

DOCUMENT
ROOMFEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

For Release to Afternoon Papers
Saturday, February 8, 1941.

"SERVICES ON THE HOME FRONT"

(The following address is for delivery by Mrs. Florence Kerr, Assistant Commissioner, Work Projects Administration, at a meeting of the Oklahoma Education Association in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Saturday, February 8, 1941, at 10 A.M., Central Standard Time.)

The title under which I am speaking -- "Services on the Home Front" -- may sound rather military. But it is not of strictly military matters that I wish to speak. We all know by now that the continued existence of our democracy is threatened by hostile forces. We are preparing to defend ourselves. I would be less than candid if I did not say that these preparations are imperatively necessary -- and that every moment counts. The preparations that are now going forward in our national defense program are against dangers that come nearer every day. In these defense preparations we shall all have to take our part. And what I have come here to say to you is that for many of us the part that we can best take is on the home defense front.

There are two great tasks in national defense. One is concerned with military training and the production of armaments -- with the building up of an iron ring of outer defense. But that is only one of the nation's two great tasks. There is another coordinate task -- in many ways, a humbler task, a less heroic task, but one which is nevertheless of equally great importance -- the task of home defense.

In America today, we are so fortunate that "home defense" does not as yet have a military meaning. It does not as yet mean that we must train our babies to wear gas-masks. It does not as yet mean that we have to keep a lookout for enemy parachute troops landing in our back gardens. It does not as yet mean hastening to put out fires started by incendiary bombs dropped from the midnight skies. We hope to be so strong as to keep these things away from our shores.

What, then, does "home defense" mean in America today? I would like to remind you of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Only one of them wore a crown. Only one of them carried a sword. The others are intended to symbolize the dreadful consequences of war, one of which is Famine. And sometimes, in applying a modern meaning to these figures, we give to the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse the name, "Pestilence" --- though in our familiar translation it only says: "And I looked and beheld a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him." And so we are told in phrases which seem to reveal so much of past and present history in flashes of Biblical lightning --- power was given to the Four Horsemen "over a fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the field."

We are entrenching ourselves not only against war, against Conquest and Slaughter, but against their accompaniments of Famine and Pestilence. Please God, we shall keep the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse away from our American shores, now and forever.

But there are four dangers --- let me name them: they are Hunger, Poverty, Disease, and Ignorance --- that are already within our borders. They do not ride triumphantly on horseback. They hide in the shadows, they creep out of corners. But they have not assumed menacing and terrifying proportions. They are being held in check. They are being diminished, year by year. But they still exist --- Hunger, Poverty, Disease and Ignorance --- within all our communities. If we relax our vigilance against them, if we stop fighting against them, they can become great and terrible dangers. And it is against these dangers that we must work to defend ourselves on the home front.

Our weapons of defense against these internal dangers are simply food, shelter, education, health protection, for all who are in need of these things. These are the weapons of democracy. This is the task of home defense that I am going to discuss with you. It is a task that has to be carried on at all times. It has always been our great peace-time job. And it must be carried on all the more vigorously today. So I am going to talk about the need of our communities for more preparation, to enable them

to carry out this home defense work in larger ways, and to any extent that may become necessary in the days that lie before us.

Defense, literally, means protection. Home defense means the protection of our people through home or community services. We hear nowadays the terms "total war" and "total defense." It is clear that "total home defense" would require community services sufficient to meet all these needs among our whole population. This is the goal toward which we in America have been striving, but it is a goal which, as we all know, we have not yet attained.

Much has been accomplished toward this end through social legislation of various kinds. We do not intend to give up any of the great social gains that have been made. But legislation does not account for all of our social gains. That legislation has always followed in the paths marked out by the pioneer work of social minded private citizens who have given willing service and undergone many sacrifices for the benefit of others in their communities. And our social legislation, when it has been finally achieved, has been most effectively administered in this same spirit. There is always a need for volunteer work in this direction. And there is particular need of volunteer service on the home defense front in America today.

Service and sacrifice are not empty words in times like these. They have a meaning for every man and woman in our communities. We will all of us have a chance to serve our community, in one way or another. Many of us -- including the women who have free time, the men who are too old and the boys and girls who are too young to take a more direct part in our national defense program -- may be called upon to give our time and energies in important tasks on the home defense front.

