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THE WORKS PROGRAM

-- Works Progress Administration --

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The following address was delivered by Harry L. Hopkins, Administrator
of the Works Progress Administration, at the WPA's Free Exhibit at Philadelphia
at 7:30 P.M., Monday night, October 12, 1936:

In all America, the greatest barrage of charges which is being laid down against the federal work-relief program is based on Pennsylvania. I have come here to meet it. Every day in the newspapers, every night on the radio, national Republican leaders join with local ward-heelers in the concentrated chorus of condemnation. Why, in the months of September and October, 1936, do you hear and read so much about WPA in Pennsylvania? I will admit that alongside the old-line political postgraduates who are running this attack, I am a babe in arms. But even I can add up a plain situation and get the answer.

This battle in Pennsylvania is between two specific groups - those who represent modern social practice and those who represent what your own State Department of Welfare has described as seventeenth-century poor relief in the twentieth century.

Local Republican bosses in this State are waging holy war for the return of the happy days when Poor Boards took relief money and spent it for the best interests of whoever was boss. And campaigners for the highest office in the land are not above joining them because after all, only one other State has more electoral votes.

Thus far in this political football game they have played with WPA, there haven't been any rules. They have alleged we fired men we never employed from projects that did not exist.

George Green of 1524 North Hutchinson Street, in this city, is a good example. He signed an affidavit that he was discharged from a WPA project because he registered Republican. In the first place, he never worked for WPA, and in the second place, there never was any such project as the one he alleged he was discharged from.

I understand there is some kind of an unfinished trestle at Parker's Landing in Armstrong County. The charge was printed that WPA wasted \$62,000 on this trestle. As a matter of fact, it was a total fabrication. WPA never had anything to do with the trestle. This parade of ridiculous falsehoods originates with Grundy and his crowd, and is passed along by his well-paid agent, William Hard.

Hard recently charged over the radio that three members of one family, all active Democrats, were all working for WPA in the Philadelphia district-- Mrs. Winnie Booker, Wilfred Booker and Coffield Booker. Careful investigation of the charge revealed that Mrs. Winnie Booker never worked for us at any time, that there is no record of a Coffield Booker's ever having been employed, and that Wilfred Booker resigned last July. These are typical examples of the sort of charges they are bringing against us. I could give you dozens more. As soon as we give the true answers, they drop them like hot potatoes and rush on to new fantasies.

I do not expect them to accept any rules, let alone rules of my choosing. But I think any fair-minded citizen will agree to this one: If the WPA in Pennsylvania is to be measured, there must be a yardstick. What is a fair measuring-rod? I say it is what Pennsylvania had before.

In 1932, there were nearly a million and a quarter Pennsylvanians out of work - over 30% of your working population. Another 30%, according to the Governor were working half-time or less.

In this crisis, what did you get within the State? Your State legislature voted \$10,000,000 in the First Talbot Act. Your Governor said the law was "conceived in politics and born in hatred." It turned the money over to the local Poor Boards without supervision. The contemptible story of what happened to it has now been ferreted out - waste, discrimination on the basis of grudges, favoring of particular grocery stores, squeezing the destitute out of compensation and insurance. Local political racketeers paid personal taxes with this money. The stories of many of these boards, for years back, are utterly incredible. Official reports show that one district bought 5,800 cigars for its officials in 1931 at 11 cents each, and 29 cases of rye whiskey for \$1,000. In another, 528 bottles of ginger ale and 950 cigars helped to build up an administrative overhead of 36 percent. When an investigation threatened, many of the records were mysteriously burned. Members took their wives to conventions on relief money, framed dummy real-estate deals and worked insurance rackets. They paid big architects' fees in periods during which there was no construction. One board was entirely above favoritism. It divided the relief money evenly among all the qualified voters! This is the picture of local Poor Board relief.

There are dozens of such examples in the public records. Whole families of officials got special favors. Stores were favored which charged exhorbitant prices. Records were sketchy or non-existent. In 1934 the State Auditor-General said one-seventh of the First Talbot Act money went for questionable or illegal expenditures.

These boards were manned mainly by ward-heelers. Administrative expense ran from 13 to 40 per cent. For the whole State in 1933 it was over 18 per cent, in Philadelphia over 27 per cent.

In contrast, the WPA's overhead in Pennsylvania is less than 4 per cent.

Herbert Hoover once coined a phrase. "Politics with human misery." I know of no place in America to which it can be applied more aptly than to the Pennsylvania Poor Boards during the time he was President of the United States. All your decent people, of both parties, have been trying to get rid of them for years. Who keeps them with you? The very people who are making this fight on WPA. The local Republican machine. The ablest social experts in your State dwell in constant fear that they will return to power at any time. They are an octopus you can't stop by cutting off tentacles. For they were fed by the richest boodle the State ever knew, and they will not stop trying to get it back. They tried again in 1935. You may have heard of the Batchelor bill. It proposed to displace the State Emergency Relief Board and give relief money back to the Poor Boards. It even passed the Republican Senate. But your good Governor managed to get it laid on the shelf in the House

I suppose Ex-President Hoover must know something about this history, yet he spoke to the Republican Women of Pennsylvania here in Philadelphia only five months ago and this is what he said:

"Return the administration of relief again to State and local non-partisan committees of leading citizens. Give them such Federal subsidy as meets the need of the unemployed. Take the favoritism of politics out of the bread of relief."

Mr. Hoover now is willing to grant federal subsidies for relief, though four years ago he was "opposed to any direct or indirect federal dole." He

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advocated what he called "encouragement of voluntary cooperation in the community."

