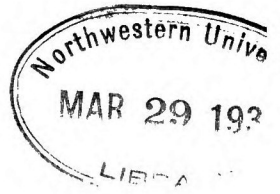


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--Works Progress Administration--

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Thursday, March 18, 1937.



Address by Aubrey W. Williams, Deputy Administrator of Works Progress  
Administration, on "How Far Should Federal Relief Go?"--

Delivered Over America's Town Meeting of the  
Air, Over NBC-Blue Network, Mar. 18.

How far should Federal relief go? A forthright answer  
would be--as far as necessary.

Federal relief policy has steered a sane middle course,  
and that is always a thankless job. It has traveled an incredible  
distance forward since the dreary days when a reactionary administration  
kept insisting that relief was a local matter.

For this advance it is attacked by reactionaries as an un-  
necessary and inexcusable waste of the taxpayers' money. At the same  
time extremists on the liberal side belittle its achievements, call them  
trifling and demand much more.

I am not here to say the Federal relief program has gone far  
enough as it now stands. I think it has not gone far enough, and I am

ready to admit it has its inadequacies and weaknesses.

But, we can all find some comfort in the distance it has traveled in four short years, and in the light of history I am convinced it needs no apologies. For those who have lived through this great change as it was brought about, and have seen the infinite courage and humanity and energy that have carried us this far, as I have seen them, find hope in this achievement for the future..

Now, to take up first of all the criticisms from those who think we have not gone far enough: We have all heard it said that when private industry and business broke down during the depression, the Federal government should have set up a national system of production and distribution, giving full-time employment at union wages to some ten or fifteen million unemployed. In comparison with that grandiose picture of Federal relief, all our actual accomplishments must seem small to these critics. Nevertheless, let us consider what was done in reality.

It is true that we did not take advantage of the temporary breakdown of private industry, and seek to make it permanent by nationalizing production on a large scale. In fact, our Federal work program has been designed to assist in the revival of private industry and business. We have taken workers who were out of private employment, with the aim of restoring them as rapidly as

possible to private employment. We have given them work and wages, maintained and developed their skills, and as fast as genuine opportunities of private employment came, we have insisted that our workers take such employment. Seeking to avoid competition with private industry, we have restricted our program to work on public property and for the public benefit.

All this is probably, from the point of view of some people, too timid and cautious. Yet we have traveled far in four years. Back in the winter of 1932-33, President Hoover told Congress, "I feel warranted in asking the Congress for an appropriation of"-- please note the figure carefully--" from \$100,000,000 to \$150,000,000 to provide such further employment in this emergency." Four years later, in 1936, the Federal government was spending over twenty times that amount on relief. And almost from the first days of the present administration we have had a **w**ork program, which is now employing in all nearly three million people. We have rejected the false economy of the dole. We are not maintaining these millions of able workers in hopeless idleness. On the **W**PA alone, 725,000 of them

are building and remaking highways, farm-to-market roads, and bridges; 60,000 of them are building schoolhouses; 190,000 are making playgrounds and parks; 11,000 are putting on plays; 40,000 are teaching people to read and write; and 225,000 are making garments for those too poor to buy them. And these people receive, on an average, \$50 a month in wages. And this work program has been developed to make use of a wide variety of skills and professions--I like to think that the nation will never again ask unemployed musicians to dig ditches or unemployed writers to be hod carriers. The American people have shown that they want and are willing to support public works of art programs, programs for educators, programs for all occupations, professions, and skills that can be used for the public benefit.

From the other side, their demands are much simpler. All they want is to abolish the program. It is not necessary for me to discuss that demand at length, for it was discussed in the last election, made a direct issue, and definitely settled. But whenever anyone calls our work program wasteful, we can point to its record of achievements throughout the nation. Consider the WPA alone:

20,000 buildings repaired; 8,300 schoolhouses constructed or repaired; 120,000 miles of farm-to-market roads built or improved; 60,000 performances by hundreds of musical organizations; 30,000 performances of plays attended by 15,000,000 people; 8,000 new bridges built and 13,000 repaired; 10,000,000 books repaired for libraries and schools; thousands of parks and athletic fields developed-- a total wealth created for the nation, through the construction of material things alone, running into billions of dollars.

After all, the future of Federal relief depends upon the American people and upon Congress. Exactly what direction Federal relief will take, what will be the hourly wage paid or total earnings, will, at least for the immediate future, soon be determined by Congressional action. It seems clear, however, that the American people have placed the stamp of their approval on the Federal works program, and that they insist on its continuance. It seems also to have been decided by public opinion that the aid given to unemployed workers must be decent and adequate. Who can deny that work and wages for the unemployed have for three years upheld the national

wage-levels? The wage standards of the work program must not be lowered.

The Federal government has now, quite properly, assumed the major responsibility for the relief of the able-bodied unemployed. We know that our work program still falls short of giving work to all the able-bodied unemployed. And I believe that our work program in the future should be expanded to include the great majority of the total number of the unemployed. The average weekly earnings in our nation, being what they are, do not permit of adequate savings against unemployment. A work program should be able to take on a worker soon after he loses his job, and continue such employment until he finds another.

It is desirable, for the greatest good to both the unemployed and the nation, that our work program be placed on a long-time basis. Long time plans must be worked out for its location, planning and financing of projects. The work which the unemployed are now doing and will do is work that must sometime be done, and much of it the sooner the better. The recent flood disaster, and the continuing

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drought, are evidences of large national needs which will require the use of many workers and long-time plans. The administration of the Federal relief and of the work program has helped to disclose to the nation the extent both of its vast poverty, and of the vast amount of socially valuable work that remains for the unemployed to do.

The greatest part of the task of dealing with unemployment still remains to be done. We have come a long way since the days of the poor farm; and there is a long way for our Federal work program to go before it is wholly adequate to the nation's needs.

We shall probably never satisfy our extreme critics on either side. We shall move as fast as we can, as slowly as we must.

(By the way, we have not yet heard from the Supreme Court as to whether we have a right to exist at all!) But the work program is here to stay. How far should Federal relief go? I repeat, the answer is -- as far as necessary.

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