

THE WORKS PROGRAM

\*\*\*

--Works Progress Administration--

For Release on Delivery,  
Tuesday, August 30th, 1938

"The Essence of Democracy"

The following address was delivered by Harry L. Hopkins, Administrator of the Works Progress Administration at the banquet of the Northeastern Conference of Democratic Women at Boston, Mass. The address was broadcast from the Statler Hotel, from 8 to 8:30 P.M., Eastern Standard Time, over the Blue network of the National Broadcasting Company.

I want to say at the outset that I am impressed at the array of Democratic women of this region who have assembled here for this two-day Institute of Government.

The interest you are showing in the affairs of your party and your government is not surprising today, but it is impressive. Six or seven years ago it would have been surprising. But today our democracy is working. Today there is wider interest and participation in the democratic process of government, by more people, than at any time in our recollections, if not in the entire history of the nation.

Why is this true? It is true because the people of this country have found out, virtually for the first time, that they can employ their government for the purpose of solving vital, practical democratic problems. It is true because the actual practice of democracy has been revived and spurred to new heights by the most inspiring leadership of our time.

It is entirely right and proper for us to meet here, to appraise what has been done during the five and one-half years our party has been at the national helm, and to forecast what it hopes to do during the coming two and one-half years.

Officials of the Administration have not only the right, but the duty, to discuss public measures fully and frankly with the electorate. That is the very essence of democratic action, and I wish to say that it has been advanced immeasurably both by the development of radio itself, and by the fair policies of those who control those facilities.

I believe it is entirely proper for me to present the case in behalf of the Administration as persuasively as I know how. It is for you to reject, if somebody else makes a different case which is more to your liking. That is democracy -- the freest, fullest possible presentation of facts to every voter, upon which he then can base his independent decision.

But the question of administering any of the nation's affairs, under the law, is quite another matter. In this administration there must be no discrimination and no coercion. We have made that fight sincerely and earnestly in the WPA. I have stated our position so many times that you must know it by heart. No one need be a Democrat to get work from the WPA. No one is fired from the WPA for the way he votes or does not vote. The WPA will not tolerate political activity within its ranks. WPA workers are free men and women, however, who are just as much entitled to their own opinions as any other American citizen, and they do not dwell in a vacuum; they are just as subject to influence and solicitation outside the WPA as anybody else. But within this organization it is as clean as honest, earnest effort can make it, and I have not the slightest apology for it.

The same impartiality holds for all Federal agencies. Your political beliefs or party affiliations have nothing whatever to do with whether or not you can insure your bank account, or get a farm or home loan, or old age benefits or unemployment insurance, or any of the other Federal services. The present low interest rates on mortgages do not vary according to political faith. The law against the sale of bad stocks and bonds protects Republican and Democratic investors alike. Perhaps, indeed it protects the Republicans more; they seem to have more money.

All this is only elementary obedience to the laws and the Constitution of the United States. Congress enacts the laws for the benefit of the whole people, and the President swears to execute those laws faithfully. If they are not faithfully executed, the President as well as subordinate executive officials may be impeached by Congress. And if the people are not satisfied with the President or the Congress, they may change either or both at the ballot box.

On the other hand, it is just as clearly an American tradition that every administration bears the stamp of a political party, enacting and administering its program as a party responsibility. We say a party

is in power when the people have entrusted it with a term of office. And it is just as traditional that the party in power then had the responsibility not only of carrying through its program, but of explaining its moves and objectives to the sovereign people.

Every administration in this nation's history has taken its case to the people, listing its achievements and answering its critics. To fail to do so would not preserve our tradition, but would violate it.

Yet recently there has been an organized attempt to misrepresent this tradition, and to imply that it is dishonest or unfair for administrative officials to report on the benefits and purposes of the program to the people. It is charged that these reports are a way of coercing the beneficiaries of the program into voting for the administration. If, for example, I support my party and its program out loud, I am coercing WPA workers. If Secretary Wallace defends the agricultural program he is administering, he is in some occult way interfering with the freedom of the ballot among farmers.

This claim is so absurd that, save for its constant repetition by the opposition, it would not deserve an answer.

