, Group 21, and Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt* (New York, 1957), 233.

¹⁹ Henry F. Pringle, “Profiles: The President,” *New Yorker* (New York), X (June 16-30, 1934), 22.

²⁰ Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought*, 100.

²¹ On the skeptical elements in Roosevelt’s attitude toward one group of intellectuals—the economists—see Schlesinger, *Politics of Upheaval*, 649-51.

²² *New York Times*, May 24, 1933; Moley, *After Seven Years*, 46.

²³ A weakness of the professors of the “First New Deal” persuasion was their inability to agree on the businessman. Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 183-84; *Politics of Upheaval*, 235.

²⁴ Tugwell, “The Preparation of a President,” *Western Political Quarterly* (Salt Lake City), I (June, 1948), 145-47; Tugwell, *Democratic Roosevelt*, 9, 213, 219-23, 242-43, 252-53, 261.

the Columbia economist complained of his chief's practice of taking advice "from me at one time, from Moley at another time, and, perhaps if we are not handy, from some senator or congressman who happens to turn up at an opportune moment."²⁵

In short, Roosevelt drew upon a multitude of groups and individuals in the shaping of his policies. His procedures caused one correspondent to ask: "How in the confusion around the President could any professorial group remain the keeper of the conscience of the able man who is the most astute politician of his time?"²⁶ And the author of *Behind the Ballots* suggested that Roosevelt made "a sincere and honest effort to strike a happy balance between the theoretical knowledge gained by the professors and schoolmen and the practical knowledge gained by men who spend their lives in the busy world of finance and industry."²⁷ Here was a method that put the President in touch with many developments in American life, produced political support, and valued an adviser for the interests he represented as well as the ideas he possessed.²⁸

The method meant that the President, not the professors, dominated the New Deal. Although they had a chance to influence policy, they had to contend against other groups that were also being encouraged to contribute. The groups could pull and haul among themselves, but ultimately a decision had to be made on their conflicting proposals. Final responsibility for the decision, at least as Roosevelt organized his administration,²⁹ lay with the President, a fact that those in close contact with him recognized.³⁰ "He likes to talk to people," Tugwell confided to his diary, "but he makes up his mind almost regardless of advice." "We could throw out pieces of theory; and perhaps they would find a place in his scheme. We could suggest relations; and perhaps the inventiveness of the suggestion would attract his notice," this Columbia professor recalled in another place.

²⁵ Tugwell, "Diary," Roosevelt Library, Group 21.

²⁶ Washington correspondent of London *Times*, in *New York Times*, June 28, 1933.

²⁷ James A. Farley, *Behind the Ballots* (New York, 1938), 220-21; Tugwell, *Art of Politics* (New York, 1958), 5.

²⁸ See Frank Freidel's discussion of Roosevelt's concept of political balance, a concept "of serving all important groups in the American community," *The Triumph*, 317-18, 331-32, 337.

²⁹ Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 521-25.

³⁰ Edward J. Flynn, *You're the Boss* (New York, 1947), 90; Charles Michelson, *The Ghost Talks* (New York, 1944), 11, 13; Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York, 1946), 328-33; Tom Connally, *My Name Is Tom Connally* (New York, 1954), 159; Daniel R. Fusfeld, *The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal* (New York, 1956), 209-17; Freidel, *The Triumph*, 322.

“But the tapestry of policy he was weaving was guided by an artist’s conception which was not made known to us.”³¹ Another Brain Truster, Adolf A. Berle, also testified that he and other advisers could not run the show because the President drew upon many advisers and thus had to choose between them and make up his own mind.³² One should add that the professors often disagreed with one another. Consider Tugwell and Felix Frankfurter, a professor from the Harvard Law School. For several years, they competed against one another for influence within the administration. Tugwell, a critic of competition and of efforts to restore it in the American economy, insisted that big business must be accepted as inevitable and desirable and that the nation must move on in a collectivistic direction and establish a system of national planning. Frankfurter, on the other hand, distrusted the schemes of the planners, believed in competitive enterprise, and argued that the powers of government must be employed to reverse the trend toward economic concentration.³³ The influence of intellectuals like Tugwell and Frankfurter went up and down while Roosevelt remained on for over twelve years.

