

THE WORKS PROGRAM

--Works Progress Administration--

For release in morning newspapers
June 5, 1936

Speech of Works Progress Administrator Harry L. Hopkins on the Works Program Delivered Over a Nation-Wide Radio Network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, 9:45 to 10 P. M., June 4, 1936.

I wish every American could see the entire Works Program in action. That, of course, is impossible, but I would like to give you, in a few minutes, a clear picture of what is being accomplished, not only for the people it employs, but for American communities.

First, let's see what it is doing to the people it provides with jobs. The individual experiences of those who have been out of work and broke, then have found a chance to work in their own line and have become self-supporting, are most interesting. A few illustrations will be enough.

Let's see, for example, what the Works Program did for one man, a graduate engineer who had developed his own construction business before the depression.

This is not a particularly dramatic case--though there are plenty of them. I am choosing it because it is typical of thousands of others--

This man saw his business vanish, and all his equipment lost. Finally he found himself on the relief rolls, in a condition he would never have believed possible a few years before.

In due course he was given a job on a federal works project--and it was a job in his own line of work, a chance to use his skill. His morale revived. Then came a chance with a construction company--and back on private payrolls, he went, with a salary of Thirty-Six Hundred Dollars a year as foreman. The depression for him, was over. His health, his skill and his morale were saved.

Another case typical of many occurs to me. Here was a middle-aged man in a Midwestern city, who had worked for the same electrical company for eleven years before his job ended. Then, for about a year, he went from door to door, trying to get electrical repair jobs. All this time he lived in a basement apartment, thanks to a friend who charged him no rent. But even that came to an end, and four months later, barely existing in a mouldy room, he applied for relief.

Then came a job on a Federal Works project. Five months later he said:

"I can now pay my own rent. I have been able to pay off \$75 worth of debts. When I was on relief I was trying to do my own cooking and my meals were bad. Now I can eat some of my meals in restaurants. My physical condition is much better. I hope soon to get some better clothes. I have had an operation I needed for a long time. Before long I will be able to get a job for myself, I believe, on a farm. It means a lot to be able to earn a little again and feel some spending money in your pocket."

Let me cite just one more instance of what this Works Program means to the individual. Here was a white-collar worker, trained in one of the large national schools of art, specializing in pen and ink drawings. Employment at an end, he had drifted from city to city. After months of useless wandering he was desperate. He was against everything and everyone. Some of the things he said about society and government, in the hopelessness of his condition, would have caused many to regard him as dangerous. But he found his chance through an art project of the Works Progress Administration. His mental attitude changed in the first month. He was able to return home and provide a small apartment for his aged mother, and soon was regaining his skill. He is now developing a series of drawings for medical journals, and in place of his old bitterness he has regained his normal mental outlook.

But now let's see what the Works Program is doing for all of us through the projects being carried out all over the country.

The biggest classification of all is the construction or improvement of streets and highways and farm-to-market roads. Another big group includes public buildings--new or improved schools, libraries and hospitals. Also, of great significance is the building of parks, playgrounds and recreational centers. Ten per cent of our projects provide for water and sewer systems.

In a city in upstate New York a sewer wall more than One Hundred years old is being replaced by a modern system. In many of the older districts of this city "dead end" water lines are being eliminated, preventing the danger of serious illness or epidemic. No general program of street, sewer or building improvements ever before had been planned and followed through in this city until the WPA took the lead.

A campaign to clean up sources of insanitary milk in Wisconsin, made possible by the Works Progress Administration, resulted in reports from nine counties showing that Five Hundred Forty-four farmers had brought their milk up from a grade of "poor" to "good" and many others had raised their milk standards from "poor" to "fair."

I am reminded, too, of a village down in New Mexico, where virtually all the residents had made their living hauling wood to Santa Fe. When that city introduced natural gas four years ago, the villagers were thrown out of work and on to the relief rolls. Then a project of the Works Program taught them to make tables and chairs of a distinctive type from white pine, willow and rawhide. As a result, practically every family in the community is now self-supporting.

In Georgia alone more than Fifteen Hundred schools have been built or repaired by WPA.

In one New Hampshire Community, heavy rains had flooded the locality in spring and summer. The residents had never had a sewer or drainage system until the Works Program was launched. In many areas where floods frequently have caused extensive damage, WPA projects have provided additional reservoirs, and water control systems.

Down in New Orleans one of the finest and largest park systems in America is under way. Out in Portland, Oregon, where residents were

seeking to provide adequate facilities to keep up with the constantly growing demand at this western terminal of various trans-continental air lines, one of the country's great ports is being built.

The airport program is being carried on under a definite national plan. Construction is under way at over three hundred and fifty locations. The building of innumerable intermediate landing fields is also under way.

One highly useful, though relatively small, project in a Midwestern city should be credited to the willingness of a WPA worker to do more than was required of him. In addition to his regular work of conducting various recreational activities in a hospital for crippled children, he began taking some of the boys into town with him and giving them swimming lessons in the Y.M.C.A. pool. The youngsters showed such improvement as a result of this that hospital authorities became interested and sought to raise funds for construction of a pool on the hospital grounds, where all the children might learn to swim. With WPA aid, that pool is now built and, in gratitude to the man who suggested it, the hospital has engaged the former WPA worker on a permanent basis as its swimming instructor and recreation director.

It is well to keep in mind, that through the Works Progress Administration alone, more than a Hundred Million Dollars is poured into the channels of trade every month. That means something to all of us.

Think what the WPA payroll means to business in your own community. WPA workers pay last March reached One Hundred and Forty-Six Million Dollars, and in return for these wages paid to more than three million Americans previously on relief, the value of public facilities in our country has been correspondingly increased.

But fine as the projects are, in the development of our communities and rural areas, in the stimulation of trade and finally, in their value to the jobless themselves, there is one thing that impresses me even more about this Works Program.

The most inspiring thing is to see a real democracy in action--meeting civilization's most serious problem, that of unemployment--not in the easiest way, but in the most courageous, intelligent way--in a way that not only has provided security for millions, but has added immeasurably to the national wealth.