This is by no means the first administration that has carried through important popular benefits. The Whigs had a vast program of highways, canals, dams and other internal improvements. The Republicans under Lincoln and Grant gave away vast numbers of free homesteads.

Every one of these administrations discussed its program before the voters, as it had every right to do. Yet this administration is charged with coercion the moment it attempts to point out how well it has looked out for the interests of great masses of the people -- of business men, of the unemployed, of the farmers, of American labor and of all the people generally. Well, we refuse to be the first Administration in American history to be muzzled and gagged.

It is a strange service to democracy, indeed, which seeks to throttle free discussion of public affairs by responsible officials. The suppression of facts during a political campaign may be proper tactics for some countries, but it has no place in free America!

What is the New Deal program we are here to discuss? What has been its guiding plan and purpose? What, indeed, were the conditions it faced at the outset?

The economists talk of the prostrate condition of the country in the spring of 1933 in terms of excessive inventories, indices of production and of unemployment, the volume of bankruptcies and of bank closings, the outflow of gold and the action of stock prices. But what did all that mean to you and me? What did we see about us?

We saw millions of people begging for a chance to work, even begging for food. We saw families breaking up as the various members who no longer wanted to be a burden to each other set off to forage for themselves as best they could.

We saw children unable to continue their schooling -- many because they had neither clothing nor food, others because the schools themselves closed up, still others because they could earn a few dollars undercutting adult workers in the mills of unscrupulous employers.

We saw an army of jobless youth, taking to the roads and the freight trains and the hobo jungles, or drifting into crime. We saw homes, acquired through years of sacrifice and hallowed by family memories, invaded by the sheriff. Those homes had been planned as the havens of old age, in the instinctive human struggle for security. We saw an almost endless list of savings accounts swept away as literally thousands of banks collapsed, and the whole banking system threatened to go under.

We saw farmers, the backbone of American individualism, in armed and open revolt against the auctioneers who came to offer to the highest bidder their lands and their livelihood.

Above all, everywhere, we saw fear. Fear pervaded not only the jobless and the destitute, but it reached out to touch those who still had jobs.

There was such fear, in so many quarters, that it seemed as though the whole people were willing to give up their liberties, their traditions, their institutions -- anything -- for some sort of security. Do you doubt it? It has happened repeatedly in Europe.

In such an atmosphere, Franklin D. Roosevelt became President. Business was pleading for governmental action. Rich and poor, were united by common bond of fear behind the new leader. They looked to him for the answer. It looked as if the very democratic process was whipped, for the moment at least.

What did the President do? He set about, with the leaders of his party, to plan a way out that would restore opportunity and a certain amount of security without the loss of personal liberty, without the sacrifice of any of our cherished democratic institutions.

I believe few reasonable persons will question the statement that the United States, in the five and a half years since, has advanced further toward that difficult dual objective - security in democracy - than in the entire previous history of the country.

The leadership of your party and mine faced a practical democratic problem. It realized that millions of bitter and desperate people wanted action -- not committees and philosophy and fine distinctions as to why things could not be done. It saved homes and farms from foreclosure. It insured bank accounts. It put idle youth to work or back in school through the CCC and the NYA. It outlawed worthless securities. It loaned money to reopen schools.

It gave jobs to millions of willing people who could find no private work to do. Through work, wasted human resources were employed. Jobless women made clothes for ragged children, and canned surplus food for the hungry. They served millions of nourishing school lunches. They opened thousands of new libraries, and taught a million illiterate adults to read and write. Jobless men were put to work building and repairing schools, improving long-neglected rural roads, fighting malaria and typhoid, building airports and bridges and parks.

But more vital than all the work they did, is the simple fact that people had JOBS. And the whole vast Federal program knitted itself more firmly together, month by month and year by year, into what? Into the beginning of a pattern of security and the reopening of opportunity for all citizens. The right to a job. Education. Health. Decent housing. Aid for old people and the unemployed and the blind and for dependent children. Purchasing-power for the customers of our merchants and manufacturers. Profits to business. Parity for farm prices. Protection from loan-sharks and bad securities and shaky banks. Collective bargaining. A floor under wages and ceiling over hours. Free competition and wider opportunity by a curb on monopoly. Not all of these things are complete, but they all have been begun.

