

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Great Depression and the New Deal 1929–1939

The Early Years of the Depression, 1929–1932

The stock market crashed a little more than seven months into Herbert Hoover's presidency. During the final two years of his term, Hoover confronted a series of dilemmas posed by an ever-worsening economic crisis unprecedented in severity. That crisis, moreover, had major political and diplomatic implications. Only once before, during 1860 and 1861, had the nation and its chief executive faced a comparable crisis. The Great Depression was recorded in statistics—unemployment, bank and business failures, mortgage foreclosures, and stock market averages. Graphed from 1929 to 1933, these figures resemble the vital signs on the medical chart of a seriously ill patient, data that disclose periodic upticks, but ominously, an overall worsening condition. For patient, family, and friends, hard times were experienced and felt as daily realities.

As more and more businesses and farms failed, construction continued to fall off and unemployment mounted. Increasingly fearful, those who were directly affected reached such numbers that their responses manifest themselves in falling marriage and birth rates. As the economy contracted, many whites were compelled to take jobs formerly held by blacks (such as office cleaning, laundry work, and domestic service); married women who worked were resented and discriminated against in government employment; high school attendance increased (especially among males) in the face of reduced job opportunities; and large numbers of young men and women, unable to contribute to meager family income, became tramps or hoboes.

Document 23-1 provides Herbert Hoover's plan for recovery. Documents 23-2, 23-3, and 23-4 make painfully clear the impact of the Great Depression on individuals and families. For African Americans, farmers, Mexican Americans, and the elderly poor, the Great Depression meant that hard times became harder still.

23-1 Herbert Hoover's Plan (1931)

On June 15, 1931, President Hoover addressed the Indiana Editorial Association, presenting his solutions to the depression that was gripping the country.

Source: Herbert Hoover's Speech to the Indiana Editorial Board, June 15, 1931.

The business depression is the dominant subject before the country and the world today. Its blight stretches from all quarters of the globe to every business place and every cottage door in our land. I propose to discuss it and the policies of the Government in respect to it.

Depressions are not new experiences, though none has hitherto been so widespread. We have passed through no less than fifteen major depressions in the last century. We have learned something as the result of each of these experiences. From this one we shall gain stiffening and economic discipline, a greater knowledge upon which we must build a better safeguarded system. We have come out of each previous depression into a period of prosperity greater than ever before. We shall do so this time.

As we look beyond the horizons of our own troubles and consider the events in other lands, we know that the main causes of the extreme violence and the long continuance of this depression came not from within but from outside the United States. Had our wild speculation; our stock promotion with its infinite losses and hardship to innocent people; our loose and extravagant business methods and our unprecedented drought, been our only disasters, we would have recovered months ago.

A large part of the forces which have swept our shores from abroad are the malign inheritances in Europe of the Great War—its huge taxes, its mounting armament, its political and social instability, its disruption of economic life by the new boundaries. Without the war we would have no such depression. Upon these war origins are superimposed the overrapid expansion of production and collapse in price of many foreign raw materials. The demonetization of silver in certain countries and a score of more remote causes have all contributed to dislocation.

Some particular calamity has happened to nearly every country in the world, and the difficulties of each have intensified the unemployment and financial difficulties of all the others. As either the cause or the effect, we have witnessed armed revolutions within the past two years in a score of nations, not to mention disturbed political life in many others. Political instability has affected three-fourths of the population of the world.

I do not at all minimize the economic interdependence of the world, but despite this, the potential and redeeming strength of the United States in the face of this situation is that we are economically more self-contained than any other great nation. This degree of independence gives assurance that with the passing of the temporary dislocations and shocks we can and will make a large measure of recovery irrespective of the rest of the world. We did so with even worse foreign conditions in 1921.

We can roughly indicate this high degree of self-containment. Our average annual production of movable goods before the depression was about fifty billion dollars. We exported yearly about five billions, or ten per cent. The world disruption has temporarily reduced our exports to about three and one half billions. In other words, the shrink-

age of foreign trade by one and one half billions amounts to only two or three per cent of our total productivity.

Yet as a result of all the adverse forces our production has been reduced by, roughly, ten or twelve billions. This sharp contrast between a national shrinkage of, say, twelve billion dollars and a loss of one and one half billions from export trade is an indication of the disarrangement of our own internal production and consumption entirely apart from that resulting from decreased sales abroad.

Some of this enlarged dislocation is also due to the foreign effects upon prices of commodities and securities. Moreover, the repeated shocks from political disturbance and revolution in foreign countries stimulate fear and hesitation among our business men. These fears and apprehensions are unnecessarily increased by that minority of people who would make political capital out of the depression through magnifying our unemployment and losses. Other small groups in the business world make their contribution to distress by raids on our markets with purpose to profit from depreciation of securities and commodities. Both groups are within the law; they are equally condemned by our public and business opinion; they are by no means helpful to the nation.

Fear and apprehension, whether their origins are domestic or foreign, are very real, tangible, economic forces. Fear of loss of a job or uncertainty as to the future has caused millions of our people unnecessarily to reduce their purchases of goods, thereby decreasing our production and employment. These uncertainties lead our bankers and business men to extreme caution, and in consequence a mania for liquidation has reduced our stocks of goods and our credits far below any necessity. All these apprehensions and actions check enterprise and lessen our national activities. . . .

We must bear in mind at all times our marvelous resources in land, mines, mills, man power, brain power and courage. Over ninety-five per cent of our families have either an income or a bread winner employed. Our people are working harder and are resolutely engaged, individually and collectively, in overhauling and improving their methods and services. That is the fundamental method of repair to the wreckage from our boom of two years ago; it is the remedy for the impacts from abroad. It takes time, but it is going on.

Although fear has resulted in unnecessary reduction in spending, yet these very reductions are piling up savings in our savings banks until today they are the largest in our history. Surplus money does not remain idle for long. Ultimately it is the most insistent promoter of enterprise and of optimism. Consumption of retail goods in many lines is proceeding at a higher rate than last year. The harvest prospects indicate recovery from the drought and increased employment in handling the crop. Revolutions in many countries have spent themselves, and stability is on the ascendancy. The underlying forces of recovery are asserting themselves.

For the first time in history the Federal Government has taken an extensive and positive part in mitigating the effects of depression and expediting recovery. I have conceived that

if we would preserve our democracy this leadership must take the part not of attempted dictatorship but of organizing coöperation in the constructive forces of the community and of stimulating every element of initiative and self-reliance in the country. There is no sudden stroke of either governmental or private action which can dissolve these world difficulties; patient, constructive action in a multitude of directions is the strategy of success. This battle is upon a thousand fronts.

I shall not detain you by a long exposition of these very extensive activities of our Government, for they are already well known. We have assured the country from panic and its hurricane of bankruptcy by coordinated action between the Treasury, the Federal Reserve System, the banks, the Farm Loan and Farm Board systems. We have steadily urged the maintenance of wages and salaries, preserving American standards of living, not alone for its contribution to consumption of goods, but with the far greater purpose of maintaining social goodwill through avoiding industrial conflict with its suffering and social disorder.

We are maintaining organized cooperation with industry systematically to distribute the available work so as to give income to as many families as possible.

We have reversed the traditional policy in depressions of reducing expenditures upon construction work. We are maintaining a steady expansion of ultimately needed construction work in cooperation with the states, municipalities, and industries.

Over two billions of dollars is being expended, and today a million men are being given direct and indirect employment through these enlarged activities. We have sustained the people in twenty-one states who faced dire disaster from the drought. We are giving aid and support to the farmers in marketing their crops, by which they have realized hundreds of millions more in prices than the farmers of any other country. Through the tariff we are saving our farmers and workmen from being overwhelmed with goods from foreign countries where, even since our tariff was revised, wages and prices have been reduced to much lower levels than before.

We are holding down taxation by exclusion of every possible governmental expenditure not absolutely essential or needed in increase of employment or assistance to the farmers. We are rigidly excluding immigration until our own people are employed. The departures and deportations today actually exceed arrivals.

We are maintaining and will maintain systematic voluntary organization in the community in aid of employment and care for distress. There are a score of other directions in which coöperation is organized and stimulation given. We propose to go forward with these major activities and policies. We will not be diverted from them.

By these and other measures which we shall develop as the occasion shall require we shall keep this ship steady in the storm. We will prevent any unnecessary distress in the United States, and by the activities and courage of the American people we will recover from the depression.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the business, industrial, labor, and agricultural leaders for their remarkable spirit of coöperation. Their action is magnificent proof of the fundamental progress of American institutions, of our growth in social and economic understanding, of our sense of responsibility, and of human brotherhood.

Leaders of industry have coöperated in an extraordinary degree to maintain employment and sustain our standards of living. There have been exceptions, but they represent a small per cent of the whole. Labor has coöperated in prevention of conflict in giving greater effort and consequently in reducing unit costs. We have had freedom from strikes, lock-outs, and disorder unequaled even in prosperous times. We have made permanent gains in national solidarity. . . .

While we are fostering the slow but positive processes of the healing of our economic wounds, our citizens are necessarily filled with anxiety, and in their anxiety there is the natural demand for more and more drastic action by the Federal Government. Many of their suggestions are sound and helpful. Every suggestion which comes within the proper authority and province of the Executive is given most earnest consideration. We are, of course, confronted with scores of theoretical panaceas which, however well intended, would inevitably delay recovery.

Some timid people, black with despair, have lost faith in our American system. They demand abrupt and positive change. Others have seized upon the opportunities of discontent to agitate for the adoption of economic patent medicines from foreign lands. Others have indomitable confidence that by some legerdemain we can legislate ourselves out of a world-wide depression. Such views are as accurate as the belief we can exorcise a Caribbean hurricane by statutory law.

For instance, nothing can be gained in recovery of employment by detouring capital away from industry and commerce into the Treasury of the United States, either by taxes or loans, on the assumption that the Government can create more employment by use of these funds than can industry and commerce itself. While I am a strong advocate of expansion of useful public works in hard times, and we have trebled our federal expenditure in aid to unemployment, yet there are limitations upon the application of this principle.

Not only must we refrain from robbing industry and commerce of its capital, and thereby increasing unemployment, but such works require long engineering and legal interludes before they produce actual employment. Above all, schemes of public works which have no reproductive value would result in sheer waste. The remedy to economic depression is not waste, but the creation and distribution of wealth.

It has been urged that the Federal Government should abandon its system of employment agencies and should appropriate large sums to subsidize their establishment in other hands. I have refused to accept such schemes, as they would in many places endow political organizations with the gigantic patronage of workmen's jobs. That would bring

about the most vicious tyranny ever set up in the United States. We have instead expanded our Federal Government agencies which are on a non-political basis. They are of far greater service to labor.

We have had one proposal after another which amounts to a dole from the Federal Treasury. The largest is that of unemployment insurance. I have long advocated such insurance as an additional measure of safety against rainy days, but only through private enterprise or through coöperation of industry and labor itself. The moment the Government enters into this field it invariably degenerates into the dole. For nothing can withstand the political pressures which carry governments over this dangerous border.

The net results of governmental doles are to lower wages toward the bare subsistence level and to endow the slacker. It imposes the injustice of huge burdens upon farmers and other callings which receive no benefits. I am proud that so representative an organization as the American Federation of Labor has refused to approve such schemes. . . .

With industry as well as agriculture we are concerned not merely in the immediate problems of the depression. From the experience of this depression will come not only a greatly sobered and more efficient economic system than we possessed two years ago, but a greater knowledge of its weaknesses as well as a greater intelligence in correcting them. When the time comes that we can look at this depression objectively, it will be our duty searchingly to examine every phase of it.

