There are many people who feel that no issue confronting this country today has greater significance for its future than unemployment. This is an issue involving both a readjustment in our economy so that all people may be employed and an immediate problem of assistance to those who are now unemployed. It is with the latter problem that the Works Progress Administration is primarily concerned.

Only those who deliberately blind themselves to human suffering could deny that need for such assistance still exists. But accepting its necessity does not solve the entire problem. There are three fundamental questions that still must be answered:

First: Who shall assume the responsibility for the relief of need growing out of unemployment?

Second: What form shall that assistance take? and

Third: How adequately shall we meet the problem?

To the millions who are themselves unemployed these are no academic problems - for on their solution depends not only the right to live but also the right to work and to have some part in the economy of our country.

As a nation we have come a long way since the days when the first onslaught of the depression found us bewildered and unprepared to meet its problems. We have come to realize that only public, governmental agencies can meet the problem of mass unemployment adequately and decently. There are two reasons for this: first, we have learned the practical necessity of financing a relief program through the taxing
power of governmental units and the impossibility of depending upon private
generosity for this purpose; second, we have come to feel that the self-respecting
unemployed workingman who is unable to find employment should not have to depend
upon the generosity of his neighbors and former employers for his continued existence.
We have come to feel that he has a right to exist and that the public, functioning
through its several governmental units has an obligation to assist him.

When the present administration took office, it met this situation square­
ly by the enactment of Federal legislation, openly accepting public responsibility
to share with the states the burden and obligation of providing for persons in dis-
tress.

Today there are those who feel that the time has come for the Government
to retreat from this position and to deny that it owes any responsibility to the un­
employed, leaving them to the limitations of local resources and to the mercies of
private generosity. To many of us this attitude more accurately reflects an interest
on the part of a few rich and powerful men for their own pocketbooks and their own
prerogatives than a sincere interest in the theory and practice of democratic govern-
ment.

On the other hand, we do not hold with the proposals that the Federal
government should assume all responsibility for this situation. We are convinced
that states and municipalities have a definite responsibility to meet certain parts
of this problem and to share in its financing. We are convinced that resources
exist in states and localities with which to meet this obligation and we are equally
convinced that they would never be tapped if the Federal government agreed to carry
the entire burden.

We have had experience in the last few years with several different methods
of assisting the unemployed. We are convinced that the only adequate answer to the
problem of the able-bodied unemployed person is work, useful productive work for
which he receives a wage in payment of value created by that work. We believe also
that where private employment fails to provide such work, the public functioning
through its government has an obligation to do so. Direct relief answers no problems
it offers no fulfillment and sense of participation to the able-bodied person who is
unemployed; it offers no security to the aging person, the widowed mother of de­
pendent children or the handicapped who cannot work.
For this reason the Federal government has undertaken to provide work for the able-bodied unemployed and to assist the states in providing security for those who cannot work. The acceptance of those obligations marks a forward step on the road to progress. But this is no time for complacency on the part of any of us. Not only does need still exist, but the real battle is just begun. For an employment program is not the cheapest form of assistance in terms of immediate outlay. Not only do men require tools and materials to work but wages—even security wages—cost more than the subsistence fare of direct relief. It is little wonder that an employment program is not popular with those to whom the best relief program is the cheapest relief program. But we will never believe that the American people as a whole begrudge an average wage of $50.00 a month to the man who works on one of our projects. If we are criticized by future historians it will be that we did not do enough for our unemployed, that we did not spend the money necessary to employ all who were willing and able to work. For in the long run the vitality of our democracy will be tested by the adequacy of our measures for dealing with this problem of unemployment.