

Gerald J. Boileau and the Progressive-Farmer-Labor Alliance: Politics of the New Deal. By James J. Lorence. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. Pp. xiii, 324. Illustrations, notes, tables, map, appendix, bibliography, index. \$44.95.)

Historians are prone to assert six impossible things before breakfast, but none, apparently, has clamored for a good biography of Gerald Boileau, a now-forgotten, four-term Wisconsin congressman first elected in 1930. Fortunately, James J. Lorence happened upon this La Follette Republican and Progressive and resourcefully pursued his career through more than one hundred manuscript collections. Boileau's congressional tenure, though bracketed by unremarkable service as district attorney and then circuit court judge, placed him at the center of congressional left-wing activities.

As floor leader of the House's Progressive/Farmer-Labor coalition and as a key figure in its broader (more than forty-member) liberal bloc, better known today through leaders Maury Maverick and Tom Amlie, Boileau mobilized liberals in their battles against chain stores and holding companies; for currency inflation; and in support of aid to poor farmers, unemployed and unionizing workers, and Spanish loyalists. Lorence's evidence on the liberals' effectiveness in pushing President Franklin D. Roosevelt leftward is mixed—at some points he dismisses their efforts as “an interesting side show” while at others he notes their “substantial impact.” His roll call analyses of Progressive/Farmer-Labor unity are more impressive, although he might have elaborated upon the techniques and skills employed by Boileau to help to secure this cohesion. Lorence is most convincing in accounting for this coalition's decline; he traces its dissolution to splits between isolationists and interventionists, to regional differences, and to the rout suffered in the 1938 election's conservative avalanche.

One fascinating puzzle, however, remains at the book's center. From the start, Lorence presents Boileau as a progressive “politicians' politician,” a “doer,” someone whose fierce rhetorical commitment to progressive principles did not get in the way of calculated political advancement. Boileau's skills as a flexible insider, tactician, and coalition builder, Lorence shows, were also reflected in his success in drawing support from a range of farmer, veteran, union, and constituent groups (he was a vigorous defender of Wisconsin milk producers). But what Lorence does not explain fully is why, in 1937 and 1938, Boileau, though apparently never a “card-carrying communist,” worked closely with party members. His resulting radical reputation doomed what would already have been an uphill reelection battle. Boileau apparently had reveled in his newfound national prominence and his status as featured speaker on the radio and at left-wing gatherings. Lorence's main explanation goes beyond Boileau's commitment to “principle” to place a

counterintuitive emphasis on Boileau's overarching "ambition," especially his hope to parlay his notoriety into a Progressive senatorial nomination.

Perhaps if Lorence had more systematically explored Boileau's personality (despite using Boileau's private papers, this volume is definitely a "public life"), his ideology (the picture of his distinctly non-"urban liberal" antitrust individualism is not terribly helpful in this episode), his "fiery" rhetorical style (which only in this stage of his life is depicted as shrill), and his own assessment of what the Communist party had to offer, these crucial two years would have seemed less out of character. Just by raising such intriguing questions through this clearly written and well-informed narrative, however, Lorence has advanced the understanding of the left-wing congressional challenge to Roosevelt.

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Harry S. Truman: A Life. By Robert H. Ferrell. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. Pp. xiv, 501. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Harry S. Truman's historical reputation attained a kind of national apotheosis in 1992. First occurred the publication of David G. McCullough's massive, adoring, and best-selling biography. Then President George Bush adopted Truman's 1948 campaign as a model for his own ill-fated effort to gain a second term in the White House. In the process Truman became a national political saint whose allegiance to the Democratic party seemed almost irrelevant to his larger status as a legendary embodiment of American outspokenness. Few in 1992 remembered what Truman stood for; they recalled only that he gave political opponents hell and thereby won an upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey and the over-confident Republicans.

Robert H. Ferrell's excellent study now restores Truman to a human scale and weighs his character and achievements with balance and insight. This biography does not treat Truman as the typical American transformed into a great president in the crucible of the Cold War. For Ferrell, a distinguished member of the Indiana University faculty, Truman "was not the complete leader; he was capable of errors" (p. xi). The judicious tone of the book adds weight to Ferrell's overall endorsement of Truman's record in public life.

Another strength of Ferrell's narrative is the coverage of the significant historical controversies that have surrounded Truman's life and presidency. The handling of such issues as containment, the Korean War, and Truman's role in the onset of McCarthyism is very well done. In the most discussed decision that Truman made,