

T H E W O R K S P R O G R A M

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-- Works Progress Administration --

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"Dollars and Sense"

Radio Address by HARRY L. HOPKINS

Works Progress Administrator

on the "Roosevelt Progress" program

from Station WJSV, Earle Building, Washington, D. C.,

10:30 to 10:45 p.m., Friday, October 9, 1936.

Broadcast Over Nation-wide Columbia Hookup

I am going to talk tonight about the Works Progress Administration and not about politics. But if ever a major agency of government was used as a political football, WPA is being used as one now. And I believe any fair-minded listener will grant me the right to discuss with you some of the good things and some of the bad things and some of the preposterous things which are being said about it.

Fortune Magazine, that blueblood of American periodicals, conducts a nationwide poll of public opinion every three months on current questions. In its October issue, Fortune reveals the findings of its survey on the question of relief and the program of the Works Progress Administration.

Fortune finds the American people overwhelmingly opposed to direct relief, or the dole, and in favor of jobs created by the Government. But Fortune has only begun with that. It also finds--and I am sure this will astonish a great many who read or hear it--that the American people definitely believe, on the whole, that the WPA projects in their own communities have been efficiently run, and that the unemployed on those projects have been pretty well treated.

How can this be? The newspapers and magazines of many of the nation's greatest financial powers have been hammering away indefinitely on the inefficiency, politics and brutality in WPA. Political enemies of the program have kept up a barrage of fantastic charges. Yet the first national survey based specifically on WPA, and conducted by a magazine whose chief audience is the rich and the powerful,

finds the man in the street reasonably well satisfied with the work of the program.

I will admit that the outcome of this survey was a great comfort to me. I knew that the hundreds of projects which I have seen personally are sound, and I knew the calibre of the men who are administering our program. I knew that the local officials of the country who have originated and sponsored our work projects are overwhelmingly enthusiastic over what they are getting. We have in our files thousands of letters from these local officials, of all political faiths, praising the work in their own localities. But I was not sure that, despite the flood of misrepresentation and ridicule, the average man had yet had time to judge his own local public improvements and find them good.

I suppose the anvil chorus must have hammered too hard and done its job too well. The knockers must have knocked too often, and with too little support from the facts in the case.

In this whole program, which embraces nearly one hundred thousand projects, the critics have specifically attacked very few--several hundred, or less than one half of one per cent. In most cases these have been long-range attacks, by newspapers in New York or Chicago, or politicians in Washington, on local projects in Colorado or New Mexico or Florida. And in virtually every instance they have resulted in heated local defense and endorsement of the projects in the localities where they were being carried on.

This is the old story of the bandits in South America. They are never in the town which you are visiting. They are always just over the hill, out of sight, but the townspeople can tell you some very interesting stories about them. You may go over the hill, but you will not find them. They are somewhere else. The boondoggling and the waste are always somewhere else. The citizen who has not realized this trick will say to you, "Oh, the WPA projects here in my town are useful and beneficial to the whole community. There is nothing wrong with them. But they must be pretty terrible in other parts of the country, from what I read in the papers."

So much for the local angle. All I ask of the man or woman who wants to judge WPA, and what the workers of WPA have done to increase the national wealth, is that he examine critically the work that has been done in his own community and base his verdict on what he finds. Other communities are not essentially different. The workers and the work will run pretty even in quality wherever they are inspected.

Political enemies of this program have made repeated and sensational charges which have captured national attention in the press. It mattered not how absurd the charges, the answer never got the same attention. The story of a man's arrest always overshadows the later stories of his acquittal. Here's a sample:

The Republican National Committee charged that we had wasted four hundred thousand dollars on a big improvement in Cleveland by changing the plans when the work was half done. It was utterly false. There had been no change in plans after the work was begun, and the city officials of Cleveland hastened to say so.

The current situation in Pennsylvania is typical. We have refuted by affidavit dozens of wild charges by William Hard and his crowd, but the parade of scarecrows goes on. They talked about a "defeated political candidate" in Wilkes-Barre until he was revealed to be a defeated Republican candidate. And where is Harry Ball, the engineer so widely quoted in criticism of WPA? He now is employed by the Sun Oil company, and by Joe Pew, the Republican leader in Pennsylvania. Who, indeed, are the saintly gentlemen in Pennsylvania who are crying politics in WPA? They are the saintly Mr. Grundy, the saintly Mr. Mellon, and those paragons of nonpartisan ethics. Pew and Owlett and McClure.

Here's another case: Recently the Republican National Committee issued a blast about a half-hour of "expensive radio time" which WPA had purchased on sixty-one stations to spread propaganda about the program. The truth of that story is that over three months ago, on June 20th, two days after Congress had made its new appropriation for WPA, some of our key officials took the air to inform our administrative staffs in every state of the Union concerning the rules and regulations governing the new program. The big laugh about this political howl of "expensive radio time" lies in the fact that the time was graciously donated, without charge, by the sixty-one stations!