The professors had an opportunity, not to take command, but to be useful.³⁴ They had a chance to co-operate with men of political and economic affairs in the task of shaping policies for a nation in its most serious depression. Prepared by a long period of historical development for the roles that Roosevelt encouraged them to play, the professors, in the collaboration with other men that they experienced during the years of the New Deal, represented a highly significant trend in American intellectual life.

To many Americans of the 1930’s, however, Roosevelt’s use of the professors seemed a radical departure from the past, rather than

³¹ Tugwell, “Diary,” Roosevelt Library, Group 21; Tugwell, “Preparation of a President,” *Western Political Quarterly*, I, 135.

³² *New York Times*, March 30, 1933. An examination of Berle’s intellectual development suggests that the relationship between Roosevelt and his Brain Trust was not a one-way relationship. He influenced as well as was influenced by this Brain Truster. Richard S. Kirkendall, “A. A. Berle, Jr., Student of the Corporation, 1917-1932,” *Business History Review* (Boston), XXXV (Spring, 1961), 43-58.

³³ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order* (Boston, 1957), 194-98, 400-401, 415, 419, 423, 451-52, and *Politics of Upheaval*, 214-15, 223, 233-35, 263, 387-94.

³⁴ Consider, for example, Roosevelt’s relations with Professors George Warren and O. W. M. Sprague in the fall of 1933. Warren seemed useful from political and economic points of view while Sprague did not. Thus Warren shaped monetary policy for a brief period while Sprague left the administration in a huff. Richard S. Kirkendall, “The New Deal Professors and the Politics of Agriculture” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1958), 311-28.

part of a long-run trend, or at least a highly undesirable development. Thus denunciations of these intellectuals in politics figured prominently in the debates of the decade. Three themes appeared most frequently in the vigorous criticism of the academic intellectuals: they dominated the administration; they gave it a radical orientation; and they lacked the required practical experience.³⁵ At times, critics simply portrayed the "Brain Trust" or "professors" as the dominant group, while frequently the alarmed observers pointed to particular individuals, like Tugwell or Frankfurter, as the men of greatest power. Sometimes their brand of radicalism was not defined, but often such labels as "communistic" and "socialistic" were pinned on their philosophies.³⁶ According to most critics, the lack of practical experience was the fundamental difficulty. The intellectuals were dangerously radical because their minds had not been formed by participation in practical affairs. The critics' case involved a theory of knowledge that rationalized the claims of a few groups, chiefly business leaders, to positions of dominant power in American society. Only they had the kinds of experience that produced the ideas needed to conduct affairs successfully.³⁷ Thus, the President should free himself from men like Tugwell and substitute men who had "hustled up pay rolls," while the professors should quit government and enter business in order to develop "more practical ideas."³⁸

³⁵ For illustrations of all three see "The Rise of Conservative Opposition," in Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 473-74, and the Wirt episode, *ibid.*, 457-60, and Kirkendall, "The New Deal Professors," 333-46. A few critics altered one or more of the themes. President John A. Simpson of the National Farmers Union insisted that only farm organizations had the right to offer plans to solve farmers' problems and that the "Brain Trust" did not speak nor understand "the farmers' language." He charged that Professor Milburn L. Wilson was "financed by big business" and that some Brain Trusters had "been in the employ of the crooks in the past and may not have severed all connections." Simpson to W. R. Ronald, 1932, M. L. Wilson Papers (Montana State College Archives); Simpson to Roosevelt, October 24, 1933, Roosevelt Library, President's Personal File 471.

³⁶ Charles H. L. Johnston to George N. Peek, September 3, 1936, Peek Papers (Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri); *Missouri Farmer* (Columbia), XXXVI (March 15, 1934), 4; *Rural New Yorker* (New York), XCIV (April 20, 1935), 335; George Benson, "Making Up the President's Mind," *Review of Reviews* (London), XCIII (June, 1936), 66; Bernarr MacFadden in *New York Times*, April 9, 1936; Edward M. Crane to Roosevelt, May 21, 1934, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1-Misc.; Ickes, *Diary* I, 492; editorial, "Brains in Government," *Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia), CCVII (July 28, 1934), 22.

³⁷ Spokesmen for business in the 1920's had developed and used this idea. See James W. Prothro, *Dollar Decade: Business Ideas in the 1920's* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 200-201.

³⁸ Sibley Everitt to Roosevelt, April 15, 1935, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1-Misc.; W. R. Gentry to Tugwell, November 19, 1936, National Archives, Records Group 96, Farm Security Administration. See also Clyde O. Patterson to Tugwell, July 4,

Views such as these rejected the basic assumption of the service intellectuals, the assumption that their training enabled them to be practical men.