There is no doubt as to the readiness of people to serve in this way. I have heard hundreds of women say: "I want to do something -- but what can I do? I don't want to fritter away my time in useless efforts."

That is an important matter. We must not allow these volunteer efforts to be wasted. We cannot afford that waste. And without adequate training and supervision these efforts would be largely wasted. Volunteer workers

must have the preparation necessary for participation in various community tasks.

This means in practice that people must be trained in every community -- trained to assist regular agencies in expanding the community services that are essential to the well being of our civilian population. Among the newly trained workers will be some, perhaps many, who have the qualities requisite for leadership; and these will be called upon in turn to help train others, or help direct groups of volunteers. Leadership will be encouraged and used wherever it is found. It is in this way, a step at a time, in an expanding program of community service, that training and leadership will be provided for the millions of volunteers who now stand ready to serve on the home front.

And practical training -- now -- is the first step in this great program. We must begin now to provide the training and find the leadership needed to guide so many willing hands in the performance of these community tasks. The tasks are plain enough. They include the provision of education to all whose needs are not met by our regular school system; the provision of health protection to everyone; and the continuance of our civic struggle against all the disintegrating effects of poverty. With training and with leadership, the women of whom I have spoken will be assured that their efforts are not wasted. They will be participants in a well-ordered and competently directed community service program.

In every State it is now our immediate concern to begin this work of providing a trained personnel for community service. Fortunately we have in various social agencies an excellent skeleton structure of such a corps of trained leaders. Many have been trained on the nation-wide WPA program of community service projects. Many others have been trained by local welfare agencies, and by the local branches of governmental departments that are working in some area of the wide social service field. These thousands of trained people all over the nation stand ready to be of assistance as leaders, teachers, supervisors, or in whatever capacity they may be needed, under an expanded program of home defense.

Let us consider for a moment in detail the various fields of train-

fields of training can be considered under the four general headings of the internal dangers already named.

Hunger comes first to mind. For, though man may not live by bread alone, he certainly cannot live without bread. There is need today for more workers in the field of food conservation, in its broadest sense -- including everything from home gardening and canning up to mass distribution of food in possible emergencies. More women will need to know how to cook and can surplus foodstuffs that might otherwise go to waste. And women with a knowledge of diet and nutrition will be increasingly needed as our school lunch projects are expanded.

Most of our malnutrition in this country comes from the lack of an income sufficient to provide adequate food for families. But some of it comes also from lack of knowledge of food values -- lack of knowledge as to how to make the best possible use of the family income in preparing the family meals. There is a great need for more knowledge of food as well as more income with which to buy food. And persons who are trained in the planning of properly balanced diets can be of service in all our communities. They can lead discussion groups of parents -- who, all over the country, are now found increasingly anxious to learn about food values, particularly as these affect their children.

That is one kind of service. Another important service is in the distribution of surplus food to the needy. The main line of such surplus food distribution is now the Food Stamp Plan. It is simple, efficient, and it has taken its place in the normal structure of the retail grocery business. But this method of surplus food distribution is not yet as widely used as it should be. It is an example of a kind of community service which is definitely a part of "business as usual." It requires no new training, since it is performed by grocery clerks in the regular course of their daily duties. It requires no sacrifice from the grocers, since they can cash in their food stamps at full value. What is needed here is more knowledge of the community benefits of this plan, and a wider use of it. In the meantime, in communities where this simple and efficient method has not yet been adopted, there is still a use for volunteer assistance of local welfare agencies in the same direction -- that of

getting surplus food which would otherwise go to waste into the homes of those who most need it, and particularly into homes where there are undernourished children.

Poverty is the second of the hostile forces that we must attack on the home front. We know that poverty cannot be banished overnight. We know that we need patience and continuous effort in this struggle.

The answer to poverty, of course, is employment. And a really final answer would mean providing employment for every person able and willing to work. We know that many people who are now out of work will find employment in private industry during the coming months. But we know that many others will not be able to get private employment until they receive some preliminary training.