I know that many volunteer agencies have done excellent and unselfish work in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. They deserve great credit. But it seems to me I recall something about a Republican apple racket which was exposed by the Philadelphia Record in 1931. How much tribute did they squeeze out of unemployed apple-vendors? Something over \$100,000 a year. I also seem to recall Republican Mayor Mackey's charity show that same year. Out of every \$100 collected, only \$36 ever reached the poor. The thing was so rotten that the newspaperman who exposed it won the Pulitzer Prize!

Of course it is not news that Herbert Hoover occasionally changed his mind or blinked the facts. In 1930 he said, "our difficulties in 1922 were far more severe than at present," and assured us we had passed the worst. In March 1931 he felt the worst would be over in 60 days. A year later he had to find some way of explaining why recovery had not come. Who did he blame? He blamed the delay on the extravagance of the House of Representatives because it had appropriated an extra \$137,000,000 to give jobs to the unemployed at road-building.

Mr. Hoover had a curious complex about lending American dollars for relief in foreign countries. But he stubbornly refused, in the light of widespread evidence presented to him personally, to do anything about the destitute of his own country. Back in 1917 he was the spearhead of the drive that got \$75,000,000 from the United States Government for Belgian relief. And in 1924, while he was Secretary of Commerce, he pleaded in vain for \$10,000,000 in Federal funds for relief in Germany. Yet when his own country stood at a desperate crossroads, and he was its Chief Executive, all he would do was to utter unctuous phrases about individual initiative.

I do not want to appear jingoistic. I do not deplore these efforts to help stricken people abroad. I only want to debunk the backgrounds of some of the high priests of present-day criticism. William Randolph Hearst is another of these. He feels our spending is inexcusable. Let me quote what he said over the Columbia network on June 2, 1931: "This is not a time to reduce National debt. It is a time to increase National debt and increase the expenditures of the

Government in public works in employment of labor, and thereby increase prosperity. Then, out of prosperity, to pay the debt."

He said prosperity could be restored by a Federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for employment of labor at prevailing wages, but the plan would succeed only if the Government spent the money and "did not sit on it permanently like a deluded hen on a porcelain doorknob."

Well, Pennsylvania drifted along into the beginning of 1933 and your State legislature was in a political deadlock for 14 long weeks without passing a relief bill. Your relief officials know how near you were to riots and blood shed in March, 1933. The threats were printed in all your newspapers. Here are some headlines: "300,000 Beg Quick Action on State Aid"; "State Relief Plans Wrecked Again"; "Governor Appeals to Clergy to Avert Starvation Riots."

In Washington, C.W.A. was our first big effort at work-relief. It was set up in winter, in a crisis. Nowadays, judged by present standards of WPA, CWA was only a beginning.

But it seems that CWA was pretty welcome here. Arthur Dunham, Secretary of the relief division of Pennsylvania Public Charities wrote this in 1934:

"The CWA program met with general enthusiasm in Pennsylvania -- there was a certain clean-cut quality about it; it was real work on real jobs for real wages."

Back in 1932, President Hoover rejected a public works program submitted by the American Society of Civil Engineers. He said the program not only was too expensive but it represented "the building of a community beyond its necessities."

What are the necessities of a community or a State? I wonder if Pennsylvania will find unnecessary the fourteen hundred miles of new roads and streets that WPA is building, or the thirteen thousand miles it is improving. Is the construction or the improving of more than five hundred Pennsylvania bridges a thing to be deplored? WPA is building or improving 1,500 new schools in Pennsylvania, 28 airports, 400 other public buildings, 300 miles of sewers, 100 miles of water lines and a thousand parks and playgrounds. But perhaps such foresight is superfluous.

You had a flood last Spring. The work that WPA had done on Codorus in the city of York saved the town. Today WPA is building a million dollar dam on the Susquehanna river at Wilkes Barre, and doing extensive work at other towns.

Over 89,000 WPA workers fought that flood day and night. Thousands of women on sewing projects made clothes and bedding for the victims. Many local health authorities have said that WPA clean-up work was the biggest factor in the prevention of any serious epidemic.

A WPA worker at Williamsport toiled 83 hours without food or sleep and rescued 45 persons before he fainted from sheer exhaustion. These are the kind of people you do not hear about from the political racketeers who are chiefly interested in getting their hands back on relief money.

WPA workers are beautifying Fairmount Park in this City. Chief Engineer Alan Corson of the Park Commission has been high in his praise of this work. Recently he was requested by the Commission to thank the WPA.

Depression stopped work on your Museum of Art in 1932 with twenty-eight galleries finished. WPA workers have completed twenty-six additional rooms, with substantial help from Museum funds. The work involved thirty different skilled trades. If you want to know anything about the workmanship, the economy, the spirit of the politics on that project I refer you to Dr. Fiske Kimball, Director of the Museum.

We have learned a great deal about work relief. You can see in this course samples of a number of the kinds of useful public work which local officials have requested for the employment of their own local people. This work has an infinite variety, because the people it is designed for have an infinite variety of talents and experience. It must preserve their ability to work and keep them ready for a return to private jobs. We make no apology for finding suitable work for non-manual workers--for teachers and artists and nurses and clerical and technical people. The local officials who originated these projects and share the cost have testified as to their worth.

In the light of American experience since the War, we make no apology for the money we have spent or the way we have spent it. During twelve years,

Under three successive Republican presidents, the American people were encouraged to send to Europe for the benefit of foreign countries a total of fourteen billion American dollars.

We have spent less than six billion, in our worst depression, for the unemployed of America. We have lifted the whole face of this country with many thousands of public improvements, and the improvements are right here, added national wealth, to be used by generations to come.

The last Republican administration let people starve. We fed them. They divided relief money among political henchmen. We stopped this racket. They had soup lines and Hoovervilles. We abolished them. We provided jobs. They had riots, and we have order, because we have given the jobless man a chance.

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