

## THE WORKS PROGRAM

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-- Works Progress Administration --

For immediate release  
March 5, 1936

## Hopkins Answers Senator Vandenberg

Works Progress Administrator, Harry L. Hopkins, making answer to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg's request for an investigation of charges that the Indiana County (Pa.) Democratic Committee had sought to coerce Works Progress employes to contribute to party funds, took occasion today to disclaim responsibility for acts of "dumb politicians", and to reiterate that beneficiaries of President Roosevelt's relief program are under no obligation to contribute to political organizations.

"I am sure you know" he wrote the Michigan Senator, "that I cannot be held responsible for the acts of dumb politicians. I am responsible for protecting our staff from any 'raiding' on the part of any political party or their representatives.

"This I have done and in this particular case our policy was carried out to the letter.

"I am," he concluded this letter summarizing the results of the inquiry, which, among other things noted that the widely advertised letter of the local committee grossed but \$1.25 in collections, "indebted to you for giving me the opportunity of again making it clear to the employes of the Works Progress Administration and the Emergency Relief Administration, that they are under no obligation whatever to pay tribute to any political party or person."

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With the letter, Mr. Hopkins sent the Michigan Senator copies of orders and notices dating back to 1934 issued by Emergency Relief Administration and Works Progress Administration officials warning attaches and workers alike that there must be no such solicitation as complained of by Mr. Vandenberg.

The latest of the series bore date of December 3, or twenty-four hours before the letter Senator Vandenberg based his protest on, was issued.

The correspondence, statements and exhibits follow:

March 5, 1936

Honorable A. H. Vandenberg,  
United States Senate,  
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator:

On February 28th you sent me a letter enclosing copy of an excerpt signed by Harry W. Fee, Chairman, County Democratic Committee of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, in which you state, "it would appear a reasonable deduction that this pillage is a general practice." This assumption on your part obviously was not based on any knowledge of the facts; for in the case in point our office not only advised our employees that they need not contribute, but our administrator who is responsible for this County told the employees verbally and in writing that their failure to contribute would in no wise affect their jobs. I am sure you know that I cannot be held responsible for the acts of the dumb politicians who take it upon themselves to write letters to our employees. I am responsible for protecting our staff and the workers from any "raiding" on the part of any political party or their representatives. This I have done, and in this particular case our policy was carried out to the letter. The politician who asked for the contributions was told in words of one syllable that our staff was under no obligation to contribute and that their jobs would be fully protected in case they did not contribute, and not one single person on this staff was removed from office because of his failure to contribute, nor will he be.

Following is the summary of the facts developed in the investigation:

1. The letter was sent over the protest of Works Progress Administration and State Emergency Relief Administration officials;
2. Local Republican leaders offered substantial sums of money to recipients of such letters with the declared purpose of using the same for partisan political purposes;
3. As far back as October 6, 1934, officials of the



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State Emergency Relief Administration, following the policy of this office, warned employees that while they were "as free as any other citizen to contribute to any political party or candidate, the State Emergency Relief Administration will not, directly or indirectly, in any way be a part to the solicitation of political contributions from employees;"

4. This notice was reissued on October 28, 1935, by the State Emergency Relief Administrator in advance of the election and nearly two months before the issuance of the letter on which your complaint is based;

5. Again, on December 3, having in mind that such letters as you quote might be issued, the State Emergency Relief Administrator issued an order as follows:

"It has come to my attention that some of our administrative employees have received letters from local political committees soliciting a percentage of their salaries as a contribution to the local political campaign fund.

"I wish to have it expressly understood by every employee of the Emergency Relief Administration that I do not sanction solicitation on our premises of our employees for political campaign purposes.

"This does not prohibit the right of any person in our employ who, as a private citizen, desires to make a voluntary contribution of money to any political party or campaign, but their action in so doing is voluntary on their part and has no bearing upon employment under the present Emergency Relief Administration."