The political charge which had the most laughable backfire was the story printed in New York to the effect that WPA had built some fine cement sidewalks in the little town of Arcadia, Missouri, and that the town was so small that the sidewalks would be of greater service to the cows of the community than to the people. The very thought of this was so amusing to the Republican National Committee that it sent a camera crew all the way out to Arcadia to take motion pictures of the cows using the sidewalks. The local people were pretty bitter about the purpose of the camera crew as soon as they found out about it, and the town marshal even made so

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bold as to ask them to leave. They did. They went ten miles down the road where, for \$25.00 they persuaded a farmer to truck six cows into the town at five o'clock the next morning and herd them on to the sidewalks; and they paid another non-resident \$1.00 a minute to draw a little speech about how much the cows were enjoying the WPA sidewalks. I have no doubt that this would have been another of their little national scandals but for the fact that in Arcadia there was a clever country correspondent of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, who played up the whole story, with names, dates, and prices.

Right now you are reading in a great many newspapers that WPA is keeping workers from returning to private employment. The charge was repeated this week by E. J. Harding of the Associated General Contractors. He is the same Mr. Harding who made the same general charge three months ago, and when we asked him to give specific instances in support of the charge, he apparently had none. At least he never replied. But above and beyond all reference to individuals, I ask you to judge in the realm of your own common sense whether the average American particularly one with a family, is going to cling to a part-time government job that pays him forty or fifty dollars a month when he has a chance to get decent private employment on a full-time basis.

One more ridiculous instance of this type of thing and I will leave the case with you. J. N. Darling, a crusader for conservation, charged publicly that WPA was spending millions of dollars for malaria control in Maine, although Maine has not had a malaria case for one hundred and fifty years. The charge was completely erroneous, and was refuted in full in a public statement by the United States Surgeon General. The refutation was printed two months ago, shortly after Darling made the charge. Yet, only the other day while I was traveling in the West, there was Colonel Frank Knox speaking in the State of Washington and electrifying his listeners with the scandalous charge that WPA spent millions for malaria control in Maine.

I prefer to think that these men and their publications simply are ignorant of the true facts, but it's a little difficult.

Colonel Knox made two speeches in Maine last month, in Lewiston on September 3 and in Waterville on September 4. Why didn't he tell his fake story about Maine malaria control then, to the people of Maine? Why did he wait until he got to the State of Washington, as far away as he could get on dry land? I think the answer

must be obvious to anybody. He knew what he was doing.

But certainly for the great mass of American people it is just a matter of information versus misinformation. I'd like you to think of that, if you will, when you read the political charges every few days about the great propoganda machine of the WPA. At the same time you will be reading charges that we won't give out facts. The Republicans must have got their signals mixed, for only last week we got a letter from the National Committee thanking us for information we have given them.

The hostile politicians use the "heads I win, tails you lose" method on us. If we don't talk about the program they roar about our sinister policy of secrecy. And when we do talk about it, we're circulating vicious propoganda with the taxpayers' money. We don't worry too much over that. It's part of the game. But I will hazard the statement that we have spent proportionately less effort and money to inform the public about WPA than has been spent by any comparable agency in the history of American Government. Sometimes I wonder if that is not our greatest error - not from a standpoint of avoiding personal criticism, but because of the bitter injustice which it has permitted to be heaped on the heads of millions of distressed Americans.

That's the cruel thing, and the one I resent most. The unemployed had no choice but to take our jobs and do their level best. They weren't always strong or well fed or warmly clothed or even used to the work. Under the circumstances they did magnificently. It seems to me that the way they fought this thing through to success and real achievement is a whole lot more truly "American" than the way some of our more fortunate citizens ridiculed them while they were in a tough spot. Perhaps if we had taken the time to tell our story oftener and more fully, the vicious parade of bad vaudeville jokes about shovel leaners and malcontents might have been avoided or at least reduced.

People used to joke in the same way about the Ford car, until the performance of the car made the jokers ridiculous. Well, the boys had better get in all their jokes about WPA workers quick. Their works are rapidly becoming a reality. You can't laugh off 130,000 miles of farm roads. There's nothing convulsing about 6,200 schools and 5,700 parks and 550 airports. There's hardly a giggle in all 7,000 water and sewer systems. But there is health and happiness and national wealth. Thousands upon thousands of good people are now returning to private employment because WPA let them "keep their hands in", and gave them better health and education

and family life when they were down.

Millions of citizens who never lost their jobs will profit every day of their lives from the public facilities available today which they would not have had but for emergency workers.

To my millions of associates in WPA, I just want to say this: Don't be too much disturbed by these political slurs and reflections on your character or your work. The vast majority of the American people don't believe them. There is growing, tangible proof that this nation is refusing to be stampeded by a dark cloud of manufactured fantasies in far places.

And to the American people I offer a simple sporting proposition: Judge WPA just as critically as you please, but judge it on the basis of your own WPA projects, that you can see with your own eyes. Go and see the improvements in your own community. We will rest our case on what you find.

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