The effect of this program was to set the wheels of America humming again. The national income moved upward from forty billion dollars in 1932 to over seventy billions in 1937 -- an increase of 75 per cent. The fear was gone.

We know it is gone, because the strength of our new morale and machinery was tested by the business decline which began last October, and out of which we are now happily emerging. That recession revealed none of the old panic. There were no runs on the banks. Bank failures were negligible, and small depositors were insured. Unemployment insurance went to work. The WPA expanded a little. The vicious spiral of deflation did not keep moving downward, with its progressive circles of fewer people at work, less money to spend, reduced production, still more people out of work, still less buying, and so on. Instead, the sustained purchasing power and confidence enabled business to clear its shelves of excess goods.

It was inevitable that such a tremendous program would reveal weak spots at which our political opponents could take aim. I find no fault with their attacking it at any point they think it is vulnerable. That, too, is the way the great American game of politics is played.

But I think we have a right to call them out, with the American people sitting as a jury, and say to them, "This sniping at the New Deal is all right. We have our faults. But if you were called upon to replace the Administration tomorrow, what would your program be?"

You can hunt in vain for an answer through a whole library of speeches, statements and interviews that have come from the opposition in the past five years or, for that matter, the past eight years.

In all this myriad of political verbiage, however, there is one constant refrain: "We must restore confidence". And when you look at suggestions of how to do it, you find it has a different meaning each time it is uttered. To some it means the removal of all government restrictions, which we think of as the rules of fair play. To many it means shifting the tax burden from high incomes to the common man. To stock market speculators it means the repeal of the safeguards thrown around the investor's money, and to a hundred other categories of people it means a hundred other things.

My own opinion is that confidence - by which they mean business confidence - is a product of profits. Business has lots of it when profits are high, and has a lack of it when profits are low. From my own observation I would further say that the wheel of business turns not only on

confidence, but also on money in the pockets of the general public. When the great mass of our people have money to spend, business is good; when they don't have any money, business is bad. The policies of government which make for good business are therefore found not only in those that relate to the restoration of confidence, important as that may be, but in those which act to add to the purchasing power of people. And I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not believe that purchasing power can be adequately increased merely by government expenditures. It is only by the combined effort of business, labor, and government to increase production that an effective rise in the national income can be attained.

We must not forget that for three years prior to 1933 our friends gave us the confidence treatment. They even left orders that unemployment figures should be hushed up in order not to disturb the treatment. They reduced surtax rates, they reduced wages, they trampled upon the rights of collective bargaining. They didn't give any Federal relief, but they issued statements about rugged individualism. They wooed prosperity by all the magic spells of the economic soothsayers.

One might paraphrase a famous quotation from Shakespeare and say: We, too, can use all these magic incantations. We, too, can invoke the spirits from the vasty deep. But will the spirits answer us any more than they answered Mr. Hoover and his friends?

The opposition finally realized, in 1936, that it needed a positive and concrete program, so it hired a brain trust. One member of this brain trust -- Professor Thomas Nixon Carver, who spent many years right across the river from here -- did bring forward a plan. It was not exactly an American plan -- it was based on the philosophy of certain foreign governments, whose leaders, he said -- and I quote -- "are more farseeing than the rest of us". There were two essential points to his plan. He said the way to cut down the cost of relief was to force the unemployed off the relief rolls by what he called "severe regulations". And then he said the reason we have unemployment is because too many unintelligent people are being born, so we should sterilize those who are unfit, and refuse to let any couple get married who can't afford to own and operate an automobile.

The public reaction to the Carver plan was so strong that it put an end to Republican brain trust activities for quite a while. But recently a new brain trust was created under the leadership of Dr. Glenn Frank. He also got a lot of his conditioning in Boston.

After the experience of Professor Carver, Dr. Frank was too cautious to commit himself to a concrete plan. But he did deliver himself of a piece of rhetoric which I would like you to consider. He asked everybody who was discontented to join him in building a nation in which -- I quote -- "the government would be afraid of the people, not the people afraid of the government."

