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No. 24 -- 1927

THE WORKS PROGRAM

-- Works Progress Administration --

For release in morning papers
Thursday, January 16, 1936.

Text of Aubrey Williams' speech before Buffalo, N.Y., Council of Social Agencies.

The full text of an address by Aubrey W. Williams, Assistant Works Progress Administrator and Executive Director of the National Youth Administration, before the Buffalo Council of Social Agencies, Wednesday night, January 15, in the Statler Hotel, follows:

I am pleased with the opportunity of speaking before the Buffalo Council of Social Agencies, for yours is a group with which I feel at home. By your training and the character of your work, I feel that you are gifted with the clearest perception of any professional group in the country of the problems which face America's millions of unemployed. By virtue of that fact I can approach you this evening on a basis of common understanding, for we are all working with the same tools toward a common goal.

You and I know that the problem of unemployment does not stem directly from industrial depression. Depression aggravates unemployment and in the present instance has brought it to a nearly unbearable intensity. We know instead that it was spawned in an era of giddy expansionism; that it is an inescapable concomitant of our type of civilization, and that its roots are now sunk in the very bedrock of our capitalist society.

I do not think you will accuse me of pessimism when I say that unemployment -- or better, disemployment -- is, like the airplane, the radio, the weather and taxes, here to stay. Millions of those now out of jobs will never find jobs again. Thousands of young men and women leaving our schools each year are destined never to become self-supporting and independent in the sense that your and my generation were led to believe was our due.

- 2 -

The supply of workers exceeds the demand. Man power is a drug on the market. The productive forces of this country, are glutted with brawn and brain which they cannot use. And what can't be utilized, is simply laid aside to moulder and decay. Look about you and you'll see what I mean. Look at the case histories in your files and see the splendid, capable, intelligent workers for whom there are no jobs. Thumb through the cards in the National Reemployment Service. Look into the haggard faces of those who haunt the factory gates and the employment offices.

Civilization has done a great job of marching ahead in the last fifty years but it has been to the harsh, metallic beat of engines. Man has been thrust aside to make way for the machines, and the human carnage has not been reckoned. The stretch-out, the speed-up, and the soul-destroying regimentation of the production line are the grim symbols of our progress, and as they have been applied, a toll in human values has been taken.

Equally distorted has been the distribution of our national income, giving to our country today that inhumane paradox of need in the midst of plenty.

Is proof of these phenomena lacking? Turn to the United States Department of Labor, the files of the A.F. of L., the research findings of the Brookings Institution, the National Industrial Conference, and scores of the most able economists and sociologists in the land. Cumulative, progressive unemployment has been in progress since before the World War. Production methods have been steadily in favor of the machines as against human labor in practically any field you can name. Production ratios have doubled, trebled, and quadrupled while employment indices have remained static.

Incomes and the national wealth, meanwhile, have funneled into the coffers of the few. While 70 percent of our people are obliged to live in poverty on incomes of less than \$1,500 a year -- a sum insufficient to maintain health and decency for a family of five -- a mere one-sixth of one percent of our people are privileged to enjoy the luxuries and good things of life which can be bought with incomes of \$7,500 a year or more. Even in 1929, that false-faced Nirvana toward which the Bourbons still yearn, the Brookings Institution has revealed not more than ten percent of all our people were financially able to enjoy a liberal diet.

Now, these distressing conditions were not built up over night. They have been accumulating for the last fifty years when our physical frontiers were reached and overrun. Unseen for the most part save by a few inspired prophets whose warnings

we scorned, they hung like the sword of Damocles over our heads, until the slender thread snapped in the fall of 1929.

Similarly, the damage is not to be repaired off hand. We have a long job of reconstruction ahead and as we build anew we must build for permanence. We must recognize that our cherished American liberties are but a pretense so long as three-fourths of our people do not know the meaning of security; when ten millions of our workers are denied the right to earn a living; while thousands of parents sit with helpless, folded hands while their children waste away from hunger.

It is along the line of a permanent correction of these inequalities that the Roosevelt New Deal has moved. Our efforts were clumsy at first, as naturally would result from attempting so momentous a task with not a single precedent or pattern to go by. But at least the direction was clear: it was not to spend the government's millions in salvaging railroads, banks, and insurance companies alone, but to spend them as well for the salvaging of human beings. For the first time in any national administration, President Roosevelt has thrown the spotlight of emphasis on human rather than material values.

The wails of protest from Park Avenue and Wall Street have, as you know, been piteous. I am fascinated by the glib wizardry of those who would care for these dispossessed millions and at the same time balance the budget, reduce taxes, end the war in Ethiopia and produce prosperity like a long eared rabbit from an opera hat. Theirs is the wistful, wishful thinking of adolescence.