As this hostility mounted, members and friends of the Roosevelt administration suggested that the war had broken out because the intellectuals threatened the "special interests" that were "struggling to maintain their power in a period of revolutionary change."³⁹ The real criticism of the Brain Trust, the *New Republic* explained, "comes from those who feel that the whole course of the administration is hostile to their special and private interests—men of great wealth who fear that in one way or another some of it will be taken from them, important industrialists who see in the Roosevelt Administration a degree of concern for the rights and interests of the common man which has not been witnessed since the first two years of the Wilson Administration."⁴⁰ According to this theory, the threatened groups were reluctant to criticize the President directly for he seemed to have tremendous popular support. Attacking the professors served as an indirect and safe way of hitting Roosevelt.⁴¹

Although the theory throws light on the criticism, something more must have been involved. Why did the anti-New Dealers believe that an attack upon the professors as professors would bring support to the opposition that could not be obtained in other ways? Perhaps the intellectuals' opponents believed that there was a widespread resentment of the special privileges that a highly educated group enjoyed and the sense of superiority that some members of the group displayed.⁴² Perhaps the critics of the Brain Trusters as-

1934, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary's Correspondence, Criticism (Tugwell); B. R. Douglas to Louis Howe, May 27, 1933, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1-Misc.; R. R. Englehart to Roosevelt, April 25, 1934, Roosevelt Library, president's Personal File 965; *Rural New Yorker*, XCIV (December 21, 1935), 795; XCVII (January 15, 1938), 46; Eugene Meyer in *New York Times*, April 22, 1934; R. D. Bowen to Roosevelt, October 21, 1933, Roosevelt Library, Official File 227-Misc.; *Missouri Farmer*, XXV (April 15, 1933), 9; (June 1, 1933), 8; William A. Hirth to George N. Peek, August 25, 1936; J. M. Somerndice (?) to Peek, August 25, 1936; and Clarence A. Earl to Peek, December 6, 1935, Peek Papers; *Farm Journal* (Philadelphia), LX (June, 1937), 7.

³⁹ Ernest K. Lindley, "War on the Brains Trust," *Scribners Monthly* (New York), XCIV (November, 1933), 266. See also Donald Richberg in *New York Times*, April 11, 1934.

⁴⁰ *New Republic* (New York), LXXV (June 7, 1935), 85-86.

⁴¹ The theory was advanced by such important administration figures as Louis Howe, Paul Appleby, and Adolf Berle. Ickes, *Diary*, I, 82-83; Appleby to Mrs. Robert L. Webb, March 2, 1935, and Appleby memorandum, May 1, 1934, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary's Correspondence, Criticism (Tugwell); *New York Times*, June 19, 1933.

⁴² Lipset, *Political Man*, 339.

sumed that Americans believed that men of political power needed the experience found in the business world. If such attitudes prevailed, denunciations of the professors as impractical would discredit the New Deal and stimulate the rather passive members of the body politic to rally behind the active opponents of the policy changes of the period. In the 1930's some theorists suggested that the hostility toward intellectuals grew out of unique features of American life, especially the frontier experience and the devotion to business activity.⁴³

Many professional politicians certainly behaved as though they regarded distrust of the professor as a widespread American trait that could be exploited. Members of both major parties criticized and even ridiculed the academicians. A number of Democrats disliked the new policies of their party and resented the fact that intellectuals occupied positions of power and prestige that could have been filled by professional politicians.⁴⁴ Even before inauguration, Bernard Baruch, a source of money and ideas for many Democrats, was disturbed by Roosevelt's fondness for the advice of intellectuals who seemed to Baruch to lack the experience necessary for solving the country's problems.⁴⁵ Figuring conspicuously in the battles against Tugwell in 1934 were two southern Democrats in the Senate, Harry F. Byrd of Virginia and Ellison D. ("Cotton Ed") Smith of South Carolina. The latter wanted "a graduate of God's University, the great outdoors," rather than the Columbia economist, to become Under Secretary of Agriculture.⁴⁶ The frustrated and bitter Alfred E. Smith criticized the "absent-minded" and "inexperienced young college professors" with their socialistic trappings