6. It is further shown that Mr. Fee and his associates of the Indiana County Democratic Committee had been notified by both the Works Progress Administration and relief directors that the employees and beneficiaries of the Works Progress Administration and the State Emergency Relief Administration program could not and should not be assessed for political purposes;



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March 5, 1936

Honorable A. H. Vandenberg  
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7. Both by posted notices and verbally from the County Relief Director, employees had repeatedly been advised that they need pay no attention to such letters, that their positions would in no way be jeopardized by failure to contribute, and that they were free to make such contributions as they desired to any political party.

8. Voluntary statements have been obtained from employees of the Relief Office indicating that they thoroughly understood at the time that no pressure would be brought to bear on them from their superiors;

9. The effectiveness of our efforts to protect relief workers is shown by the fact that only one employee made any contribution, and that was in the amount of \$1.25;

10. The implied threat in Mr. Fee's letters was entirely without foundation, since recipients of the letters who made no contribution were subsequently employed in similar positions in the Works Progress Administration.

I am enclosing bulletins and letters illustrating the position taken by the Works Progress Administration and relief officials.

In conclusion, my dear Senator, let me say that I am indebted to you for giving me the opportunity of again making it clear to employees of the Works Progress Administration and the Emergency Relief Administration that they are under no obligation whatever to pay tribute to any political party or person.

Very sincerely yours,

Administrator.

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United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations

February 28, 1936

Hon. Harry Hopkins,  
Federal Emergency Relief Administrator,  
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Hopkins:

My attention is directed to a full-page reproduction in the Butler (Pennsylvania) Eagle of a letter purporting to show Democratic solicitation of campaign funds from Relief Workers on penalty of black-list in the event of refusal. The letter is dated December 4, 1935, at Indiana, Pennsylvania, on the letter-head of the Indiana County Democratic Committee. It is signed by Harry W. Fee, Chairman of the Indiana County Democratic Committee. It is addressed to Mary C. Shearer of the "Emergency Relief Area" at the Community Center Building of Indiana, Pennsylvania. It reads as follows:

"I am very much surprised that you have not responded to our previous letter requesting your contribution in the amount of \$27.00 to Indiana County Democratic Campaign Committee, as I was sure that you appreciated your position to such an extent that you would make this contribution willingly and promptly. I must, however, now advise you that unless your contribution in the above amount is received promptly, it will be necessary to place your name on the list of those who will not be given consideration for any other appointment after the termination of the Emergency Relief Work, which, as you know, will terminate in the near future. Please make your check payable to A. Lucille Baun, Treasurer, and mail the same to her at 402 Indiana Theatre Building, Indiana, Pennsylvania".

Inasmuch as the amount of contribution is filled in to what otherwise is obviously a form letter, it would appear a reasonable deduction that this pillage is a general practice.

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It occurs to me that you will wish, in the name of political decency and in behalf of an un-partisan administration of relief for human misery, to investigate this matter; and, in any event, to make it clear, so far as you can, to all relief workers and relief clients that they need not surrender to this sort of sordid exploitation.

Cordially and faithfully,

(Signed) A. H. Vandenberg

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February 29, 1936

Honorable A. H. Vandenberg  
United States Senate  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator:

I have your letter of February 28  
and wish to assure you that I am having an  
investigation started immediately regarding  
the charges you make.

Sincerely yours,

Administrator

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE EMERGENCY RELIEF BOARD  
Harrisburg

December 3, 1935

MEMORANDUM

TO: EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS -R-373  
LOCAL COMPTROLLERS -F-338

SUBJECT: POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY ADMINISTRATIVE EMPLOYEES

It has come to my attention that some of our administrative employees have received letters from local committees soliciting a percentage of their salaries as a contribution to the local campaign fund.

I wish to have it expressly understood by every employee of the Emergency Relief Administration that I do not sanction solicitation on our premises of our employees for political campaign purposes.