You will be interested in some of the details of the very comprehensive picture we have been able to draw concerning our relief population. The trend of unemployment, the natural precursor of relief status, leaped upward from approximately 3,000,000 in March 1929, to an all-time high of 15,000,000 in the same month of 1933, when the present administration came into power. Last March, the estimates had dropped to 12,000,000, and today most reliable sources place the number of jobless at 10,000,000.

Relief trends followed those of unemployment, increasing from somewhere in the neighborhood of 400,000 in March 1929 -- a figure which we will never know with exactness -- to about 18,000,000 in March 1933. With the introduction of organized Federal aid in that year, and as family resources among the unemployed ^{finally} broke under the long strain of joblessness, the number continued to increase until in January 1935, we had our maximum relief burden of 20,654,000 men, women and children. As

of last May, one in every six persons in the cities, and one in every eight persons in the rural areas, were dependent upon public funds for support. The greatest proportion of these were under 20 years of age, while the next largest age group was that from 20 to 40 -- the period of greatest employability. Twenty-seven percent of all persons on relief were at that age when vitality and earning capacity should have been at its very peak, yet they were broke and without jobs, facing a hopeless future.

We have learned a great many other things about our relief group -- where and in what sort of houses they live; their former usual occupations; the extent of their training and education; their general health status; their present employability, and many other details of their lives, character and capacities. We are able to answer with a defiant and emphatic "No!" those scornful critics who would make out our relief people to be idlers, wasters, and malingerers. We know that there are triflers in the lot, but by and large they are the same honest, industrious workers who contributed to America's prosperity of the 1920's. There are bankers, lawyers, architects, and ministers in the group as well as carpenters, bricklayers, farmers, and laborers. A cross section of the relief rolls today would reveal a hardly discernible difference from any other segment of American life save for the one factor of dependence.

It was a tremendous statistical job to develop this picture on a national scale, but it had to be done if we were to use intelligent, long-range planning. This planning has assumed two general forms -- employment at security wages for those who have been on relief, and the program of economic assurance against unemployment, old age, and sickness as embodied in the Social Security Act. Let's consider them separately and see to what extent they meet the needs imposed by the inequalities of civilization today.

Four billion, eight hundred million dollars were made available at the last session of Congress to take 3,500,000 Americans off the relief rolls. The dole was to be obliterated and relief clients were to be given jobs on constructive public works at wages on which they could decently support themselves and their families. That appropriation was bitterly fought when it was proposed and has been bitterly fought ever since, particularly by those who persist in thinking in terms of their own pocketbooks instead of the lives and welfare of other people. They would have perpetuated the dole because it was cheaper and would have ignored the waste of human

values, the degradation, the smouldering resentment in honest hearts which such a system cannot help but inspire.

Now, what has the WPA done with its money? How much of it has gone into "boondoggling" and other channels of waste, inefficiency, or graft?

It should be borne in mind that the WPA did not get the entire four billion dollar fund. Not by any means. Only about 37 percent, or \$1,082,900,000, went to that agency. The balance was distributed between the CCC, which got over \$500,000,000, and certain other regular Government departments. Among the latter, the Department of Agriculture received over \$500,000,000, the Public Works Administration \$444,000,000, the Department of the Interior \$118,000,000, the War Department \$142,000,000, and so on.

As for the WPA's share, it is a simple matter to see to what purpose it is being put. Forty-two and one-half per cent of the entire fund has been earmarked for highway, road, and street projects. There are 20,950 such projects with an aggregate cost of \$458,055,892 already in operation or soon to be begun. Parks and playgrounds account for another 11.8 per cent, public buildings for 9.2 per cent, water supply and sewer systems for 9.1 per cent, flood control and other conservation projects for 5.9 per cent, sewing rooms and other production projects for 6.1 per cent, and white collar projects for 5.8 per cent.

Well, that list accounts for 90 per cent of all the funds allotted to the WPA and we haven't even touched on the health and sanitation projects, the airports, and a number of other groups of equal importance. I don't think any fair observer could complain of public funds being spent for such meritorious purposes as these.

Now think what these undertakings mean to the communities in which they are operating. In practically every case you will find that the work being done is some essential construction or service which the community has long wanted but been unable to accomplish out of its own budget. Take your own state of New York, exclusive of New York City, and let's see what the program is doing here. One hundred fifty-eight thousand of your people have been given employment at wages ranging from \$44 to \$103 per month. One hundred thirty-four thousand of them are working for the WPA, 16,000 of them are in the CCC and approximately 8,000 of them are engaged on projects sponsored by regular Governmental departments.

Forty-seven million, one hundred thirty-eight thousand dollars have been set aside to carry on the WPA program here, again, remember, exclusive of New York

City. Forty-three per cent of this money is going into the building of new roads and streets and the maintenance of those already built. Farm-to-market roads, feeders from the hinterlands to the main arteries of traffic which will be passable throughout the year, constitute a large part of this highway work. Fourteen and one-half per cent of the money is being spent in the development of parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, not only for the children of such cities as Buffalo but for those in smaller towns and rural districts as well. Public building projects, which means, predominantly, schools, account for nine per cent of the funds. Not only are new schools being built, but thousands of gallons of paint, miles of roofing, millions of feet of lumber, and tons of brick, cement and steel are being used to make repairs and alterations which your school boards have long desired, but been unable to have.