⁴³ Claude C. Bowman, *The College Professor in America: An Analysis of Articles Published in the General Magazines, 1890-1938* (Philadelphia, 1938), 176; "Professors at Washington," *Christian Century* (Chicago), L (May 31, 1933), 711-12; Scrutator, "The Professor's Dilemma," *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston), XLII (July, 1933), 124-25; Henry Seidel Canby, "Trusting in Brains," *Saturday Review of Literature* (New York), June 13, 1936, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Leuchtenburg, "Anti-Intellectualism," *Journal of Social Issues*, XI, 13-14; Edwin B. Bronner, "The New Deal Comes to Pennsylvania: The Gubernatorial Election of 1934," *Pennsylvania History* (Philadelphia), XXVII (January, 1960), 52; Forrest Davis, "Behind the New Deal," *New Outlook* (New York), CLXI (March, 1933), 13; Russell Lord, *The Wallaces of Iowa* (Boston, 1947), 252-54; "The Brain Trust," *Business Week* (Greenwich, Conn.), March 22, 1933, pp. 16-18.

⁴⁵ Margaret L. Coit, *Mr. Baruch* (Boston, 1957), 429-30, 432, 438, 439.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, April 25, May 29, June 9, 1934. On some other Democratic criticism of the professors see James A. Trent to Roosevelt, February 21, 1935, Roosevelt Library, President's Personal File 327; Lord, *Wallaces*, 353; Ickes, *Diary*, I, 330; Michelson, *Ghost Talks*, 52-53, 151; Lela Stiles, *The Man Behind Roosevelt: The Story of Louis McHenry Howe* (Cleveland, 1954), 275-76; and Schlesinger, *Politics of Upheaval*, 415, 418.

and preferred "the leaders of the past . . . people who made the country what it is."⁴⁷ By 1936 the Democratic presidential candidate of 1928 was campaigning for Alfred M. Landon and suggesting that the intellectuals who had led the Democratic party away from its traditions should wrap themselves in the "raccoon coats that the college boys wear at a football game" and go to Russia where they could plan all they wanted. "Roosevelt," Smith protested, "could have called upon the best men but look at what he got!"⁴⁸

With Democrats fighting among themselves, many Republicans worked strenuously to make an issue out of the question of the kind of man who should govern the nation. As early as the spring of 1933, the Republican leader in the Senate complained about the power and philosophy of the professors.⁴⁹ By the campaign of 1936, attacks upon them had become such a conspicuous feature of Republican vote-seeking techniques that the cautious James A. Farley decided that Tugwell should not join in the efforts to re-elect Roosevelt⁵⁰ and some observers accused the Republicans of anti-intellectualism. "I am somewhat disappointed," one person wrote, "to see no plank in the Republican platform recommending the abolition of colleges. . . . If it is a crime, as Republican orators assert, for a college man to identify himself with national affairs, why then not economize by closing up the colleges."⁵¹

While many Americans of the depression decade protested against the intellectuals in politics, many others obviously believed that such people were capable of participating successfully in the political process on its higher levels. In fact, one rather large survey of the

⁴⁷ Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston, 1958), 170, 174, 180; Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 483-84; Leuchtenburg, "Anti-Intellectualism," *Journal of Social Issues*, XI, 13-14.

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, October 2, 23, 25, November 1, 1936.

⁴⁹ *Congressional Digest* (Washington), XII (November, 1933), 269-75. For examples of other Republican criticism from 1933 to 1936 see Herbert Hoover, *Addresses upon the American Road, 1933-1938* (New York, 1938), 175; *New York Times*, April 26, May 2, 29, June 13, 15, 1934, May 15, 16, September 17, December 11, 1935, March 4, April 4, September 22, October 1, 2, 4, 27, November 18, 1936; *Literary Digest* (New York), CXVII (June 23, 1934), 5-6; *National Grange Monthly* (Springfield, Mass.), XXXIII (November, 1936), 14; and pamphlets like "Rex the First: The Ruler Nobody Elected," that can be found in the Peek Papers.

⁵⁰ Ickes, *Diary*, I, 580; Farley to Roosevelt, May 9, 1936, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1-Misc.; Farley, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York, 1948), 57; *New York Times*, October 29, 1936. See also Stephen Early to Tugwell, August 14, 1936, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1, for evidence of the care Tugwell took not to embarrass Roosevelt during the campaign.