We can already observe some directions to which endeavor must be pointed. For instance, it is obvious that the Federal Reserve System was inadequate to prevent a large diversion of capital and bank deposits from commercial and industrial business into wasteful speculation and stock promotion. It is obvious our banking system must be organized to give greater protection to depositors against failures. It is equally obvious that we must determine whether the facilities of our security and commodity exchanges are not being used to create illegitimate speculation and intensify depressions.

It is obvious that our taxes upon capital gains viciously promote the booms and just as viciously intensify depressions. In order to avoid taxes, real estate and stocks are withheld from the market in times of rising prices, and for the same reason large quantities are dumped on the market in times of depression. The experiences of this depression indeed demand that the nation carefully and deliberately reconsider the whole national and local problem of the incidence of taxation.

The undue proportion of taxes which falls upon farmers, home-owners, and all real-property holders as compared to other forms of wealth and income, demands real relief. There are far wider questions of our social and economic life which this experience will illuminate. We shall know much more of the method of still further advance toward stability, security, and wider diffusion of the benefits of our economic system.

We have many citizens insisting that we produce an advance "plan" for the future development of the United States. They demand that we produce it right now. I presume the "plan" idea is an infection from the slogan of the "five-year plan" through which Russia is struggling to redeem herself from the ten years of starvation and misery.

I am able to propose an American plan to you. We plan to take care of twenty million increase in population in the next twenty years. We plan to build for them four million new and better homes, thousands of new and still more beautiful city buildings, thousands of factories; to increase the capacity of our railways; to add thousands of miles of highways and waterways; to install twenty-five million electrical horsepower; to grow twenty per cent more farm products. We plan to provide new parks, schools, colleges, and churches for this twenty million people. We plan more leisure for men and women and better opportunities for its enjoyment.

We not only plan to provide for all the new generation, but we shall, by scientific research and invention, lift the standard of living and security of life to the whole people. We plan to secure a greater diffusion of wealth, a decrease in poverty and a great reduction in crime. And this plan will be carried out if we just keep on giving the American people a chance. Its impulsive force is in the character and spirit of our people. They have already done a better job for one hundred and twenty million people than any other nation in all history.

Some groups believe this plan can only be carried out by a fundamental, a revolutionary, change of method. Other groups believe that any system must be the outgrowth of the character of our race, a natural outgrowth of our race, a natural outgrowth of our traditions; that we have established certain ideals, over one hundred and fifty years, upon which we must build rather than destroy. . . .

These ideas present themselves in practical questions which we have to meet. Shall we abandon the philosophy and creed of our people for one hundred and fifty years by turning to a creed foreign to our people? Shall we establish a dole from the Federal Treasury? Shall we undertake federal ownership and operation of public utilities instead of the rigorous regulation of them to prevent imposition? Shall we protect our people from the lower standards of living of foreign countries? Shall the Government, except in temporary national emergencies, enter upon business processes in competition with its citizens? Shall we regiment our people by an extension of the arm of bureaucracy into a multitude of affairs?

Our immediate and paramount task as a people is to rout the forces of economic disruption and pessimism that have swept upon us. . . .

If, as many believe, we have passed the worst of this storm, future months will not be difficult. If we shall be called upon to endure more of this period, we must gird ourselves to steadfast effort, to fail at no point where humanity calls or American ideals are in jeopardy. . . .

In conclusion, whatever the immediate difficulties may be, we know they are transitory in our lives and in the life of

the nation. We should have full faith and confidence in those mighty resources, those intellectual and spiritual forces which have impelled this nation to a success never before known in the history of the world. Far from being impaired,

these forces were never stronger than at this moment. Under the guidance of Divine Providence they will return to us a greater and more wholesome prosperity than we have ever known.

Questions

1. According to Hoover, what were the causes of the Great Depression?
2. What actions did Hoover take to help bring about the country's recovery?
3. What was the "American system"?

23-2 A Wise Economist Asks a Question (1931)

John T. McCutcheon

In a career that spanned forty-three years at the *Chicago Tribune*, John T. McCutcheon (1870–1949) demonstrated a sense of compassion that led him to be known as the “dean of American cartoonists” in the first half of the twentieth century. There is nothing obvious or partisan in this drawing, which may explain why it won a Pulitzer Prize in 1932.

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"A Victim of Bank Failure" (1931)

Questions

1. How did McCutcheon make the man a sympathetic character?
2. Why did he have a squirrel ask the question?
3. What was McCutcheon saying about the American belief in personal responsibility?

23-3 Hard Times and Hoovervilles (1930, 1932, 1941)

With the rise in unemployment, many workers became homeless and ended up in makeshift quarters known as "Hoovervilles," which were usually located in the most depressed parts of town. Homelessness, which was related to the lack of employment, was experienced all over the country, as these three documents indicate, and it was prolonged. The unemployment rate in 1928, the year before the stock market crash, was 4.2 percent. The year after the crash, 1930, it more than doubled to 8.7 percent. In 1932, it climbed steeply to 23.6 percent, although in 1934 it eased a little to 21.7 percent. By 1936, the rate had come down to 16.9 percent but went back up to 19 percent in 1938. The 1930s ended with some improvement, and in 1940, the unemployment rate declined to 14.6 percent. But it was not until the start of World War II that U.S. unemployment was finally brought under control. In 1942, the year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the rate dropped sharply to 4.7 percent and in 1944 it fell even further to 1.2 percent. But, in 1941, even after years of New Deal programs, as the Seattle document indicates, communities were still struggling with what to do with their Hoovervilles.

Sources: From *The New York Times*, November 12, 1930 and January 17, 1932. Copyright © 1930 The New York Times. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the Material without express written permission is prohibited. *Letter from Housing Authority of the City of Seattle to City Council*, March 4, 1941. Courtesy of the Seattle Municipal Archives.

Chicago Jobless Colonize (1930)

SHANTY TOWN CALLED "HOOVERVILLE" HAS A "MAYOR" ON ITS "EASY STREET."

Special to The New York Times.

CHICAGO, Nov. 11.—Hooverville, so-called by a colony of unemployed men, has sprung up in Chicago's front yard at the foot of Randolph Street near Grant Park, like one of the mushroom mining towns of bonanza days of the Far West.

A primitive form of government has been set up in this "shanty town" and Mike Donovan, a disabled former railroad brakeman and miner, is "Mayor" by common consent. It has its Prosperity Road, Easy Street and Hard Times Avenue, all crudely labelled.

The shacks are built of discarded materials. The "Mayor's" residence at the corner of Prosperity Road and Easy Street, is made of brick, wood and sheet iron.

"Building construction may be at a standstill elsewhere, but down here everything is booming," said "Mayor" Donovan today. "Ours is a sort of communistic government. We pool our interests and when the commissary shows signs of depletion, we appoint a committee to see what leavings the hotels have."

St. Louis Hooverville Gets Church (1932)

NO-RENT COLONY DEDICATES ORANGE-CRATE EDIFICE AT ST. LOUIS.

Special Correspondence, THE NEW YORK TIMES

ST. LOUIS, Jan. 13.—Hooverville, a no-rent colony of approximately 400 inhabitants on the banks of the Mississippi River, within the city limits, gave abundant proof this week that it is a permanent settlement. It dedicated a church, and Gus Smith, self-appointed "Mayor" of the community, is the pastor.

The building is a shanty constructed of orange crates and scrap lumber; its pews are rough timbers salvaged from the near-by dump heaps.

Hooverville residents are not "bums." They are victims of the depression period who live in shanties of their own construction on the river bank.

Seattle's Shacks (1941)

The City Council
City of Seattle
County-City Building
Seattle, Washington

Dear Madam and Gentlemen:

In our comprehensive survey of housing conditions in the City of Seattle, we included a special study of shacks and at this time wish to submit to you for your information and possible action our findings and recommendations.

We are interested in the "shack" problem even though our own statutory powers are not broad enough to deal with it directly. If shacks continue to remain or their number grow, it is quite possible, in the light of general conditions, that many families will seek to occupy them. Then we would become directly concerned, as would you, in the accompanying threat to good housing, and in the consequent hazards to health and safety. We deem our work to be preventive as well as corrective.

We do not, however, suggest the immediate or wholesale elimination of shacks, but rather a less disruptive, more orderly and planned method. Specifically, we wish to make the following recommendations:

- (1) That none of the present occupants of shacks be forced to vacate at the present time.
- (2) That as soon, however, as any shack is no longer inhabited by its present occupants, the proper departments of the City be authorized and directed to demolish it.

(3) That the proper departments of the City be authorized and directed to demolish immediately all presently vacant shacks.

(4) That these departments be authorized and directed to prevent the building of any additional shacks in the City of Seattle.

(5) That notices of these intentions of the City be given to all occupants of shacks and public notices posted in concentrated and other shack areas.

(It is not the intention of the Housing Authority of the City of Seattle to seek credit (under the United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended) for any elimination of shacks made pursuant to the above recommendations.)

We have defined a shack as "a dwelling unit of more or less temporary character, constructed without benefit of formal design or plan, of secondhand, nondescript building materials, and located indiscriminately." (In most instances, shacks violate legal building requirements.)

A total of 1687 shacks was found in the city. We are attaching hereto Exhibit A, showing on a map the distribution of these shacks; Exhibit E, tabulating by Census Enumeration Districts their location and number; and Exhibit C, giving basic data concerning their physical condition and occupancy.

We shall be glad to cooperate in any way we can to the end that Seattle may become a city without shacks.

Sincerely yours,
Housing Authority of the City of Seattle

Question

1. Based on the articles and letter, describe what might have been a typical day in Hooverville.

23-4 Women on the Breadlines (1932)

Meridel Le Sueur

Meridel Le Sueur (1900–1996), born in Iowa, was a writer who remained active in radical circles throughout her life. "Women on the Breadlines" was published in *New Masses* but drew fire from Communist editors for its defeatism and "nonrevolutionary spirit." After suffering through her "Dark Time" during the early Cold War, Le Sueur reemerged during the 1970s. Her writing continues to be of interest even today, some years after her death.

Source: Meridel Le Sueur, "Women on the Breadlines" from *Harvest: Collected Stories* by Meridel Le Sueur. Reprinted with the permission of West End Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

I am sitting in the city free employment bureau. It's the women's section. We have been sitting here now for four hours. We sit here every day, waiting for a job. There are no jobs. Most of us have had no breakfast. Some have had scant

rations for over a year. Hunger makes a human being lapse into a state of lethargy, especially city hunger. Is there any place else in the world where a human being is supposed to go hungry amidst plenty without an outcry, without protest,

where only the boldest steal or kill for bread, and the timid crawl the streets, hunger like the beak of a terrible bird at the vitals?

We sit looking at the floor. No one dares think of the coming winter. There are only a few more days of summer. Everyone is anxious to get work to lay up something for that long siege of bitter cold. But there is no work. Sitting in the room we all know it. That is why we don't talk much. We look at the floor dreading to see that knowledge in each other's eyes. There is a kind of humiliation in it. We look away from each other. We look at the floor. It's too terrible to see this animal terror in each other's eyes.

So we sit hour after hour, day after day, waiting for a job to come in. There are many women for a single job. A thin sharp woman sits inside a wire cage looking at a book. For four hours we have watched her looking at that book. She has a hard little eye. In the small bare room there are half a dozen women sitting on the benches waiting. Many come and go. Our faces are all familiar to each other, for we wait here every day.