A little over six per cent of the funds to be spent in New York State are going into projects for professional and non-manual workers -- white-collar people. Old, worn out court records are being recopied to withstand hard use, tax maps remade and brought up to date, surveys and studies of a dozen different kinds being carried on which will add materially to the value of services rendered by your various public bodies.

In Buffalo alone, \$137,000 is being spent to provide much needed additional personnel in your public libraries. Another \$44,000 is being used to employ extra help at the City Hospital in order to expand the services of its out-patient department. Many of your unemployed writers, artists, and musicians have been placed on projects where their talents will add to the cultural value of life. Such a list as this hardly scratches the surface of the varied activities which are being carried on in this field, yet it has been called "boondoggling", and as such is the favorite target of the critics.

Turning to the national scene again, we see that the youth of the country has not been forgotten. Fifty million dollars of WPA funds were set aside last June for the creation of the National Youth Administration so that young people in this particularly difficult period might not come to their majority under the blight of joblessness and destitution.

Up to this time we are maintaining more than 300,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in high schools and colleges throughout the nation. Four

thousand of them are pursuing graduate work on benefits averaging \$25 a month. One hundred thousand are undergraduate students in some 1,600 colleges and universities and are receiving average benefits of \$15 a month. Another 200,000 are students in high schools and are receiving \$6 a month each. These, as you know, are not honorariums, but represent wages earned for constructive work in or about the schools and communities.

A little more than half of our \$50,000,000 is being thus expended. The remainder is being applied as wages on work projects for those young people for whom further schooling is impossible or inadvisable. Special projects designed for young people have been set up in every state. Many of these have training as the predominant element. In other cases, young people are being employed part-time on regular WPA projects at one-third of the regular security wage. Many offices of the United States Employment Service have added young people to their staffs to seek particularly those jobs which are generally recognized as belonging to youth, and we are cooperating in full with the Federal Committee on Apprentice Training to place unemployed young people in apprentice jobs.

General control of the WPA program is retained in Washington. This, you will agree, is essential where one and not 48 separate objectives are sought. But the administration of the program, the shaping and fitting of plans and policies to the needs of individual localities, has been left with the various state and district administrators. Contrary to a belief which seems to have become general, there is no autocratic control vested in Washington. The greatest flexibility has been allowed the states to fit the program to their own needs, and it is, essentially, a state program in each state.

Localities design the types of projects they want. They are built around community needs and the abilities of the young people on relief. The communities contribute what they can toward the cost, and the project application is forwarded through local WPA headquarters to Washington. There it is judged in the light of certain essential requirements as to social and economic desirability, employment value, and cost. If these specifications are met, it is turned over to the Comptroller General for financial inspection, and finally to the Treasury for the actual allocation of funds. All along the line, greatest care is exerted to see that each project not only provides the requisite number of jobs, but constitutes a work or service

of definite public value.

The WPA set out to remove the curse of the dole from American life and to substitute in its place honest jobs at honest rates of pay in which the unemployed might not only achieve a decent standard of living but retain their self-respect as well. In this I believe we are succeeding and I do not believe that a one of you here will tell me that our philosophy is wrong.

As to social security, the other half of our long-range program, I shall not go into detail. Briefly, it embodies unemployment compensation, old-age security, security for dependent children, aid to the blind, extension of public health services and vocational rehabilitation. It is much in the public prints at this time and most of you are familiar with its general procedure. I do wish to point out, however, how it and the WPA program of providing jobs for the unemployed complement one another and work to the greater security of the average American citizen.

I think I can be as lusty in my praise of America and the American form of government as any professional patriot who ever waved a flag or damned a Communist, but I cannot blind myself to the abuses which have arisen about us. I cannot condone the inequalities, the injustices or the mass social crimes which have been perpetrated under the guise of American freedom and liberty. I get small consolation in counting the digits of our national wealth or hearing described our celestial standard of living when I know that these blessings have clogged up at the top of the social structure.

But it is not our part to concern ourselves over-much with the forms and processes of government. Ours must be the objective point of view. We must take hunger, destitution, and the maladjustments of society as we find them, and mitigate their effects as best we can within the limitations of the existing scheme of things.

But there is no law or rule or ethical precept which says we cannot exult when we see government concern itself with the problems in which we deal. And we must give our counsel and support to any political regime which says, as President Roosevelt said last June in submitting the draft of the Social Security Act, "Among our objectives I place the security of the men and women and children of the Nation first!"

That, all along, has been the objective of those of us who have viewed unemployment and need as a professional problem. Now it has the sanction of a strong government and a courageous President and I think we may well be encouraged over the promise of fulfillment which they give.