Fancy that. On the last occasion when we had a national test, which was less than two years ago, the only people who seemed very afraid were those of Maine and Vermont. Indeed, the American people set something like an all-time record for being unafraid.

Dr. Frank has a queer slant on the people and the government. He seems to think that somehow they are rivals or opposing forces, with one always vaguely afraid of the other. To me it sounds like poppycock, unless the government is being false to the majority and serving the interests of only a few. If a government which has come honestly into power works honestly for the popular good, there should be no ground for fear on either side.

The opposition really spends very little time offering suggestions even as constructive as these. Most of the time it is raising frightful bugaboos -- of revolution, of dictatorship, of the collapse of our social institutions. You have heard many times how this Administration has set class against class, has undermined workers' discipline, has encouraged idleness, has brought about disrespect for authority, job and property. I wonder if you know how old such charges are. They were leveled against Lincoln. They were leveled against Jackson. They were the ground on which the American Revolution itself was condemned. Let me quote from a sermon delivered in revolutionary times by a Tory clergyman named Jonathan Boucher:

"There never was a time when a whole people were so little governed by settled good principles, . . . Both employers and the employed, to their mutual shame, no longer live together with attachment and cordiality. The laboring classes, instead of regarding the rich as their guardians, patrons and benefactors, now look on them as those



whom it is no demerit to wrong. The lower classes, instead of being industrious, frugal and orderly (virtues so peculiarly becoming to their station in life) are become idle, improvident, and dissolute."

Except for a certain stiffness of language, doesn't this sound familiar?

When President Roosevelt called the backbone of the opposition Tories and economic royalists, his terms were more apt, perhaps, than many people realized. Twice before in American history, as New England knows better than any other section, the people were called upon to break with outworn institutions in the interest of the national welfare.

In 1776 they had to break with British domination. But in the years of colonization certain men grew rich and powerful through alliance with the British exploiters -- men who in their eminence forgot their early struggles and looked more to their own selfish interests than to the general need for liberty and justice. These men, who scoffed at popular freedom and held tightly to the fancied security of the royal apron strings, were called Tories. They could not stand the New Deal of 1776, and many of them picked up and moved to Canada.

In 1861 there was a similar group in the North which was not only willing, but eager, to see the nation split in half -- into two separate countries -- on the issue of slavery. Those were the Copperheads.

The streamlined Tory of 1938 bears many resemblances to the Tories your forebears knew here in New England. He too has lost touch with the great philosophy on which this country was founded, has forgotten the early sacrifices here in this region which made his present position possible.

It occurs to me that perhaps I am being unfair in demanding that the opposition propose a substitute program. I may be asking it to be false to its most fundamental belief. Basically it believes that the government should do virtually nothing but deliver the mail. But doing nothing is not a very exciting policy in times like these, and therefore it must spend a great deal of its time sniping at the activities of the party that does something.

I am sure that none of us here has any objection to the old line Republicans -- that is, not much. It is convenient to have them around. When they are busily running around the country extolling the horse and buggy, or hanging their figurative witches, they serve to clear the atmosphere. They are living reminders of how we should avoid a recurrence of 1930, 31 and 32.

I believe in the party system. I do not believe in the totalitarian state, with its single party and total absence of criticism. I don't want to vote in the same party primary, or for the same candidates, as any man whose fundamental political views are opposed to mine.

Events in the last decade have interfered temporarily with the party system. The Hoover depression was so terrible, and the people got such a bitter taste of do-nothing government during 1930, 1931, and 1932, that the opposition was virtually annihilated. Because the Republicans had no reasonable hope of success through their own party; they have attempted to transfer their attentions to the Democratic party. Just as the Tories in 1776 stirred up intrigues and factions and splits among the revolutionary colonists, so do the Tories of today stir up divisions in the Democratic party.

The object of political campaigns is to win elections. It was therefore inevitable that the conflict between the Administration and the Tories would shift at least partially from the general elections to a few of the primaries within the Democratic party. This is not just a piece of logic. It is an accomplished fact. The leadership of the opposition is right now putting its full strength in men and money behind candidates in half a dozen states who have been most hostile to the things for which this administration stands. And the leadership of the opposition is today urging thousands upon thousands of people who never had any desire to enter a democratic primary before, and have no desire to do so now, to register and help defeat the aims of President Roosevelt -- not in a clean-cut general election where the divergent views of parties are clearly understood by the voters, but stealthily, within the councils of our own party.