This is a domestic employment bureau. Most of the women who come here are middle-aged, some have families, some have raised their families and are now alone, some have men who are out of work. Hard times and the man leaves to hunt for work. He doesn't find it. He drifts on. The woman probably doesn't hear from him for a long time. She expects it. She isn't surprised. She struggles alone to feed the many mouths. Sometimes she gets help from the charities. If she's clever she can get herself a good living from the charities, if she's naturally a lick spittle, naturally a little docile and cunning. If she's proud then she starves silently, leaving her children to find work, coming home after a day's searching to wrestle with her house, her children.

Some such story is written on the faces of all these women. There are young girls too, fresh from the country. Some are made brazen too soon by the city. There is a great exodus of girls from the farms into the city now. Thousands of farms have been vacated completely in Minnesota. The girls are trying to get work. The prettier ones can get jobs in the stores when there are any, or waiting on table, but these jobs are only for the attractive and the adroit. The others, the real peasants, have a more difficult time.

Bernice sits next to me. She is a Polish woman of thirty-five. She has been working in people's kitchens for fifteen years or more. She is large, her great body in mounds, her face brightly scrubbed. She has a peasant mind and finds it hard even yet to understand the maze of the city where trickery is worth more than brawn. Her blue eyes are not clever but slow and trusting. She suffers from loneliness and lack of talk. When you speak to her, her face lifts and brightens as if you had spoken through a great darkness, and she talks magically of little things as if the weather were magic, or tells some crazy tale of her adventures on the city streets, embellishing them in bright colors until they hang heavy and thick like embroidery. She loves the city anyhow. It's exciting to

her, like a bazaar. She loves to go shopping and get a bargain, hunting out the places where stale bread and cakes can be had for a few cents. She likes walking the streets looking for men to take her to a picture show. Sometimes she goes to five picture shows in one day, or she sits through one the entire day until she knows all the dialog by heart. . . .

She wants to get married but she sees what happens to her married friends, left with children to support, worn out before their time. So she stays single. She is virtuous. She is slightly deaf from hanging out clothes in winter. She had done people's washing and cooking for fifteen years and in that time saved thirty dollars. Now she hasn't worked steady for a year and she has spent the thirty dollars. She had dreamed of having a little house or a houseboat perhaps with a spot of ground for a few chickens. This dream she will never realize.

She has lost all her furniture now along with the dream. A married friend whose husband is gone gives her a bed for which she pays by doing a great deal of work for the woman. She comes here every day now sitting bewildered, her pudgy hands folded in her lap. She is hungry. Her great flesh has begun to hang in folds. She has been living on crackers. Sometimes a box of crackers lasts a week. She has a friend who's a baker and he sometimes steals the stale loaves and brings them to her.

A girl we have seen every day all summer went crazy yesterday at the YW. She went into hysterics, stamping her feet and screaming.

She hadn't had work for eight months. "You've got to give me something," she kept saying. The woman in charge flew into a rage that probably came from days and days of suffering on her part, because she is unable to give jobs, having none. She flew into a rage at the girl and there they were facing each other in a rage both helpless, helpless. This woman told me once that she could hardly bear the suffering she saw, hardly hear it, that she couldn't eat sometimes and had nightmares at night.

So they stood there, the two women, in a rage, the girl weeping and the woman shouting at her. In the eight months of unemployment she had gotten ragged, and the woman was shouting that she would not send her out like that. "Why don't you shine your shoes?" she kept scolding the girl, and the girl kept sobbing and sobbing because she was starving.

"We can't recommend you like that," the harassed YWCA woman said, knowing she was starving, unable to do anything. And the girls and the women sat docilely, their eyes on the ground, ashamed to look at each other, ashamed of something.

Sitting here waiting for a job, the women have been talking in low voices about the girl Ellen. They talk in low voices with not too much pity for her, unable to see through the mist of their own torment. "What happened to Ellen?" one of them asks. She knows the answer already. We all know it.

A young girl who went around with Ellen tells about seeing her last evening back of a cafe downtown, outside the

kitchen door, kicking, showing her legs so that the cook came out and gave her some food and some men gathered in the alley and threw small coin on the ground for a look at her legs. And the girl says enviously that Ellen had a swell breakfast and treated her to one too, that cost two dollars.

A scrub woman whose hips are bent forward from stooping with hands gnarled like water-soaked branches clicks her tongue in disgust. No one saves their money, she says, a little money and these foolish young things buy a hat, a dollar for breakfast, a bright scarf. And they do. If you've ever been without money, or food, something very strange happens when you get a bit of money, a kind of madness. You don't care. You can't remember that you had no money before, that the money will be gone. You can remember nothing but that there is the money for which you have been suffering. Now here it is. A lust takes hold of you. You see food in the windows. In imagination you eat hugely; you taste a thousand meals. You look in windows. Colors are brighter; you buy something to dress up in. An excitement takes hold of you. You know it is suicide but you can't help it. You must have food, dainty, splendid food, and a bright hat so once again you feel blithe, rid of that ratty gnawing shame.

"I guess she'll go on the street now," a thin woman says faintly, and no one takes the trouble to comment further. Like every commodity now the body is difficult to sell and the girls say you're lucky if you get fifty cents.

It's very difficult and humiliating to sell one's body.

Perhaps it would make it clear if one were to imagine having to go out on the street to sell, say, one's overcoat. Suppose you have to sell your coat so you can have breakfast and a place to sleep, say, for fifty cents. You decide to sell your only coat. You take it off and put it on your arm. The street, that has before been just a street, now becomes a mart, something entirely different. You must approach someone now and admit you are destitute and are now selling your clothes, your most intimate possessions. Everyone will watch you talking to the stranger showing him your overcoat, what a good coat it is. People will stop and watch curiously. You will be quite naked on the street. It is even harder to try to sell one's self, more humiliating. It is even humiliating to try to sell one's labor. When there is no buyer.

The thin woman opens the wire cage. There's a job for a nursemaid, she says. The old gnarled women, like old horses, know that no one will have them walk the streets with the young so they don't move. Ellen's friend gets up and goes to the window. She is unbelievably jaunty. I know she hasn't had work since last January. But she has a flare of life in her that glows like a tiny red flame and some tenacious thing, perhaps only youth, keeps it burning bright. Her legs are thin but the runs in her old stockings are neatly mended clear down her flat shank. Two bright spots of rouge conceal her pallor. A narrow belt is drawn tightly around her thin waist, her long shoulders stoop and the blades show. She runs wild as a colt hunting pleasure, hunting sustenance.

It's one of the great mysteries of the city where women go when they are out of work and hungry. There are not many women in the bread line. There are no flop houses for women as there are for men, where a bed can be had for a quarter or less. You don't see women lying on the floor at the mission in the free flops. They obviously don't sleep in the jungle or under newspapers in the park. There is no law I suppose against their being in these places but the fact is they rarely are.

Yet there must be as many women out of jobs in cities and suffering extreme poverty as there are men. What happens to them? Where do they go? Try to get into the YW without any money or looking down at heel. Charities take care of very few and only those that are called "deserving." The lone girl is under suspicion by the virgin women who dispense charity.

I've lived in cities for many months broke, without help, too timid to get in bread lines. I've known many women to live like this until they simply faint on the street from privations, without saying a word to anyone. A woman will shut herself up in a room until it is taken away from her, and eat a cracker a day and be as quiet as a mouse so there are no social statistics concerning her.

I don't know why it is, but a woman will do this unless she has dependents, will go for weeks verging on starvation, crawling in some hole, going through the streets ashamed, sitting in libraries, parks, going for days without speaking to a living soul like some exiled beast, keeping the runs mended in her stockings, shut up in terror in her own misery, until she becomes too super-sensitive and timid to even ask for a job.

Bernice says even strange men she has met in the park have sometimes, that is in better days, given her a loan to pay her room rent. She has always paid them back.

In the afternoon the young girls, to forget the hunger and the deathly torture and fear of being jobless, try to pick up a man to take them to a ten-cent show. They never go to more expensive ones, but they can always find a man willing to spend a dime to have the company of a girl for the afternoon.

Sometimes a girl facing the night without shelter will approach a man for lodging. A woman always asks a man for help. Rarely another woman. I have known girls to sleep in men's rooms for the night on a pallet without molestation and be given breakfast in the morning.

It's no wonder these young girls refuse to marry, refuse to rear children. They are like certain savage tribes, who, when they have been conquered, refuse to breed.

Not one of them but looks forward to starvation for the coming winter. We are in a jungle and know it. We are beaten, entrapped. There is no way out. Even if there were a job, even if that thin acrid woman came and gave everyone in the room a job for a few days, a few hours, at thirty cents an hour, this would all be repeated tomorrow, the next day and the next.

Not one of these women but knows that despite years of labor there is only starvation, humiliation in front of them.

Mrs. Gray, sitting across from me, is a living spokesman for the futility of labor. She is a warning. Her hands are scarred with labor. Her body is a great puckered scar. She has given birth to six children, buried three, supported them all alive and dead, bearing them, burying them, feeding them. Bred in hunger they have been spare, susceptible to disease. For seven years she tried to save her boy's arm from amputation, diseased from tuberculosis of the bone. It is almost too suffocating to think of that long close horror of years of child-bearing, child-feeding, rearing, with the bare suffering of providing a meal and shelter.

Now she is fifty. Her children, economically insecure, are drifters. She never hears of them. She doesn't know if they are alive. She doesn't know if she is alive. Such subtleties of suffering are not for her. For her the brutality of hunger and cold. Not until these are done away with can those subtle feelings that make a human being be indulged.

She is lucky to have five dollars ahead of her. That is her security. She has a tumor that she will die of. She is thin as a worn dime with her tumor sticking out of her side. She is brittle and bitter. Her face is not the face of a human being. She has borne more than it is possible for a human being to bear. She is reduced to the least possible denominator of human feelings.

It is terrible to see her little bloodshot eyes like a beaten hound's, fearful in terror.

We cannot meet her eyes. When she looks at any of us

we look away. She is like a woman drowning and we turn away. We must ignore those eyes that are surely the eyes of a person drowning, doomed. She doesn't cry out. She goes down decently. And we all look away.

The young ones know though. I don't want to marry. I don't want any children. So they all say. No children. No marriage. They arm themselves alone, keep up alone. The man is helpless now. He cannot provide. If he propagates he cannot take care of his young. The means are not in his hands. So they live alone. Get what fun they can. The life risk is too horrible now. Defeat is too clearly written on it.

So we sit in this room like cattle, waiting for a nonexistent job, willing to work to the farthest atom of energy, unable to work, unable to get food and lodging, unable to bear children—here we must sit in this shame looking at the floor, worse than beasts at a slaughter.

It is appalling to think that these women sitting so listless in the room may work as hard as it is possible for a human being to work, may labor night and day, like Mrs. Gray wash streetcars from midnight to dawn and offices in the early evening, scrub for fourteen and fifteen hours a day, sleep only five hours or so, do this their whole lives, and never earn one day of security, having always before them the pit of the future. The endless labor, the bending back, the water-soaked hands, earning never more than a week's wages, never having in their hands more life than that.

It's not the suffering of birth, death, love that the young reject, but the suffering of endless labor without dream, eating the spare bread in bitterness, being a slave without the security of a slave.

Questions

1. What aspects of “Women on the Breadlines” likely led to the criticism by editors of *New Masses*?
2. What aspects of Le Sueur’s work, revealed in this piece, do you think have led to renewed interest in the writer and to the recent publication of many of her works?
3. What most strikes you about the women Le Sueur describes and their experiences? What of the men who figure in the piece?

Questions for Further Thought

1. Based on your reading of the text and the selections in this chapter, how was Hoover’s plan inadequate in the solutions it proposed for alleviating the suffering of those adversely affected by the economy?
2. Despite the challenges the Great Depression posed to the U.S. political system, communism and other radical solutions never gained widespread followings. Based on the documents in this section and the text, why do you think this was the case?