This does not prohibit the right of any person in our employ who, as a private citizen, desires to make a voluntary contribution of money to any political party or campaign, but their action in so doing is voluntary on their part and has no bearing upon employment under the present Emergency Relief Administration.

Robert L. Johnson  
Relief Administrator.

C O P Y

Strand Theatre Building  
Greensburg, Pennsylvania

December 16, 1935

Mr. Harry W. Fee, Chairman  
Indiana County Democratic Committee  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Fee:

I have before me several letters which you have sent to our employees in Indiana and Armstrong Counties, requesting contributions to the Indiana County Democratic Campaign Committee. I am still further surprised that these letters contain a threat that if payment is not made, no further consideration for appointments will be made to that individual.

I must ask you to refrain from sending letters of this nature to employees of my organization. What you do individually with any member of our personnel is strictly your own business and the business of that individual, but to trade upon the position which that individual holds with the WPA is out of all reason and I will not tolerate it. I am as strong a Democrat as you are, and it is my earnest desire to serve our party by functioning efficiently and honestly. Coercive measures such as you are employing will do our party and its President more harm than good.

I am sorry that this matter has occurred.

Very truly yours

R. G. Allen, Dist. #13 Director  
Works Progress Administration

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C O P Y

Strand Theatre Building  
Greensburg, Pennsylvania

December 16, 1935

Mr. Paul A. Foresman, Ass't. Director  
Works Progress Administration  
Indiana County  
Community Center Building  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Foresman:

It has recently come to my attention that letters are being received by some of our WPA Administrative Personnel, demanding contributions to the Indiana County Democratic Campaign Committee.

Please post this letter in your office as my authority to disregard any such letters. Such matters as these have no place within our organization. Any individual voluntarily wishing to support his or her own party may naturally do so but coercion will not be tolerated.

Please refer to me all such letters that have been received by your personnel.

Very truly yours

R. G. Allen, Dist. #13 Director  
Works Progress Administration

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March 3, 1936

The following facts are set forth for the information and at the request of Thomas E. Stakem, Special Agent of the Division of Investigation of the Works Progress Administration.

On July 20, 1935, I was appointed Works Progress Administration Director of District #13 in Pennsylvania. This district embodies the three counties of Indiana, Armstrong and Westmoreland. Shortly after receiving my appointment, I was visited by Mr. Harry Fee, Democratic Chairman of Indiana County. Mr. Fee had several appointments which he wished me to make. Because of the lack of qualifications in his candidates, I refused to approve them. Mr. Fee took some offense at my attitude and complained of my attitude to my superiors, who in turn sustained my decisions. In my relationship with him, Mr. Fee has been quite arbitrary and has not demonstrated the good judgment which one might expect of a man in his position.

On or about December 10, 1935, I received a report from one of our employees, who is a native of Indiana Borough, Indiana County, that Mr. Fee had sent mandatory letters to our employees for contributions to the Indiana County Democratic Campaign Fund. Not only did these letters make fixed demands which were exorbitant, but they threatened the employee with black-listing in case he did not meet their demands. These letters clearly stated that the employees would not receive further consideration for public positions unless the demands were met.

I immediately dispatched a man to Indiana County to gather up these letters and furthermore, I sent instructions to Mr. Paul Foresman, who was in charge of our Indiana office, to post my notice on the bulletin board that all Indiana County employees of the Works Progress Administration should disregard Fee's letter entirely. A copy of this letter is attached herewith. Concurrently, I addressed a letter to Harry Fee criticizing him for his action and forbidding him from taking further steps of a similar nature with the Works Progress Administration employees. This letter was mailed on December 16 and a copy is attached herewith. To my best knowledge, our employees were not coerced into making contributions other than voluntary ones which were their own personal affairs.