Here is an important task of home defense. In every community we can undertake vocational training. This subject is one that has recently been publicized in all our newspapers, and I do not think that I need give it any new emphasis here. But I will call attention to a fact which is sometimes overlooked. A large number of our older WPA workers, as shown in impartial surveys, have had long experience in skilled work in private industry. Even if these older skilled workers are too old to stand the grind and speed of private jobs, they are often capable of teaching younger men. They have done this on many a WPA project, and they can do the same thing in various training projects set up in our communities. Their situation can be compared to that of the football star who quickly gets too old for football, but who can still be made use of in coaching younger players. These older workers have something of great value to contribute to home defense in this way.

And I should like to mention also the contributions that physically handicapped people can make in various lines of work. Our WPA program has included the training of such handicapped workers -- people who may have lost a hand, an arm or a leg in some industrial accident. There was a time when such people were considered useless. They might sell pencils on the street corner, but that was about all. Now we know that they can be re-trained for kinds of work that they are capable of doing, and that they can support

themselves by their work if they are given a fair chance. We can give such re-training to our handicapped workers in every community. That is another task for the home front.

And now we come to education. I want to say a word about our regular American public school system. It was not always what it is now. It took us a long time to achieve a system of universal, free, public education. And before that system was established, education owed much to voluntary effort and self-sacrifice.

It is always so. The volunteers make a path, which later becomes a broad well-paved road. And education is never a closed system, a finished and perfect thing. There are always new paths to be cleared. Our public school system is now in a period of transition. It has begun to take over -- somewhat hesitantly and doubtfully -- the task of vocational training for young people. That task is now recognized as of very great importance.

At the same time, we have come to realize that education has a job to do for adults. These adults include many young people who dropped out of school to take jobs. They include older people who had few educational opportunities, or none, in their early years, so that they have never even learned to read and write. They include immigrants who have had more or less education in some other country, but who have to start in at the bottom and learn to read and write the language of their new home. They include people of all ages, some of whom want the practical, and others the ideal benefits of education. They have a right to this knowledge. And our nation is in need of better technical accomplishment, the richer individuality and the more enlightened citizenship that only education can provide.

So far, this kind of adult education has been undertaken chiefly by the WPA as a part of its community service. It still stands outside our regular public school system. I look forward to the day when it will be a part of our regular school system. In the meantime, the need for this work is obvious. We should do more of it. And in any rapid local expansion of such efforts, there will be useful work for volunteers. I am thinking particularly of former school teachers, who may have new opportunities for community service.

However, let me digress here sufficiently to say that all former workers, who because of marriage or other reasons, have left their chosen fields of professional endeavor, should now prepare to re-undertake those tasks for which they are equipped.

Among others, ex-school teachers of languages should find useful community tasks. In particular, many more Americans than ever before will need instruction in the Spanish language, the language of all our sister republics in this hemisphere -- between whom and ourselves there will be an increasingly close relationship in the years to come.

Closely allied to all these needs is the need for recreation. It partakes of the values both of education and of health. It is the leavening of the bread of life. We need everywhere more trained recreation leaders -- and more volunteers with special talents for entertaining others. We need people to assist in planning and conducting wider community recreation programs. And we need such services particularly, at this time, in communities where new defense industries have brought in new workers and their families. We need such services also in communities close to military mobilization centers. Among others, we especially need dramatic teachers, men and women who have performed in or have managed amateur dramatic activities. Community dramatic performances and pageants that engage the interests of older and younger people alike, that draw upon many artistic skills and give opportunity for many kinds of self expression, are always of value in creating community spirit.

We need more library workers to help provide the kinds of books that people wish to read during their periods of relaxation. Incidentally, I think you will be interested in the results of a survey WPA has made to ascertain what the people of war-strafed Britain are reading these days.

One fact uncovered was that the long dreary hours of blackout with no outside recreation, has greatly revived interest in household arts and handicraft. Books on these subjects are at a premium. And also, the classics are in heavy demand, with Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens and Kipling as the favorites.

But the one subject in which Britons are most interested is the author of their affliction. The most widely read book in England, according

to the WPA survey, is Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

Musicians, and teachers of music, have an opportunity to serve usefully on the home front. The world needs music, to ease the tension of these anxious days. Anyone who can make music, or can direct the organization of music units, can be of value in community recreation services.

In all our recreational activities there should be the underlying theme of democracy. Yes, and particularly in community drama and pageantry, we can convey to others our own American sentiments and convictions -- a sense of our loyalty and devotion to our American way of life and our American freedom.