The New Deal Arrives, 1933–1935

From the beginning of his presidency, Franklin Delano Roosevelt demonstrated that his personality and voice would figure prominently in his administration. Indeed, even before his election, he had dramatically broken precedent by flying to the Democratic National Convention and personally accepting the nomination. In his speech there, he had referred to a “new deal,” a term that quickly gained currency. In his inaugural address (Document 23-5) the following March, President Roosevelt sought to rally a shaken nation at the very depths of the Great Depression. In late June, New Dealer Rexford G. Tugwell explained the significance of the president’s dramatic and wide-ranging reforms to the Federation of Bar Associations of Western New York (Document 23-6). The Great Depression was a worldwide event. Document 23-7 is the open letter to President Roosevelt by English economist John Maynard Keynes.

In 1933, there was broad consensus that the federal government was going to have to play a much larger role in the economy. According to *Business Week*, which reported on the results of a questionnaire Cornell University had sent to businessmen, “the times demand drastic reorganization designed to reduce to a minimum the effects of the business cycle, to increase the stability of employment, and to insure adequate purchasing power. . . . Any plan devised must . . . have in mind raising the standard of living of the country as a whole.” In Document 23-8, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt makes the case for the improvement that would follow with the establishment of better working conditions.

However, broad public and congressional support did not mean that the New Deal lacked significant opposition. Even more ambitious than New Deal legislation were Louisiana senator Huey P. Long’s populist schemes, which attracted national attention (Document 23-9).

23-5 First Inaugural Address (1933)

Franklin D. Roosevelt

With so many Americans suffering in poverty through the winter of 1932–1933, President Roosevelt (1882–1945) knew that he had to find a way to rekindle their spirits. Assisted by advisor Raymond Moley, Roosevelt crafted an inaugural address toward that end. The speech, given on March 4, 1933, was a resounding success.

Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933.

President Hoover, Mr. Chief Justice, my friends:

This is a day of national consecration, and I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our nation impels.

This is pre-eminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper.

So first of all let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.

In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen, government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.

Yet our distress comes from no failure of substance. We are stricken by no plague of locusts. Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for. Nature still offers her bounty and human efforts have multiplied it. Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply.

Primarily, this is because the rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence, have admitted their failure and abdicated. Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men.

True, they have tried, but their efforts have been cast in the pattern of an outworn tradition. Faced by failure of credit, they have proposed only the lending of more money.

Stripped of the lure of profit by which to induce our people to follow their false leadership, they have resorted to exhortations, pleading tearfully for restored confidence. They know only the rules of a generation of self-seekers.

They have no vision, and when there is no vision the people perish.

The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths.

The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.

Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.

The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.

Recognition of the falsity of material wealth as the standard of success goes hand in hand with the abandonment of the false belief that public office and high political position are to be valued only by the standards of pride of place and personal profit; and there must be an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing.

Small wonder that confidence languishes, for it thrives only on honesty, on honor, on the sacredness of obligations, on faithful protection, on unselfish performance. Without them it cannot live.

Restoration calls, however, not for changes in ethics alone. This nation asks for action, and action now.

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously.

It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this em-

ployment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.

Hand in hand with this, we must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, by engaging on a national scale in the redistribution, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land.

The task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products and with this the power to purchase the output of our cities.

It can be helped by preventing realistically the tragedy of the growing loss, through foreclosure, of our small homes and our farms.

It can be helped by insistence that the Federal, State and local governments act forthwith on the demand that their cost be drastically reduced.

It can be helped by the unifying of relief activities which today are often scattered, uneconomical and unequal. It can be helped by national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and of communications and other utilities which have a definitely public character.

There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act, and act quickly.

Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order; there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments; there must be an end to speculation with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.

There are the lines of attack. I shall presently urge upon a new Congress in special session detailed measures for their fulfillment, and I shall seek the immediate assistance of the several States.

Through this program of action we address ourselves to putting our own national house in order and making income balance outgo.

Our international trade relations, though vastly important, are, in point of time and necessity, secondary to the establishment of a sound national economy.

I favor as a practical policy the putting of first things first. I shall spare no effort to restore world trade by international economic readjustment, but the emergency at home cannot wait on that accomplishment.

The basic thought that guides these specific means of national recovery is not narrowly nationalistic.

It is the insistence, as a first consideration, upon the interdependence of the various elements in, and parts of, the United States—a recognition of the old and permanently important manifestation of the American spirit of the pioneer.

It is the way to recovery. It is the immediate way. It is the strongest assurance that the recovery will endure.

In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.

If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never before, our interdependence on each other; that we cannot merely take, but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because, without such discipline, no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective.

We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good.

This I propose to offer, pledging that the larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife.

With this pledge taken, I assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people, dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems.

Action in this image and to this end is feasible under the form of government which we have inherited from our ancestors.

Our Constitution is so simple and practical that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form.

That is why our constitutional system has proved itself the most superbly enduring political mechanism the modern world has produced. It has met every stress of vast expansion of territory, of foreign wars, of bitter internal strife, of world relations.

It is to be hoped that the normal balance of executive and legislative authority may be wholly adequate to meet the unprecedented task before us. But it may be that an unprecedented demand and need for undelayed action may call for temporary departure from that normal balance of public procedure.

I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require.

These measures, or such other measures as the Congress may build out of its experience and wisdom, I shall seek, within my constitutional authority, to bring to speedy adoption.

But in the event that the Congress shall fail to take one of these two courses, and in the event the national emergency is still critical, I shall not evade the clear course of duty that will then confront me.

I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis— broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency as great as the power that would be given me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.

For the trust reposed in me I will return the courage and the devotion that befit the time, I can do no less.

We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike.

We aim at the assurance of a rounded and permanent national life.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action.

They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

In this dedication of a nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us! May He guide me in the days to come!

Questions

1. What did Roosevelt seek to achieve in this address?
2. What do you make of his analogy between wartime and depression circumstances?
3. How do you interpret Roosevelt's religious references?

23-6 Design for Government (1933)

Rexford G. Tugwell

Rexford G. Tugwell (1891–1979) was born in New York and became a professor of economics at Columbia University. Tugwell and other academics such as Raymond C. Moley and Adolf A. Berle Jr. served as advisors to President Roosevelt. The president relied so heavily on their input that they collectively came to be known as the "Brain Trust." In the following excerpt from his book *The Battle for Democracy*, Tugwell makes a case for an activist government.

Source: Excerpt from Rexford G. Tugwell, *The Battle for Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 12–16. Reprinted with the permission of Columbia University Press.

Let me say that it is my view that what we have done is to rediscover the Constitution, to revitalize the powers it was intended to create, many of which had been obscured in the interest of economic aims and purposes which have now become oppressively obsolescent. Those who wrote that great state paper were wise and bold. The best of them, although they disagreed on details, were struggling to meet a crisis which, in some important respects, was not unlike that now confronting us. They were fighting economic disorganization fostered by inadequate centralization. The Constitution, as you recall, was, in effect, a coup d'état; it was adopted in contravention of the Articles of Confederation because the Government set up by those Articles was too weak, too decentralized, to meet contemporary economic necessities.

The governmental pattern set up by the founding fathers was adapted from the British pattern, but with notable modifications. Among them was the grant of wide powers to the Executive at a time when the powers of the Executive in England were declining. And that American set-up—a strong central government with a powerful executive—maintained itself for years, in spite of verbal protests from one political faction or another. Later, a variety of influences led to the rise of an opposed constitutional theory. And part of that new theory was an increased stress on the idea of checks and balances. That idea, in turn, was based on Montesquieu's false description of the workings of the English government. And Montesquieu's misdescription was, in the interest of this new theory, misdescribed and its errors magnified. It was as if an image in a defective mirror had been reflected in another defective mirror.

The resulting false image of a wise government became the controlling design for government in these United States. Governmental action was considered as, at best, a necessary evil. To check and balance government to a point just short of inaction was the desideratum. The prevailing constitutional theory, and therefore the constitutional law, of course corresponded to this prevailing economic outlook.

At the center of this constitutional law was the conception of government as policeman. Government was to stop flagrant abuses, but not, in any circumstances, to do more. It was to be negative and arresting, not positive and stimulating. Its role was minor and peripheral. It was important in this one sense: It was to prevent interferences with the competitive system. Behind that system (so it was said and thoroughly believed) was an invisible hand which beneficently guided warring business men to the promotion of the general welfare.

The jig is up. The cat is out of the bag. There is no invisible hand. There never was. If the depression has not taught us that, we are incapable of education. Time was when the anarchy of the competitive struggle was not too costly. Today it is tragically wasteful. It leads to disaster. We must now supply a real and visible guiding hand to do the task which that mythical, nonexistent, invisible agency was supposed to perform, but never did.

Men are, by impulse, predominantly cooperative. They have their competitive impulses, to be sure; but these are normally subordinate. *Laissez faire* exalted the competitive and maimed the cooperative impulses. It deluded men with the false notion that the sum of many petty struggles was aggregate cooperation. Men were taught to believe that they were, paradoxically, advancing cooperation when they were defying it. That was a viciously false paradox. Of that, today, most of us are convinced and, as a consequence, the cooperative impulse is asserting itself openly and forcibly, no longer content to achieve its ends obliquely and by stealth. We are openly and notoriously on the way to mutual endeavors.

And there is the importance of the rediscovery of the Constitution. We are turning our back on the policeman doctrine of government and recapturing the vision of a government equipped to fight and overcome the forces of economic disintegration. A strong government with an executive amply empowered by legislative delegation is the one way out of our dilemma, and on to the realization of our vast social and economic possibilities.

I have spoken of the resurgence of the cooperative impulse. It has long struggled for more active expression. That struggle might have been unsuccessful. But it is our great good fortune that at the moment when the failure of that struggle would almost surely have meant total collapse, there came into the presidency a man deeply moved by the cooperative impulse. And, above all, it is our good luck that that man was one whose integrity is beyond question.

That point cannot be overemphasized. The success of the new spirit demanded a restoration of power to the Executive. The executive branch of the Government is not a piece of mechanism, it is a body of men. If the new program is to succeed, those men must be wise, able, ingenious and honest. The shift to a new design for government would be a total failure if they were otherwise.

President Roosevelt is establishing, at this most critical period, an enduring pattern of administrative conduct. A lesser man, a self-aggrandizing, humorless one, a person less gifted with administrative talent and less eagerly hungry for wisdom, a dogmatizer without the experimental attitude, would merely have aroused false hopes which his accomplishments would have destroyed. The new design, with its unavoidable stress on vigorous governmental administration, possesses promise of endurance because it found precisely the right man. He is creating a lasting standard of administrative conduct below which none of his successors will dare to fall.

It is rather common to hear praise and criticism in one breath these days. The program is deplored because of its departures from tradition; the shaper and administrator of the program is praised because he embodies all those traits which we like to think of as American. But this is an antithesis which cannot be allowed. If praise is due for what he does, praise also is due for the program which permits the

doing. The Executive is inseparable from his program—not any single part of it, but the total attempt to meet exigencies as, he has said, the football quarterback meets them, with power to do the expedient thing, to advance or to withdraw, creating strategy as the need for it appears.

There is nothing in all this which violates the spirit of our Constitution. As Mr. Justice Brandeis has said, "We do not need to amend the Constitution, we need to amend men's minds." And Mr. Justice Holmes, following in the foot-

steps of Marshall, has reminded us to remember always that it is a Constitution with which we are dealing and that "The Constitution was not designed to establish for all time any particular economic theory, whether of the organic relationship of the individual to the state or of laissez-faire." It is an experiment as all life is an experiment. We shall follow resolutely wherever the dictates of our minds propose. In the noble language of Mr. Justice Brandeis, "If we would guide by the light of reason, we must let our minds be bold."