⁵¹ Letter to editor, *New York Times*, September 6, 1936. See also *Times*, June 24, 1934.

treatment of the Brain Trust in periodicals concluded that most of them were not hostile to the professors.⁵² Even the much maligned Tugwell had his admirers, some of whom saw him as a friend of the "workers" and an enemy of the "greedy individuals" who had brought "economic ruin" upon the people. He recognized that the old "capitalist-eat-worker system" was obsolete. One of those who applauded hoped to get work again so as to earn enough to buy every book the economist had published.⁵³

While some of the friends of the professors saw them as substitutes for the discredited businessmen and politicians and distinguished by an objective, disinterested adherence to principle,⁵⁴ other supporters were satisfied to make simple claims for the usefulness of the intellectuals without unrealistic notions about their power or superiority. Recognizing the development of a utilitarian orientation in American higher education and often emphasizing the growing complexity of public affairs, these people saw men who had been trained to study affairs thoroughly and to consider their fundamental implications as ones who could and should co-operate with other types of men in the development of policy. This view of the service intellectual was much like Franklin Roosevelt's.⁵⁵

⁵² Bowman, *College Professors*, 186.

⁵³ Paul Whitney to Tugwell, June 11, 1934; M. N. Holland to Tugwell, June 21, 1934, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary's Correspondence. The Secretary's Correspondence for 1933-1936, under such headings as "Criticism," "Congratulations (Tugwell)," "Criticism-Commendations," "Under Secretary," and "Farm Relief," contains evidence of support for Tugwell. See also Roosevelt Library, Official File 1-Misc., for the spring of 1934.

⁵⁴ Owen R. Lovejoy, "Philosophy for a New Deal," *Survey Graphic* (New York), XXII (October, 1933), 522-23; F. H. Underhill, "Democracy and Leadership," *Reference Shelf* (New York), IX (November, 1933), 117; Forrest Davis, "Rise of the Commissars," *New Outlook*, CLXII (December, 1933), 23-26; Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Idealist Comes to the Front," *Nation* (New York), CXXXVII (October 4, 1933), 371; Jonathan Mitchell, "Don't Shoot the Professors! Why Government Needs Them," *Harper's Magazine* (New York), CLXVIII (May, 1934), 740-49; "Brain Trusts for Literature," *Saturday Review of Literature*, X (December 2, 1933), 304; "Professors and Politics," *School and Society* (New York), XXXVIII (November 11, 1933), 640-41; "Trust Brains," *Collier's* (New York), XCIII (May 19, 1934), 66.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, July 29, 1933; June 5, 1934; November 7, 1934; September 30, 1936. R. L. Duffus, "A New Spirit in Government: Professor Tugwell Charts the Prevailing Winds of Economic Doctrine," *New York Times Book Review*, May 14, 1933; "We Still Need Experts," *Collier's*, CI (March 12, 1938), 70; Albert W. Atwood, "Government by Professors," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCVI (October 14, 1933), 23 ff.; Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner, "We Shall Make America Over," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCXI (November 19, 1938), 92; Dorothy Thompson, "Trust in Brains, Instead of Brain Trusts," *Ladies Home Journal* (Philadelphia), LV (May, 1938), 4 ff.; "Keep Our Universities Free," *School and Society*, XLIV (July 25, 1936), 123-24; Oliver McKee, Jr., "Professors Put to the Test," *North American Review* (New York), CCXXXVIII (October, 1934), 345. See the letter from an Oklahoma farmer to Tug-

A number of politicians applauded the professors, seeing them as useful allies, rather than as substitutes for legitimate rulers. Tugwell had significant support—as well as many enemies—in the House and Senate.⁵⁶ Although he was encouraged not to participate in the 1936 campaign, Democratic leaders urged some of the other intellectuals to join in campaigns and had an especially high regard for the efforts in this area of the Montana economist, Milburn L. Wilson.⁵⁷ Top administrators, especially Secretary Henry A. Wallace, also liked the service intellectual.⁵⁸ And in 1936 the Republicans hired their own group of professors to assist in the campaign. The creation of a Republican “Brain Trust” delighted supporters of the New Deal’s professors. “If we can divert the minds of the people off our own brain trust,” Congressman Maury Maverick of Texas wrote to Tugwell, “we can take a lot of wind out of the Republican bag.”⁵⁹ Twitting the G.O.P. was obviously great fun, but it should not be allowed to obscure the significance of what Roosevelt’s opponents had done. Their action indicated that at least some impor-

well July 8, 1934, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary’s Correspondence, Criticism (Tugwell). The farmer assured Tugwell that farmers needed “theory and how to put it into practice.”