In this connection, I want to speak of the great possibilities that exist for training girls for volunteer leadership -- girls from the ages of ten to eighteen. These youngsters can be helped and moulded for future womanhood and future service to the community, in the familiar fields of athletics and recreation. Discussion groups for girls of the teen age are a great character-building instrument -- if the discussions are lively and wisely directed. Through such discussions, girls can be given a sense of their responsibility toward the nation and toward their own community -- so that they, too, will be eager for a chance to serve.

I have left to the last what is perhaps the most terrible of our inward enemies -- Disease. It requires a very specialized kind of service to combat this enemy. Opportunities for service are many in this field, but training is needed for those who serve.

However, health is something in which practically every woman in America is interested. And, under proper direction, there are many women in every community who can assist in the work of protecting the public health. Those with special training as nurses, or in practical care of the sick, can be used in hospitals, or in the homes of those who cannot afford to pay for nursing care.

Our present WPA force of twelve thousand hospital aides will be greatly increased during the next twelve months. As a part of our health program, we shall train as many as 50,000 persons as ward attendants, orderlies and hospital aides. Services of this kind can save many thousands of lives in

such epidemics of influenza as occurred during the World War.

The entire public health service of the WPA is to be expanded to supplement the work of public hospitals, clinics and sanitariums in protecting the health of the American people.

As a health measure, also, the WPA school lunch program will be expanded. About two million school children are now getting the daily benefits of these school lunches. Gardening and food preservation projects, operating in conjunction with the school lunch program, are also to be expanded.

And all this work will still leave room -- plenty of room -- for volunteer services. In this home defense program we are not only planning for today -- we are building for tomorrow. We want to build a better, safer and more homelike America than has ever existed in the past. Some of the volunteer work of which I have spoken needs to be done immediately. Other volunteer work, at least upon any large scale, can wait until there is greater need for it. But we must be ready to volunteer; and we must be prepared now, to be useful then.

There is need for training in first aid. From my own experience with the work of the American Red Cross, I am sure that women in every community will be ready to volunteer for first aid training. If enough people can be trained to serve as leaders in such work, the scope of first aid programs can be broadened to meet any emergency that might arise within our home communities.

I think I have covered now the four major fields of service on the home front. In addition, immediate training can be given to large groups in how to conduct aptitude tests which will reveal the possibilities for service on the parts of many millions of volunteers who might not themselves realize their own best qualifications. Once we have a trained force of workers who can take these tests, then the bigger job of using volunteers in the work that will be of the greatest value can be accomplished with efficiency and dispatch. For example, certain people in every community have a natural aptitude for map reading, map making and drafting. Aptitude tests will locate such persons and they may be asked to volunteer in a type of work that will be of utmost importance to our national defense. Training for civic service also will be expedited in this way -- those with special aptitude for this service will be

- 11 -

located, and their cooperation sought, to supplement the work of hard-pressed civic bureaus and departments, short-handed by the absence of employees who are away for military training.

I hope I have given you a clear picture of the ways in which we all who are not of military eligibility can serve on the home front. And I hope you see as I do that this program is planned not just for today, nor solely for the present emergency. It is planned, as I have said, with thought for the morrow. With the solemn thought that we in America may have the leading role to play in the difficult task that lies ahead -- after the world emerges from the chaos of war.

I am going to close with a remark I heard Eleanor Roosevelt make the other day, for it expresses better than any words of mine could express the task that lies ahead -- and the need for looking ahead now to prepare ourselves. Mrs. Roosevelt said: "We must remember that with half the world in flames, the rest of us, even though we are not touched by the fire, are affected by it; and when the flames have died and there's nothing left but ashes -- we are the ones who must help rebuild the world from those ashes. We must begin now to look ahead, and to plan ahead. We must decide what kind of a world we want to build -- and do what is necessary to make sure we have that kind of a world."

We in America know what kind of a world we want. We want a democratic world -- one in which all the people share the freedom and justice -- and the good things of life. We can have that kind of a world only if we cherish the good things, and earnestly strive to eliminate the bad, in our imperfect world today. The first step in building anything -- be it a world, a nation, or a single house, is to lay a firm foundation.

Let us start now -- in the grass roots of our own communities -- to build the world we want tomorrow.

#-#-#-#-#