Questions

1. What did Tugwell mean when he said that the New Deal rediscovered the Constitution?
2. According to Tugwell, what was the new spirit or new design for government? What was the old spirit?

23-7 An Open Letter to President Roosevelt (1933)

John Maynard Keynes

John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) was born in Cambridge, England, and became perhaps the most important economist of the twentieth century. His works include *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), *The End of Laissez-Faire* (1926), *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936), and *How to Pay for the War: A Radical Plan for the Chancellor of the Exchequer* (1940). In the broadest terms, Keynes's thought reflected the shift that occurred from the time when economics was considered a dismal science to one when economics became a much more hopeful endeavor—the study of how to manage business cycles and solve the problems of abundance and overproduction. Keynes believed that capitalism had developed to the point where general prosperity was achievable and sustainable, if governments would avoid orthodoxy and radicalism. What the times called for was flexibility and a willingness of governments to apply and adjust, based on reliable data, appropriate fiscal and monetary policies. The United States was cautious about adopting Keynes's theories but not his optimism.

Source: Open Letter to President Roosevelt by B. John Maynard Keynes, December 30, 1933.

London, Dec. 30.

Dear Mr. President:

You have made yourself the trustee for those in every country who seek to mend the evils of our condition by reasoned experiment within the framework of the existing social system.

If you fail, rational change will be gravely prejudiced throughout the world, leaving orthodoxy and revolution to fight it out.

But if you succeed, new and bolder methods will be tried everywhere, and we may date the first chapter of a new economic era from your accession to office.

This is a sufficient reason why I should venture to lay my reflections before you, though under the disadvantages of distance and partial knowledge.

OPINION IN ENGLAND.

At the moment your sympathizers in England are nervous and sometimes despondent. We wonder whether the order of different urgencies is rightly understood, whether there is a confusion of aims, and whether some of the advice you get is not crack-brained and queer.

If we are disconcerted when we defend you, this is partly due to the influence of our environment in London. For almost every one here has a wildly distorted view of what is happening in the United States.

The average City man believes you are engaged on a hare-brained expedition in face of competent advice, that the best hope lies in your ridding yourself of your present advisers to return to the old ways, and that otherwise the

United States is heading for some ghastly breakdown. That is what they say they smell.

There is a recrudescence of wise head-wagging by those who believe the nose is a nobler organ than the brain. London is convinced that we only have to sit back and wait to see what we shall see. May I crave your attention, while I put my own view?

THE PRESENT TASK.

You are engaged on a double task, recovery and reform—recovery from the slump, and the passage of those business and social reforms which are long overdue. For the first, speed and quick results are essential. The second may be urgent, too; but haste will be injurious, and wisdom of long-range purpose is more necessary than immediate achievement. It will be through raising high the prestige of your administration by success in short-range recovery that you will have the driving force to accomplish long-range reform.

On the other hand, even wise and necessary reform may, in some respects, impede and complicate recovery. For it will upset the confidence of the business world and weaken its existing motives to action before you have had time to put other motives in their place. It may overtask your bureaucratic machine, which the traditional individualism of the United States and the old "spoils system" have left none too strong. And it will confuse the thought and aim of yourself and your administration by giving you too much to think about all at once.

NRA AIMS AND RESULTS.

Now I am not clear, looking back over the last nine months, that the order of urgency between measures of recovery and measures of reform has been duly observed, or that the latter has not sometimes been mistaken for the former. In particular, though its social gains are considerable, I cannot detect any material aid to recovery in the NRA. The driving force which has been put behind the vast administrative task set by this act has seemed to represent a wrong choice in the order of urgencies. The act is on the statute book; a considerable amount has been done toward implementing it; but it might be better for the present to allow experience to accumulate before trying to force through all its details.

That is my first reflection—that NRA, which is essentially reform and probably impedes recovery, has been put across too hastily, in the false guise of being part of the technique of recovery.

My second reflection relates to the technique of recovery itself. The object of recovery is to increase the national output and put more men to work. In the economic system of the modern world, output is primarily produced for sale; and the volume of output depends on the amount of purchasing power, compared with the prime cost of production, which is expected to come on the market.

Broadly speaking, therefore, an increase of output cannot occur unless by the operation of one or other of three factors. Individuals must be induced to spend more out of

their existing incomes, or the business world must be induced, either by increased confidence in the prospects or by a lower rate of interest, to create additional current incomes in the hands of their employees, which is what happens when either the working or the fixed capital of the country is being increased; or public authority must be called in aid to create additional current incomes through the expenditure of borrowed or printed money.

In bad times the first factor cannot be expected to work on a sufficient scale. The second factor will only come in as the second wave of attack on the slump, after the tide has been turned by the expenditures of public authority. It is, therefore, only from the third factor that we can expect the initial major impulse.

Now there are indications that two technical fallacies may have affected the policy of your administration. The first relates to the part played in recovery by rising prices. Rising prices are to be welcomed because they are usually a symptom of rising output and employment. When more purchasing power is spent, one expects rising output at rising prices. Since there cannot be rising output without rising prices, it is essential to insure that the recovery shall not be held back by the insufficiency of the supply of money to support the increased monetary turnover.

THE PROBLEM OF RISING PRICES.

But there is much less to be said in favor of rising prices if they are brought about at the expense of rising output. Some debtors may be helped, but the national recovery as a whole will be retarded. Thus rising prices caused by deliberately increasing prime costs or by restricting output have a vastly inferior value to rising prices which are the natural result of an increase in the nation's purchasing power.

I do not mean to impugn the social justice and social expediency of the redistribution of incomes aimed at by the NRA and by the various schemes for agricultural restriction. The latter, in particular, I should strongly support in principle. But too much emphasis on the remedial value of a higher price-level as an object in itself may lead to serious misapprehension of the part prices can play in the technique of recovery. The stimulation of output by increasing aggregate purchasing power is the right way to get prices up; and not the other way around.

Thus, as the prime mover in the first stage of the technique of recovery, I lay overwhelming emphasis on the increase of national purchasing power resulting from governmental expenditure which is financed by loans and is not merely a transfer through taxation, from existing incomes. Nothing else counts in comparison with this.

BOOM, SLUMP AND WAR.

In a boom, inflation can be caused by allowing unlimited credit to support the excited enthusiasm of business speculators. But in a slump governmental loan expenditure is the only sure means of obtaining quickly a rising output at rising prices. That is why a war has always caused intense in-

dustrial activity. In the past, orthodox finance has regarded a war as the only legitimate excuse for creating employment by government expenditure. You, Mr. President, having cast off such fetters, are free to engage in the interests of peace and prosperity the technique which hitherto has only been allowed to serve the purposes of war and destruction.

The set-back American recovery experienced this past Autumn was the predictable consequence of the failure of your administration to organize any material increase in new loan expenditure during your first six months of office. The position six months hence will depend entirely on whether you have been laying the foundations for larger expenditures in the near future.

I am not surprised that so little has been spent to date. Our own experience has shown how difficult it is to improvise useful loan expenditures at short notice. There are many obstacles to be patiently overcome, if waste, inefficiency and corruption are to be avoided. There are many factors I need not stop to enumerate which render especially difficult in the United States the rapid improvisation of a vast program of public works. I do not blame Secretary Ickes for being cautious and careful. But the risks of less speed must be weighed against those of more haste. He must get across the crevasses before it is dark.

The other set of fallacies, of which I fear the influence, arises out of a crude economic doctrine commonly known as the quantity theory of money. Rising output and rising incomes will suffer a set-back sooner or later if the quantity of money is rigidly fixed. Some people seem to infer from this that output and income can be raised by increasing the quantity of money. But this is like trying to get fat by buying a larger belt. In the United States today your belt is plenty big enough for your belly. It is a most misleading thing to stress the quantity of money, which is only a limiting factor, rather than the volume of expenditure, which is the operative factor.

It is an even more foolish application of the same ideas to believe that there is a mathematical relation between the price of gold and the prices of other things. It is true that the value of the dollar in terms of foreign currencies will affect the prices of those goods which enter into international trade. In so far as an overvaluation of the dollar was impeding the freedom of domestic price-raising policies or disturbing the balance of payments with foreign countries, it was advisable to depreciate it. But exchange depreciation should follow the success of your domestic price-raising policy as its natural consequence, and should not be allowed to disturb the whole world by preceding its justification at an entirely arbitrary pace. This is another example of trying to put on flesh by letting out the belt.

CURRENCY AND EXCHANGE.

These criticisms do not mean that I have weakened in my advocacy of a managed currency or in preferring stable prices to stable exchanges. The currency and exchange policy of a country should be entirely subservient to the aim of raising output and employment to the right level. But the re-

cent gyrations of the dollar have looked to me more like a gold standard on the booze than the ideal managed currency of my dreams.

You may be feeling by now, Mr. President, that my criticism is more obvious than my sympathy. Yet truly that is not so. You remain for me the ruler whose general outlook and attitude to the tasks of government are the most sympathetic in the world. You are the only one who sees the necessity of a profound change of methods and is attempting it without intolerance, tyranny or destruction. You are feeling your way by trial and error, and are felt to be, as you should be, entirely uncommitted in your own person to the details of a particular technique. In my country, as in your own, your position remains singularly untouched by criticism of this or the other detail. Our hope and our faith are based on broader considerations.

If you were to ask me what I would suggest in concrete terms for the immediate future, I would reply thus:

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM.

In the field of gold devaluation and exchange policy the time has come when uncertainty should be ended. This game of blind man's buff with exchange speculators serves no useful purpose and is extremely undignified. It upsets confidence, hinders business decisions, occupies the public attention in a measure far exceeding its real importance, and is responsible both for the irritation and for a certain lack of respect which exist abroad.

You have three alternatives. You can devalue the dollar in terms of gold, returning to the gold standard at a new fixed ratio. This would be inconsistent with your declarations in favor of a long-range policy of stable prices, and I hope you will reject it.

You can seek some common policy of exchange stabilization with Great Britain aimed at stable price levels. This would be the best ultimate solution; but it is not practical politics at the moment, unless you are prepared to talk in terms of an initial value of sterling well below \$5 pending the realization of a marked rise in your domestic price level.

Lastly, you can announce that you will control the dollar exchange by buying and selling gold and foreign currencies at a definite figure so as to avoid wide or meaningless fluctuations, with a right to shift the parities at any time, but with a declared intention only so to do either to correct a serious want of balance in America's international receipts and payments or to meet a shift in your domestic price level relative to price levels abroad.

THE FAVORED POLICY.

This appears to me your best policy during the transitional period. You would be waiving your right to make future arbitrary changes which did not correspond to any relevant change in the facts, but in other respects you would retain your liberty to make your exchange policy subservient to the needs of your domestic policy—free to let out your belt in proportion as you put on flesh.

In the field of domestic policy, I put in the forefront, for the reasons given above, a large volume of loan expenditure under government auspices. It is beyond my province to choose particular objects of expenditure. But preference should be given to those which can be made to mature quickly on a large scale, as, for example, the rehabilitation of the physical condition of the railroads. The object is to start the ball rolling.

The United States is ready to roll toward prosperity, if a good hard shove can be given in the next six months. Could not the energy and enthusiasm which launched the NRA in its early days be put behind a campaign for accelerating capital expenditures, as wisely chosen as the pressure of circumstances permits? You can at least feel sure that the country will be better enriched by such projects than by the involuntary idleness of millions.

