

America's Second Revolution

ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL. by D. W. Brogan; Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press. English price, 16s.

(Reviewed by A.M.)

A COMMUNITY hit by such a visitation as the depression of the thirties has enough to worry about in its own straits without studying the plight of others. New Zealanders have been aware that the depression started in the United States, that millions there were thrown out of work, and that a new President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, applying a policy known as the New Deal, steered the country back to prosperity in the years leading up to the second war. Popular simplification of the process was unavoidable. It takes a book like this, written by one of the leading English authorities on American history, to show the foreigner the magnitude of the crisis, and to lead him through the tangle of resultant problems and the means taken to cope with them.

There was a general impression that the new Administration marched straight

ahead to its goal and won by strength and strategy. In reality it marched and counter-marched; retreated and reformed its ranks; and had to use every device that conviction and imagination could conceive. The economic consequences were worse than in Britain. The mightiest and most diverse industrial nation on earth was struck by a storm that caused widespread personal ruin and shook old political convictions to their foundations. Forty-eight State governments were concerned, as well as Washington. The Administration had to rescue industry and commerce all over the country against vested interests, entrenched prejudice, and the Supreme Court, which could and did veto some of its legislation.

Professor Brogan takes us step by step through this maze. If there is a fault in the book it is that there is too much detail, and the author perhaps assumes too much knowledge of American life on the reader's part; but it is an able and important record of a long crisis in American domestic history, with the story centred on Roosevelt from his first election to his death. Professor Brogan goes back to Lincoln for

a comparison. Lincoln saved the Union politically; Roosevelt saved it economically, and in doing so engineered a revolution. He tore a growing gap in the old American belief in individualism and profound dislike of government intervention. Americans had prided themselves that they would never incur such a socialistic stigma as the British "dole," but they had to accept this and other forms of paternalism.

The political lesson is that in such a crisis it is much better to make mistakes than to make nothing. Inaction is the worst policy. Roosevelt's line was to act, and go on acting boldly, and though he was checked often, he won through. He also realised that a government's activity must be apparent to all. The portrait of the man himself is vivid. When someone condoled with him after his first election on the terrible



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