The effect of this is that there is in general no opposition party which stands on its own feet under its own banner and advocates its own principles. The opposition has given up its identity, and even its integrity, for a better chance to win.

All political parties, historically, have had factional fights within their own councils and in their own primaries. The Democrats have had perhaps more than their share of such fights, but they have been private fights, which we have been able to iron out before the election came around. And the Democratic party can still handle its own private family squabbles without the interference of any Republican in-laws.

Our party has a big job to do -- perhaps the biggest governmental job in modern times. The President summed it up -- summed up the platform and the philosophy of the Democratic party -- in Madison Square Garden a little less than two years ago. This is what he said:

"Of course we will continue to seek to improve working conditions for the workers of America -- to reduce hours over long, to increase wages that spell starvation, to end the labor of children, to wipe out sweatshops ....Of course we will continue our efforts in behalf of the farmers of America ....Of course we will provide useful work for the needy unemployed; we prefer useful work to the pauperism of a dole....Of course we will continue our efforts for young men and women so that they may obtain an education and an opportunity to put it to use. Of course we will continue our help for the crippled, the blind, for the mothers--our insurance for the unemployed -- our security for the aged."

The last line of that Madison Square Garden speech set the stage for the landslide which was to follow. And the last line of that speech read: "For all these things we have only just begun to fight".

To "all these things" not only the President, but all of us who call ourselves Democrats stand committed. The course in 1936 was crystal clear. It was no longer experimental. Everybody knew which way we were going. Everybody had had four years in which to make up his mind. Yet there were men who did not believe in these things who tricked the voters by wearing our insignia, only to turn against us as soon as they got in office. They fought wages and hours. They fought relief for the unemployed. They fought social security. They fought agricultural legislation. They fought the very heart of the program which the Democratic party has pledged to the American people that it will carry out.

But that is not all they did. Even while they hacked away at the foundation of the program with one hand they were patting the President on the back with the other, protesting to the voters that they were really good Democrats. Protesting that they were really with us in a broader sense,

pleading that they were merely exercising independent judgment. That is a good deal like the young man who abandoned his father and mother and then asked for public sympathy on the ground that he was an orphan.

Under those circumstances what would you expect the President, as the leader and spokesman of his party, to do? He is calling the attention of the voters to the records of these men. He is merely saying "these men who came into office with the administration no longer support the administration. If you believe in the Administration and want to help it, do not send these men back. If you oppose the Administration these are your men".

After that, the voters will vote exactly as they want to. To say that this is not democracy is an insult to the voters, not to the President. The course he has taken is really a step in the direction of responsible government. He is clearing away the cobwebs and the confusion and making the issue plain before the voters who must pass upon it.

One hundred and forty-three years ago George Washington, the first President, wrote a letter to a Member of his Cabinet in which he said, I quote:

"I shall not, whilst I have the honor to administer the government, bring a man into any office of consequence knowingly whose political tenets are adverse to the measures which the general government are pursuing, for this in my opinion would be a sort of political suicide."

I don't suppose very many people today would call George Washington a dictator or say that he was un-American.

I don't object to a man being a Tory. That is his business. But I do object to a Tory who says he is a liberal, and who accepts the help of other Tories at the very time he shouts his claim to the liberal label. Give us men who are ready to stand up straight and be counted. We can respect men who differ with us and who say so, but we can neither respect nor trust men who say they are with us and at the same time join with our political foes to fight us.

I know the President. Neither abuse nor flattery, neither pressure nor ridicule, will sway him from the pact he and his party have made with the American people. Adulation has not made him arrogant, defeat has not made him timid.

What we have to decide is whether to go back or go ahead -- whether to wink at social and economic injustice or to correct it -- whether we want prosperity and profits for a few or prosperity for all -- whether we want weasel words or real leadership -- whether, in short, we want to abdicate the stronghold of democracy or to fight for it. And I think we, too, have "only