PLENTY OF CHEAP CREDIT.

I put in the second place the maintenance of cheap and abundant credit, in particular the reduction of the long-term rate of interest. The turn of the tide in Great Britain is largely

attributable to the reduction in the long-term rate of interest which ensued on the success of the conversion of the war loan. This was deliberately engineered by the open-market policy of the Bank of England.

I see no reason why you should not reduce the rate of interest on your long-term government bonds to $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent or less, with favorable repercussions on the whole bond market, if only the Federal Reserve System would replace its present holdings of short-dated Treasury issues by purchasing long-dated issues of exchange. Such a policy might become effective in a few months, and I attach great importance to it.

With these adaptations or enlargements of your existing policies, I should expect a successful outcome with great confidence. How much that would mean, not only to the material prosperity of the United States and the whole world, but in comfort to men's minds through a restoration of their faith in the wisdom and the power of government!

*With great respect,
Your obedient servant,*

J. M. KEYNES.

Questions

1. According to Keynes, what could be learned from war that could be applied to the current economic crisis?
2. What were Keynes's specific policy recommendations?

23-8 The State's Responsibility for Fair Working Conditions (1933)

Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) brought to the White House her public and organizational experience in reform causes during the 1920s. As First Lady, she advised the president and advocated causes important to her (though not necessarily to him), including youth, women, and African Americans.

Source: "The State's Responsibility for Fair Working Conditions" by Eleanor Roosevelt is reprinted with the permission of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc, from *Scribner's Magazine*, March 1933. Copyright © 1938 by Charles Scribner's Sons. All rights reserved.

No matter how fair employers wish to be, there are always some who will take advantage of times such as these to lower unnecessarily the standards of labor, thereby subjecting him to unfair competition. It is necessary to stress the regulation by law of these unhealthy conditions in industry. It is quite obvious that one cannot depend upon the worker in such times as these to take care of things in the usual way. Many women, particularly, are not unionized and even unions have temporarily lowered their standards in order to keep their people at work. If you face starvation, it is better to accept almost anything than to feel that you and your children are go-

ing to be evicted from the last and the cheapest rooms which you have been able to find and that there will be no food.

Cut after cut has been accepted by workers in their wages, they have shared their work by accepting fewer days a week in order that others might be kept on a few days also, until many of them have fallen far below what I would consider the normal and proper standard for healthful living. If the future of our country is to be safe and the next generation is to grow up to healthy and good citizens, it is absolutely necessary to protect the health of our workers now and at all times.

It has been found, for instance, in Germany, in spite of the depression and the difficulty in making wages cover good food, that sickness and mortality rates have been surprisingly low amongst the workers, probably because of the fact that they have not been obliged to work an unhealthy number of hours.

Limiting the number of working hours by law has a twofold result. It spreads the employment, thereby giving more people work, and it protects the health of the workers. Instead of keeping a few people working a great many hours and even asking them to share their work with others by working fewer days, it limits all work to a reasonable number

of hours and makes it necessary to employ the number of people required to cover the work.

Refusing to allow people to be paid less than a living wage preserves to us our own market. There is absolutely no use in producing anything if you gradually reduce the number of people able to buy even the cheapest products. The only way to preserve our markets is to pay an adequate wage.

It seems to me that all fair-minded people will realize that it is self-preservation to treat the industrial worker with consideration and fairness at the present time and to uphold the fair employer in his efforts to treat his employees well by preventing unfair competition.

Questions

1. What group was Roosevelt attacking?
2. With whom was she aligning herself?
3. What kind of political fallout could such views have had for her husband? Should that have been a consideration for her? Why or why not?

23-9 The Long Plan (1933)

Huey P. Long

To his supporters, Senator Huey P. Long (1893–1935) of Louisiana was a saint; to his enemies, he was Satan. Long referred to himself simply as “the Kingfish.” Until an assassin murdered him, Long and his brand of populism seemed strong enough to pose a threat to FDR’s winning a second term. Long titled his autobiography *Every Man a King*. Following is his plan to make that vision a reality.

Source: From Huey P. Long, *Every Man a King: The Autobiography of Huey P. Long* (1933). Used by permission of the Estate of Huey Long.

THE MADDENED FORTUNE HOLDERS AND THEIR INFURIATED PUBLIC PRESS!

The increasing fury with which I have been, and am to be, assailed by reason of the fight and growth of support for limiting the size of fortunes can only be explained by the madness which human nature attaches to the holders of accumulated wealth.

What I have proposed is:—

THE LONG PLAN

1. A capital levy tax on the property owned by any one person of 1% of all over \$1,000,000; 2% of all over \$2,000,000 etc., until, when it reaches fortunes of over \$100,000,000, the government takes all above that figure; which means a limit on the size of any one man’s fortune to something like \$50,000,000—the balance to go to the government to spread out in its work among all the people.

2. An inheritance tax which does not allow any one person to receive more than \$5,000,000 in a lifetime without

working for it, all over that amount to go to the government to be spread among the people for its work.

3. An income tax which does not allow any one man to make more than \$1,000,000 in one year, exclusive of taxes, the balance to go to the United States for general work among the people.

The foregoing program means all taxes paid by the fortune holders at the top and none by the people at the bottom; the spreading of wealth among all the people and the breaking up of a system of Lords and Slaves in our economic life. It allows the millionaires to have, however, more than they can use for any luxury they can enjoy on earth. But, with such limits, all else can survive.

That the public press should regard my plan and effort as a calamity and me as a menace is no more than should be expected, gauged in the light of past events. . . .

In 1932, the vote for my resolution showed possibly a half dozen other Senators back of it. It grew in the last Congress to nearly twenty Senators. Such growth through one

other year will mean the success of a venture; the completion of everything I have undertaken,—the time when I can and will retire from the stress and fury of my public life, maybe as my forties begin,—a contemplation so serene as to appear impossible.

That day will reflect credit on the States whose Senators took the early lead to spread the wealth of the land among all the people.

Then no tear dimmed eyes of a small child will be lifted into the saddened face of a father or mother unable to give it the necessities required by its soul and body for life; then

the powerful will be rebuked in the sight of man for holding that which they cannot consume, but which is craved to sustain humanity; the food of the land will feed, the raiment clothe, and the houses shelter all the people; the powerful will be elated by the well being of all, rather than through their greed.

Then, those of us who have pursued that phantom of Jefferson, Jackson, Webster, Theodore Roosevelt and Bryan may hear wafted from their lips in Valhalla:

EVERY MAN A KING

Questions

1. What was Long proposing?
2. Who was most likely to support him? Why?
3. Was Long arguing for reform or revolution? In your answer, consider the status of the rich under the Long Plan.

Questions for Further Thought

1. Compare and contrast Rexford G. Tugwell's "Design for Government" (Document 23-6) with Herbert Hoover's plan (Document 23-1).
2. To what extent were Roosevelt's policies "Keynesian"? In what ways were they clearly not? Provide examples.

The Second New Deal and the Redefining of Liberalism, 1935–1938

The Second New Deal initially involved a leftward shift in Congress (the Democrats had gained additional House seats in 1934) and in the administration, which was under attack from the right for what it had done and under pressure from the left for what it had not done. In 1935, Congress took the lead in enacting the National Labor Relations Act to assist the labor movement, and the administration took the lead in passing the Social Security Act to provide old-age pensions, unemployment compensation, and assistance to the "deserving poor." These laws were to become part of the New Deal's legacy. In a landslide victory one year later, Roosevelt won reelection, while his party added to its congressional majority.

Roosevelt's second term proved to be less successful than his first. His early 1937 proposal to enlarge the Supreme Court aroused widespread opposition. A sharp economic downturn during 1937 and 1938, the so-called Roosevelt recession, damaged the president, his administration, and his party. The Democratic Party itself was increasingly divided between liberals (mostly northern and urban) and conservatives (mostly southern and rural). As a consequence, in 1937 and 1938, only a few New Deal measures passed Congress. During 1938, FDR failed to unseat conservative Democratic congressional opponents in party primary elections and the Republicans registered gains in midterm elections. Clearly, the New Deal tide that had flowed in 1935 and 1936 ebbed in 1937 and 1938, resulting in a lasting political stalemate.

Document 23-10 provides portions of the 1936 Republican and Democratic national platforms, while Document 23-11 provides the Socialist Party's critique of the New Deal.

23-10 Republican and Democratic National Platforms (1936)

In 1936, the Republicans nominated Alfred M. Landon and Colonel Frank Knox for president and vice president, each on the first ballot. The Democrats renominated Franklin D. Roosevelt and John Nance Garner by acclamation. Before his nomination, Landon telegraphed the Republican convention to express agreement with the platform but advocated a constitutional amendment to safeguard women and children in the workplace and to establish wage and hour standards in case the courts struck down pending legislation. The Democratic platform chided the Republican document for proposing state action to cope with national problems and recommended a "clarifying amendment" if necessary to ensure that federal and state governments could constitutionally enact necessary legislation. The portions of the national platforms excerpted here reveal the depths of partisan differences over the New Deal.

Source: Republican and Democratic National Platforms (1936).

REPUBLICAN

America is in peril. The welfare of American men and women and the future of our youth are at stake. We dedicate ourselves to the preservation of their political liberty, their individual opportunity and their character as free citizens, which today for the first time are threatened by Government itself.

For three long years the New Deal Administration has dishonored American traditions and flagrantly betrayed the pledges upon which the Democratic Party sought and received public support.

The powers of Congress have been usurped by the President.

The integrity and authority of the Supreme Court have been flouted.

The rights and liberties of American citizens have been violated.

Regulated monopoly has displaced free enterprise.

The New Deal Administration constantly seeks to usurp the rights reserved to the States and to the people.

It has insisted on the passage of laws contrary to the Constitution.

It has intimidated witnesses and interfered with the right of petition.

It has dishonored our country by repudiating its most sacred obligations.

It has been guilty of frightful waste and extravagance, using public funds for partisan political purposes.

It has promoted investigations to harass and intimidate American citizens, at the same time denying investigations into its own improper expenditures.

It has created a vast multitude of new offices, filled them with its favorites, set up a centralized bureaucracy, and sent out swarms of inspectors to harass our people.

It has bred fear and hesitation in commerce and industry, thus discouraging new enterprises, preventing employment and prolonging the depression.

It secretly has made tariff agreements with our foreign competitors, flooding our markets with foreign commodities.

It has coerced and intimidated voters by withholding relief to those opposing its tyrannical policies.

It has destroyed the morale of our people and made them dependent upon government.

Appeals to passion and class prejudice have replaced reason and tolerance.

To a free people, these actions are insufferable. This campaign cannot be waged on the traditional differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. The responsibility of this election transcends all previous political divisions. We invite all Americans, irrespective of party, to join us in defense of American institutions.

DEMOCRATIC

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that the test of a representative government is its ability to promote the safety and happiness of the people.

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that 12 years of Republican leadership left our Nation sorely stricken in body, mind, and spirit; and that three years of Democratic leadership have put it back on the road to restored health and prosperity.

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that 12 years of Republican surrender to the dictatorship of a privileged few have been supplanted by a Democratic leadership which has returned the people themselves to the places of authority, and has revived in them new faith and restored the hope which they had almost lost.

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that this three-year recovery in all the basic values of life and the reestablishment of the American way of living has been brought about by humanizing the policies of the Federal Government as they affect the personal, financial, industrial, and agricultural well-being of the American people.

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that government in a modern civilization has certain inescapable obligations to its citizens, among which are:

- (1) Protection of the family and the home.
- (2) Establishment of a democracy of opportunity for all the people.

- (3) Aid to those overtaken by disaster.