⁵⁶ Paul Appleby to W. W. Waymack, March 1, 1935, National Archives, Records Group 16, Criticism-Commendations. Compare T. V. Smith to Roosevelt, May 22, 1934, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary’s Correspondence, Criticism (Tugwell): “Tugwell is your best bet for the Middle West and the Western South, both of which and only which I well know.” For an example of support for Tugwell and other professors from a state politician see the speech by Clyde Tingley, governor of New Mexico, at Las Cruces, August 20, 1935, and Tingley to Senators Carl A. Hatch and Dennis Chavez, July 13, 1935, National Archives, Records Group 96, Farm Security Administration, Adm. Correspondence, 1935-38, Ad-1.

⁵⁷ Mrs. James H. Wolfe, Democratic National Committee, to Wilson, November 24, 1936; Sam Rayburn and Paul C. Aiken to Wilson, November 13, 1936, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary’s Correspondence, Assistant Secretary (Personal); Elbert D. Thomas to Wilson, November 14, 1938, *ibid.*, Secretary’s Correspondence, Politics; James Murray to Roosevelt, January 13, 1937, Roosevelt Library, Official File 1.

⁵⁸ Homer S. Cummings, “Are the Increasing Powers of the President Improving the American Government?” *Congressional Digest*, XII (November, 1933), 276; Daniel C. Roper, *Fifty Years of Public Life* (Durham, 1941), 282; Harold Ickes, in *New York Times*, January 27, 1936; Hugh Johnson, *ibid.*, June 22, 1934; Donald Richberg, quoted in Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, 490; Chester C. Davis, “The Place of Farmers, Economists, and Administrators in Developing Agriculture Policy,” *Journal of Farm Economics* (Menasha, Wis.), XXII (February, 1940), 1-9; Henry A. Wallace, “Farm Economists and Agricultural Planning,” *ibid.*, XVIII (February, 1936), 1-11; *New York Times*, November 19, 1936.

⁵⁹ Maury Maverick to Tugwell, May 1, 1936, National Archives, Records Group 96, General Correspondence, 1935-38. See also *New Republic*, LXXXVI (April 22, 1936), 299-300, and M. L. Wilson to Selig Perlman, May 4, 1936, National Archives, Records Group 16, Secretary’s Correspondence, Assistant Secretary (Personal).

tant members of this party of practical men also recognized and accepted the rise of the service intellectuals.⁶⁰

As important members of the political world placed a high value on the pragmatic developments in the academy, so did a number of business leaders. Professor Wilson, for example, had very good relations with a large number of these people, including the president of the United States Chamber of Commerce and a top official of the Prudential Life Insurance Company;⁶¹ and behind George Warren of Cornell stood the Committee for the Nation, a group dominated by business leaders who did not hesitate to say that their monetary theories had been formed by a professor.⁶² A significant feature of the behavior of many business leaders during the New Deal period was a tendency to work closely with and applaud the actions of some intellectuals while condemning others, a pattern suggesting that businessmen in politics are not controlled by abstract conceptions of the capabilities of intellectuals. Although these businessmen frequently talked as though a professor should not be allowed out of his classroom, their behavior revealed that to them a service intellectual was not necessarily impractical. His status in their world depended upon the relation between their interests and his ideas.⁶³

The reactions of a number of academicians to the presence of their kind in the politics of the 1930's indicates that many of them felt ready and eager to enjoy power.⁶⁴ Presidents Nicholas Murray But-

⁶⁰ Some Republicans were unhappy about the establishment of a Republican Brain Trust. See the *New York Times*, June 16, 1936, and the man who argued: "The Administration of Mr. Harding was a successful administration. He was not a college man and he never consulted with college savants." Leuchtenburg, "Anti-Intellectualism," *Journal of Social Issues*, XI, 14. But it is incorrect to suggest that the Republicans did not accept the service intellectual until 1953. See Mario Einaudi: "Having for twenty years scoffed at Roosevelt's brain trusts and at the wide-eyed, non-payroll-meeting academicians infesting the White House, the Republicans appointed in 1953 as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers the top theoretician of them all, Arthur F. Burns, the Columbia University economist." *The Roosevelt Revolution* (New York, 1959), 130. Republican history is more complex than this implies.