In closing I would like to say that politics of this nature have been forbidden in the administration of my district affairs. None of our employees have been threatened or coerced into making contributions to any political organization. In order to have this fact clearly understood, during our staff meetings, I have stressed the fact that such politics as this were not to be injected into our organization and our department heads have carried out these instructions scrupulously. To clarify this matter further, we assembled our employees this afternoon

and told them definitely that if they were approached in the matter of assessment for any political fund, that they were to disregard the demand entirely during working hours or while in the W. P. A. office. I informed our employees that the activities before 8:30 in the morning and after 5:00 in the afternoon, were their own affairs, as long as these activities were not subversive to the best interests of the W. P. A. organization. I explained this statement further by stating that any political contributions which they might make were purely their own affairs and should be as voluntary as though they were employed by a private agency, and I further stated that I did not care to know anything about these political contributions or the individual's political affiliations.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ R. G. Allen  
R. G. Allen, District #13 Director  
Works Progress Administration

/s/ THOS. E. STAKEM, Witness  
Thomas E. Stakem, Special Agent  
of the Division of Investigation  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.



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Area 11, Indiana, Pa.  
November 13, 1935.

SPECIAL BULLETIN

TO: SUPERVISORS (INDIANA COUNTY)

FROM: DAVID HALL BLAIR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Several employees of Area No. 11 in Indiana County have voluntarily brought to my attention letters received by them from the Indiana County Democratic Campaign Committee soliciting a percentage of their salaries as a contribution to the Democratic Campaign Fund in Indiana County.

I wish to have it expressly understood by every employee of the Emergency Relief Administration in Indiana County that I do not sanction solicitation of our employees for political campaign purposes.

This does not prohibit the right of any person in our employ who as a private citizen desires to make a voluntary contribution of money to any political party or campaign, but their action in so doing is voluntary on their part and has no bearing upon employment under the present Emergency Relief Administration.

The matter of the letters recently received from the Democratic Campaign Committee in Indiana County has been referred to the State Relief Administrator at Harrisburg. Pending further instructions from Mr. Johnson's office it has been requested that we take no action on these solicitations.

David Hall Blair  
Executive Director

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE EMERGENCY RELIEF BOARD  
Harrisburg

BULLETIN NO. 85

October 28, 1935

SUBJECT: SERA POLICY ON ELECTIONS AND CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS.

Please refer to Bulletin No. 38 issued October 6, 1934 outlining the policy of the State Emergency Relief Administration in regard to political elections and campaign contributions. This policy is still in effect.

Your particular attention is called to the following portion of Bulletin No. 38:

"No employee shall take part in the solicitation of funds to further the candidacy of any person or party. While employees are as free as any other citizen to contribute to any political party or candidate, the State Relief Administration will not directly or indirectly in any way be a part to the solicitation of political contributions from employees of State and Local Relief Administrations or from relief recipients.

"The State Relief Administration has no interest in the manner in which employees vote. Employees will, of course, vote as they deem best. They shall refrain from any discussion with relief recipients which may be inferred as direct or indirect pressure on that recipient to vote for any candidate or party."

Robert L. Johnson  
Relief Administrator

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE EMERGENCY RELIEF BOARD

Area No. 11 -- Indiana, Pennsylvania

October 29, 1935

Mr. Vernon S. Pitner, Manager,  
Indiana Democratic Campaign Headquarters,  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

My dear Mr. Pitner:

Regarding your inquiry of October 23rd concerning the proposed solicitation of funds to be contributed by the employees of the Indiana offices of the State Emergency Relief Administration my attention has been called to the following order issued by the State Administrator, which I quote for your information:

"No employee of the State Emergency Relief Administration shall take part in the solicitation of funds to further the candidacy of any person or party. While employees are as free as any other citizens to contribute to any political party or candidate, the Relief Administration will not directly or indirectly in any way be a part to the solicitation of political contributions from employees of State and local Relief Administrations or relief recipients."

I am advised by Mr. Johnson's office that this order remains in effect concerning the present political campaign and that we will receive orders within the next few days requiring that we reemphasize this order to the attention of every employee.

This applies to any and all political parties.

Sincerely yours,

David Hall Blair  
Executive Director