These obligations, neglected through 12 years of the old leadership, have once more been recognized by American Government. Under the new leadership they will never be neglected.

Questions

1. What appeals to emotion do the platforms make?
2. Identify New Deal measures that were indicted by the Republicans.
3. Identify New Deal measures that fit into one or more of the three “inescapable obligations” of government enumerated by the Democrats.

23-11 What Was the New Deal? (1936)

Norman Thomas

Norman Thomas (1884–1968) was a Presbyterian pastor and pacifist who joined the Socialist Party in 1918. He became the party's leader in 1926, after the death of Eugene V. Debs (Document 17-12), four-time presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket. Thomas would receive his party's nomination for the presidency six times. Although he was handily defeated in each election, he represented a dissenting voice and helped to found what would become the American Civil Liberties Union. In the following excerpt, Thomas clearly distinguishes the New Deal from the Socialist Party's positions on the leading issues of the day.

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It is a testimony to the economic illiteracy of America that the New Deal has been called almost everything from communism and socialism to fascism. Or, as one editor put it: “Socialism or Fascism—What’s the difference? We don’t like it.” Actually the New Deal is, or rather was, an experimental attempt at reformed capitalism. Part of the time Mr. Roosevelt talked, and practiced very little, the gospel of the virtue of smallness. Little business was, he has said or implied, pretty good. His effort to break up big utility holding companies looked in that direction. He made gestures toward it in some of his tax proposals. His declaration of a war of liberation against “economic dynasties” in his acceptance speech can be interpreted as a modern renewal of the struggle of the individual against the growth of concentration of control in the hands of the masters of finance capital. But his main reliance has been state capitalism; that is a degree of government ownership and a much greater degree of government regulation of economic enterprises for the sake of bolstering up the profit system.

It was not socialism. The argument to the contrary was born partly from the American delusion that government

ownership equals socialism and government regulation approaches it. That depends, of course, on who owns the government, and for what purpose the government owns industry: for war and militarism; for greater security of banking as a better instrument of the profit system, or for the sake of planned abundance for all.

There is, however, more definite reason why “Mr. John Q. Public” should think the New Deal and Mr. Roosevelt's present efforts are socialistic. He has been told so in various accounts by Mr. David Lawrence, Mr. Alfred Emanuel Smith and Mr. James P. Warburg, whose book *Hell Bent for Election* has been circulated as a campaign document. In Denver one of my Socialist friends was assured by a woman that it was entirely unnecessary for her to hear Mr. Thomas talk about socialism. She knew all about it. Mr. Warburg's book had told her that the New Deal was socialism and she knew all about the New Deal!

Now as everybody knows, or ought to know, the essence of socialism lies in the end of the class division of income; that is, in planned production for the general use rather than for the private profit of an owning class. Such planned pro-

duction requires the social ownership of the great natural resources and the principal means of production and distribution. To this principle Mr. Roosevelt has not even professed allegiance; rather he has declared his support of a profit system that in one of his official addresses he inaccurately defined. Only in the Tennessee Valley Authority is there an approximation of a socialist approach to a great economic problem. For the rest Mr. Roosevelt put the banks in order and turned them back to the bankers; he set an able administrator or co-ordinator, Mr. Joseph B. Eastman, over the railroads, not to socialize them but to help to pull them out of depression primarily for the benefit of private stockholders whose railway holdings will thereby be made more expensive if and when the government takes them over.

That such a program should be confused with socialism by special pleaders like Mr. Warburg is perhaps in part the fault of European socialists who in office have so often been concerned only with reforms attainable within capitalism. It may be a little our fault in America that in our Socialist platform of 1932 we did not distinguish more plainly between immediate demands and our essential revolutionary purpose. But only a little. The Socialist platform of 1932 in its opening paragraphs gives the Socialist diagnosis of poverty and insecurity. It declares for socialization in more than one section. Mr. Warburg makes a plausible case that Mr. Roosevelt has carried out the Socialist platform by a highly selective choice of Socialist demands, and by a very superficial test of what it would mean to carry out effectively even those demands to which Mr. Roosevelt apparently paid some heed.

For example, during years of boondoggling and other forms of made work, public housing in the sense in which we Socialists developed our demand for it in 1932 and 1933 was grossly neglected. Only toward the end of the four-year term did Senator Wagner introduce his inadequate public housing bill which was not on the President's *must* list. Congress adjourned without passing it. The next Congress, even assuming Mr. Roosevelt's election, is likely to be less, not more, progressive in this matter. With a third of our people housed in shacks and slums fit only for destruction, the builders and the workers in materials were kept in unemployment on a miserable dole or some form of improvised or comparatively non-essential public work. And they call this socialism!

Or, to take an even more striking example: When the President finally got around to security legislation, long dear to the hearts of Socialists, he took the name rather than the substance of any Socialist proposal. Intelligent Socialists vigorously repudiate any responsibility for the President's so-called Security Bill. This omnibus measure neglects altogether the vital matter of health insurance or any equivalent for it. Its immediate allowance to the states for old age assistance is meager. The reserve to be set up for old age insurance is very large and the manner of its investment makes for a dangerous degree of political control over business in the future, without in the least changing the basic principles of that control from those appropriate to capitalism to those

which would be necessary under a cooperative commonwealth.

Worst of all, however, is the treatment given to unemployment insurance. The federal government has set a certain tax on payrolls; ninety per cent of this tax to be rebated to employers who may come under state unemployment insurance schemes for the support of such schemes. Under the most favorable circumstances, the amount thus rebated cannot provide more than a fifteen-week period of insurance at a rate not to exceed \$15 a week. The plan would work out somewhat as follows:

If you are now unemployed your chance of being helped by unemployment insurance depends upon your getting a job. You must hold a job while the reserve piles up in the Federal Treasury and while the state of which you are a citizen works out its own unemployment insurance plan. Then if you lose the job you may possibly get \$15 a week for fifteen weeks provided the optimistic calculations of the amount to be received are correct, and provided your particular state takes advantage of the law and sets up its own machinery for insurance. There are forty-eight states. There will be forty-eight different systems—if all the states get around to providing unemployment insurance which is more than all of them have yet done in the case of workmen's compensation. There will be enormous confusion. The benefits to the unemployed will be kept down because of the fear of each state that adequate insurance measures will drive corporations into the borders of other states less generous in their treatment of the workers. The payroll tax itself will to a large extent be passed on to consumers; that is, the workers themselves, in an increase in prices. It will be added to the immense volume of indirect taxation or of sales taxes under which the American worker now struggles. Moreover the tax on employers as the sole support of unemployment insurance will inevitably spur them to reduce it by reducing the number of their employees. It will stimulate technological unemployment.

This is not socialism—not even what Mr. David Lawrence calls "unconscious socialism." The most that one can say is that in 1933 President Roosevelt had to act in a crisis. The principles to guide any effective action were not to be found in his own platform, and certainly not in the musty Republican document. Like many a politician before him, he had to turn to ideas advanced by Socialists. The trouble is not that he took some of them, but that he took so few and carried them out so unsatisfactorily. The moral of the tale is that if you want a child brought up right you better leave him with his parents, not turn him over to unsympathetic strangers.

But if what Mr. Roosevelt has given us is not socialism, neither is it fascism. The New Deal has gone a long way toward the economics of state capitalism which are the economics of fascism when it comes to power. A well-informed Italian journalist, a visitor in this country, told me that Roosevelt's achievements were not only in line with Mussolini's ideal of the corporative state, but that Mr. Roosevelt had

gone so far in his first year that he had actually spurred Mussolini to action. He had good grounds for his argument. But fascism while it arises out of the economic distress of the middle class is not of itself primarily an economic program. It is an extra-legal revolutionary, or rather counter-revolutionary, effort of the middle class, led by a demagogue, to use the power of the state and the religion of nationalism to maintain its own status and, for a while longer, the grossly unequal division of the social income which the profit system has created and still maintains. In power the fascist demagogue as dictator does not satisfy the little men of the middle class by splitting things up. He operates, because he has to, under the forms of state capitalism, but his appeal is not to the excellencies of state capitalism as an economic device; it is to the national pride of his people. Mr. Roosevelt has not given or sought to give us the equivalent of a fascist dictatorship. This or that thing which has been done under or during his Administration can justly be called fascist in tendency. The President's economics are in action, if not in intention, more nearly the economics of fascism than of socialism. Yet he himself is less clearly a forerunner of fascism than was such a demagogue as Huey Long. Of this we shall have more to say in later chapters. Here we are absolving the New Deal of fascism.

Intelligent and sympathetic critics of the New Deal will agree with me that the New Deal is neither socialism nor fascism, but will vehemently deny that it is dead. Despite the Supreme Court they maintain that it still has some coherent shape of which N.R.A. and A.A.A. were not an essential part. Just what that shape is they are somewhat vague in describing. Of course, if all we are to understand by the New Deal is the President's willingness to sponsor more relief and social welfare legislation and to spend more on these causes than Mr. Hoover; his rather friendly attitude to organized labor; his occasionally resentful attitude toward the United States Chamber of Commerce; and his professed desire to befriend the "little man"—some of which he has incorporated into law and some of which, perhaps, he has impressed on his party—the New Deal is not dead. It is one more expression of an uncritical, moralizing progressivism like the first Roosevelt's Square Deal or Wilson's New

Democracy. But for a time the New Deal seemed to have more definite outline and structure than that. Our criticism is that the New Deal if it is alive in this vaguely progressive sense has not been successful. Certainly it has solved no basic problem.

What it has done is to let in some of the farmers—by no means all—on the old game of subsidy; begin some excellent work in protecting the soil from erosion; give some recognition to organized labor and try to write into law its right to organize and bargain collectively; abate—at least while N.R.A. lasted—child labor, long hours, and sweatshop wages; lend money on fairly easy terms to home owners; give some protection to bank depositors and investors and speculators in the stock market; ease a little the money stringency and the burden of debt by devaluing the dollar; definitely assume some federal responsibility for social security and immediate unemployment relief through public work and outright doles; set up T.V.A. in the electric power field, and pass drastic legislation against holding companies. Incidentally it gave a genuine New Deal to the original Americans, the Indians.

How this has been done is a subject for criticism in this book. I believe that on the whole Mr. Roosevelt did more for such temporary capitalist "recovery" as we have than for reform. Nevertheless, for the liberal believer in a possible "good" capitalism the list records a notable effort at reform. To one who faces the American economic and political scene realistically, despite the program's serious theoretical and practical shortcomings, it was as much of an achievement along its own line and within capitalist limits as we could reasonably expect in a country where labor unions and other forces desiring change were so weak. It stands in sharp contrast to the Hoover record. That it is fundamentally a failure, is not primarily its fault as a New Deal of the old capitalist deck; it is the fault of the whole game. Neither the Old Deal nor the New Deal, nor any variant of them, can bring us plenty, peace, and freedom as long as our magnificent machinery is geared to the production of profit for private owners—most of them absentee owners. It is impossible to keep that system which depends upon relative scarcity and get the good society. This is the theme of our argument.

Questions

1. According to Thomas, the New Deal was neither socialism nor fascism. Explain.
2. Explain what Thomas meant by comparing the New Deal with Theodore Roosevelt's Square Deal and Woodrow Wilson's New Democracy or New Freedom.
3. What did Thomas criticize and praise about the New Deal?

Questions for Further Thought

1. The supporters of the New Deal were a political coalition that included industrial workers, professionals, intellectuals, and scientists. Why did the New Deal appeal to so varied a group? What problems were likely to strain this coalition?