⁶¹ Kirkendall, "New Deal Professors," 143-53, 207-209, 230-32.

⁶² Earl Harding radio speech, July 14, 1933; Edward Rumely to Roosevelt, April 15, 1933, Roosevelt Library, Official File 5707; Committee for the Nation, "Facts vs. 'Baloney,'" George Warren Collection (Cornell University Archives.)

⁶³ George N. Peek and the members of the Committee for the Nation provide good examples. Kirkendall, "New Deal Professors," 13, 97-102, 176, 184, 189, 298, 306, 319, 322, 324, 332-46, 399; Gilbert C. Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity* (Norman, 1954), 271.

⁶⁴ For examples see statements by Dean Virginia C. Gildersleeve of Barnard College, President Mary E. Woolley of Mount Holyoke, President Remsen B. Ogilby of Trinity College, George E. Vincent of the Rockefeller Foundation, Dean Howard Lee McBain

ler of Columbia and Robert M. Hutchins of Chicago supplied particularly conspicuous and revealing defenses of the expanding role of scholars in public affairs. Suggesting that people had "become so accustomed to the long rule of the 'blockhead trust' in Washington" that they were "very cynical and contemptuous of the 'brain trust,'" Butler argued that "the true scholar is the most practical person in the world, because he spends his time adjusting himself to reality in accordance with the evidence." And the Columbia President indicated that he believed in the service intellectual: "We have been insisting now nearly forty years that a university is a public service institution of the highest type. . . . Its business is not merely to preserve, to increase and to interpret knowledge, but to carry scholarship and scientific knowledge into the four corners of the earth for the service of mankind and the solution of its problems."⁶⁵

As Butler's defense reveals, theories of the service intellectual involved a substitute for the businessman's assumption about the superiority of knowledge derived from business experience. This point appeared with emphasis in Hutchins' argument that it was precisely because they were professors that the Brain Trusters had a contribution to make—"the application of a clear, disinterested, honest, trained intelligence to the great problems." According to this university president, most businessmen and politicians, and especially those who had ruled the nation during the preceding ten years, lacked the valuable kind of intelligence that the professors possessed.⁶⁶

Clearly, as some viewed them, the service intellectuals deserved to be more than mere "servants of power."⁶⁷ They should be an important power group, perhaps the most important one. "Never before has the world been more obviously in need of expert leadership and never has the obligation of leadership more obviously devolved upon a single group," Tugwell had written before moving to Wash-

of Columbia, Dean Carl W. Ackerman of Columbia, and President Frank Aydeltote of Swarthmore, in *New York Times*, November 23, 1932; May 27, June 14, 20, November 19, 1933; June 4, 6, September 27, 1934. See also I. G. Davis, "The Social Science Fellowships in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology," *Journal of Farm Economics*, XVI (July, 1934), 501.

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, February 14, June 7, 1933.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, May 18, 1933.

⁶⁷ Loren Baritz concluded that those social scientists who worked in industry became servants of "the industrial elite" and abandoned "the wider obligations of the intellectual who is a servant of his own mind." *Servants of Power*, 194.

ington. He believed that it was "the clear duty of American economists to say what the economic system of America can and should do and to point the true path toward new goals."⁶⁸ Obviously the Columbia economist had great ambitions for this rising group, the service intellectuals.

The professors who served under Roosevelt failed to achieve power of the magnitude that Tugwell had in mind, but they did provide important illustrations of the service intellectual in operation. While those operations shocked many people, many others, including Franklin Roosevelt, looked upon the professors as ready for important political roles. Although he did not give the academic men as much power as some Americans feared and others hoped they had, he did supply these intellectuals with a chance to work with other men in the shaping of the New Deal. Like most features of that political movement, this one had important roots in earlier periods. Roosevelt simply recognized that for many years American higher education had been developing a strong utilitarian emphasis, and he gave that development a significant push forward by increasing the political opportunities of service intellectuals.

⁶⁸ Tugwell, *The Trend of Economics* (New York, 1924), 384. Other professors in the New Deal were not so ambitious. Wilson, for example, busied himself building institutions designed to enable intellectuals and other people to work together. In these institutions, no group would monopolize leadership, but the intellectuals would have some power. Kirkendall, "A Professor in Farm Politics," *Mid-America* (Chicago), XLI (October, 1959), 212-16.