-
2. Based on the documents and text, evaluate the effectiveness of the New Deal in terms of its goals and accomplishments.
-

The New Deal's Impact on Society

New Deal governmental policies would affect the nation for decades, even to the present. The federal government assumed a larger role in the economy, which continued to be based on the private sector, and with it a larger presence in the lives and minds of Americans. Agriculture and labor organizations received lasting recognition; for a time, the creative and performing arts were encouraged by government. A rudimentary welfare state came into existence, and the Democratic Party, which had come to national power during the Great Depression, remained the nation's majority party for more than two decades following the death of FDR.

A range of groups that contributed to and benefited from the New Deal merit attention in their own right. Women, ethnic and religious minorities, and African Americans came to play larger public roles; some in government, others in private organizations. With Eleanor Roosevelt (Document 23-8) in the White House; Francis Perkins in the cabinet; Mary McLeod Bethune, an African American, in the National Youth Administration; and Genora Johnson Dollinger in the labor movement, women figured significantly in the events of the period. Similarly, the government employed Jews and Catholics at a time when the private labor market was tight because of the Depression and jobs were frequently closed to them because of prejudice.

Document 23-12 deals with working men and women (Genora Johnson Dollinger among them) during the General Motors sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, in 1936 and 1937. In Document 23-13, Richard Wright, who later became a novelist, offers testimony about his temporary attraction to communism during this period. Document 23-14 reveals the concern of southern Democrats over a proposed federal antilynching law early in 1938. Document 23-15 is Lorena Hickok's 1934 report on conditions in Arizona to Harry L. Hopkins, administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Document 23-16 is taken from Paul Sears's influential study on North American ecology, *Deserts on the March* (1935).

23-12 The Sit-Down Strike at General Motors (1937)

Mary Heaton Vorse

The Flint, Michigan, sit-down strike against General Motors was among the most dramatic and significant episodes in American labor history. Defying court injunctions and police attacks, workers occupied the General Motors plant from December 31, 1936, to February 11, 1937. The strike led to the recognition of the United Automobile Workers by GM and Chrysler, though Ford continued to resist unionization for some time. Journalist Mary Heaton Vorse (1874–1966) here reports on the GM sit-down strike, the men and women involved in it, and labor's day of triumph.

Source: Excerpt from Mary Heaton Vorse, *Labor's New Millions* (1938; New York: Ayer, 1969), 76–77, 88–90. Reprinted with permission.

I went down to the Chevrolet plant with two members of the Emergency Brigade. The workers had now captured plant No. 4. The street was full of people—there were about twenty policemen between the bridge and the high gate of the plant.

They were quiet and unprovocative, so the crowd of pickets was good-natured. The sound car was directing operations.

The use of the sound truck is new in strike procedure and it is hard to know how a strike was ever conducted without

it. As we came down past the policemen a great voice, calm and benign, proclaimed that everything was in hand—the plant was under control.

Next the great disembodied voice, really the voice of auburn-haired young Roy Reuther [a young organizer of the United Automobile Workers], urged the men in the plant to barricade themselves from tear gas. Every now and then the voice boomed:

“Protection squad. Attention! Guard your sound car. Protection squad. Attention!”

Then the voice addressed the workers who crowded the windows of the lower levels. At the top of the steep flight of steps were the workers of the plant, lunch buckets under their arms, waving at the pickets in the street. A crowd of workers fringed the roof. The sound car inquired if they were union men. They shouted, “Yes.” The crowd cheered.

The measured soothing voice of the sound car boomed:

“Word has come to us that there are men in the crowd anxious to join the union. Go to the last car, you will find the cards ready to sign. If you have no money for dues with you you can come to Pengally Hall later.” The sound car struck up *Solidarity* and the men at the top of the steps, on top of the plant, in the street, all sang.

A woman’s voice next—Genora Johnson [organizer of the Women’s Emergency Brigade]. She told the crowd that the women had gone to the Hall to wipe their eyes clear of tear gas and would soon be back. “We don’t want any violence; we don’t want any trouble. We are going to do everything we can to keep from trouble, but we are going to protect our husbands.”

Down the hill presently came a procession, preceded by an American flag. The women’s bright red caps showed dramatically in the dark crowd. They were singing, *Hold the Fort*.

To all the crowd there was something moving about seeing the women return to the picket line after having been gassed in front of plant No. 9. A cheer went up; the crowd took up the song. The line of bright-capped women spread itself out in front of the high gate. Clasping hands, they struck up the song, *We Shall Not Be Moved*. Some of the men who had jumped over the gate went back, amid the cheers of the crowd.

I went to the top of the little hill and a file of men were coming out of the back of the building.

“Are you going home?”

“Home—Hell no! We’re going back to picket the plant. Half of us are sitting down inside, and half of us are coming out to picket from the street.”

“How many of you are for the sit-down?”

“Ninety per cent,” a group of them chorused.

What happened that day [the day the workers left in victory—February 11, 1937] in Flint was something that no one who ever saw it could possibly forget. Never since Armistice Day has anything been seen comparable to its in-

tensity. A mighty emotion shook the working people of that town. Joy and freedom dominated Flint’s commonplace streets.

It was as if Flint had been under a spell for a long time, perhaps always. Fear and suspicion had walked through Flint’s streets. People didn’t dare to join unions. They’d get fired, they’d lose their jobs. Your next door neighbor might be a spy. No one knew who the stool pigeons were. The people who had got used to living that way didn’t know how maimed they were.

General Motors had come into Flint and made a city out of a crossroads. General Motors had dominated the town. It had ruled its political life and it had set its face against unions. Men had organized on their peril. Unions were kept out by fear. And now that fear was over. No wonder that the people marching in the line stretched out their hands to their friends on the sidewalk and said:

“You can join now, you can join now, we are free!”

Freedom to join your own union seems a little thing. But one has to live in a town dominated by a great industry to see how far off a union can seem and how powerful the industry.

Now General Motors had bargained with the union officials. The long days of suspended violence were over. Here was the antithesis of a mob: the gathering together of people to express a great emotion. Such gathering together is at the very basis of civilization. It is the intensification of the individual, the raising of his power for good to a thousandth degree.

No one in that crowd remained isolated. People’s small personalities were lost in this great Hallelujah.

When the men from Fisher No. 1 had accepted the agreement they marched in a parade to the plants at the other end of the town which were still guarded by the militia. The barrier of soldiers drew aside.

The crowd with flags marched cheering into the guarded zone.

The strikers were coming out of Chevrolet No. 4, flags preceding them. There were flags on the steps and flags on the street. Flares lighted up the scene. Cheers for Governor Murphy¹ filled the air. Strikers’ wives were waving to husbands they had not seen for days. A woman held up a baby. The procession marched down the street. Another roar filled all space.

The Fisher No. 2 boys marched out. They marched out in military formation from the quiet of the empty, waiting plant, carrying neat bundles of their things. They became part of the crowd that was now bright with confetti. People carried toy balloons. The whole scene was lit up by the burst of glory of the photographers’ flares. The big flags punctuated the crowd with color.

¹ Governor Frank Murphy, a Democrat, risked his political career by refusing to employ the National Guard to force the sit-down strikers to evacuate the plants.

They shouted to the rhythm of "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom!"

Chevrolet Avenue was packed from bridge to bridge. People swarmed over the murky little Flint River with its new barbed wire fences. They came past Chevrolet No. 4 and they came up the street past Fisher No. 2. They came, flags at their head, singing. They marched from the plants back to union headquarters. The streets were lined all the way with cheering people. Men and women from the cars and marchers shouted to the groups of other working people who lined the streets, "Join the union! We are free!"

The marchers arrived in front of Pengally Hall. They gathered in increasing thousands. The hall itself was jammed. They no longer let people into the building. Inside and outside, the loud speakers were going. Homer Martin, Wyndham Mortimer, Bob Travis and the other strike leaders addressed the roaring crowds.

The joy of victory tore through Flint. It was more than the joy of war ceasing, it was the joy of creation. The workers were creating a new life. The wind of Freedom had roared down Flint's streets. The strike had ended! The working people of Flint had begun to forge a new life out of their historic victory.

Questions

1. According to Vorse, why had Flint's workers remained nonunionized for so many years?
2. Which tactics brought victory to the union? What strikes you about the male and female participants?
3. Why did Vorse compare the emotions that were felt by workers after winning the strike to those felt on Armistice Day (the day on which the Great War ended)?

23-13 Communism in the 1930s (1944)

Richard Wright

With the publication of *Native Son* in 1940, Richard Wright (1908–1960) became the best-known African American novelist of his generation. In the mid-1930s, Wright was attracted to the Communist Party. In this excerpt from his memoir, *American Hunger*, he suggests why communism appealed to him for a time and why its appeal proved limited.

Source: Excerpt from Chapter IV in *American Hunger* by Richard Wright. Copyright © 1944 by Richard Wright; copyright © 1977 by Ellen Wright. Reprinted with permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

One Thursday night I received an invitation from a group of white boys I had known in the post office to meet in a South Side hotel and argue the state of the world. About ten of us gathered and ate salami sandwiches, drank beer, and talked. I was amazed to discover that many of them had joined the Communist party. I challenged them by reciting the antics of the Negro Communists I had seen in the parks, and I was told that those antics were "tactics" and were all right. I was dubious.

Then one Thursday night Sol, a Jewish chap, startled us by announcing that he had had a short story accepted by a little magazine called the *Anvil*, edited by Jack Conroy, and that he had joined a revolutionary artists' organization, the John Reed Club. Sol repeatedly begged me to attend the meetings of the club, but I always found an easy excuse for refusing.

"You'd like them," Sol said.

"I don't want to be organized," I said.

"They can help you to write," he said.

"Nobody can tell me how or what to write," I said.

"Come and see," he urged. "What have you to lose?"

I felt that Communists could not possibly have a sincere interest in Negroes. I was cynical and I would rather have heard a white man say that he hated Negroes, which I could have readily believed, than to have heard him say that he respected Negroes, which would have made me doubt him. I did not think that there existed many whites who, through intellectual effort, could lift themselves out of the traditions of their times and see the Negro objectively.

One Saturday night, sitting home idle, not caring to visit the girls I had met on my former insurance route, bored with reading, I decided to appear at the John Reed Club in the capacity of an amused spectator. I rode to the Loop and found the number. A dark stairway led upwards; it did not look welcoming. What on earth of importance could transpire in so dingy a place? Through the windows above me I saw vague murals along the walls. I mounted the stairs to a door that was lettered:

THE CHICAGO JOHN REED CLUB

I opened it and stepped into the strangest room I had ever seen. Paper and cigarette butts lay on the floor. A few benches ran along the walls, above which were vivid colors depicting colossal figures of workers carrying streaming banners. The mouths of the workers gaped in wild cries; their legs were sprawled over cities.

"Hello."

I turned and saw a white man smiling at me.

"A friend of mine, who's a member of this club, asked me to visit here. His name is Sol———," I told him.

"You're welcome here," the white man said. "We're not having an affair tonight. We're holding an editorial meeting. Do you paint?" He was slightly gray and he had a mustache.

"No," I said. "I try to write."

"Then sit in on the editorial meeting of our magazine, *Left Front*," he suggested.

"I know nothing of editing," I said.

"You can learn," he said.

I stared at him, doubting.

"I don't want to be in the way here," I said.

"My name's Grimm," he said.

I told him my name and we shook hands. He went to a closet and returned with an armful of magazines.

"Here are some back issues of the *Masses*," he said. "Have you ever read it?"

"No," I said.

"Some of the best writers in America publish in it," he explained. He also gave me copies of a magazine called *International Literature*. "There's stuff here from Gide, Gorky . . ."

I assured him that I would read them. He took me to an office and introduced me to a Jewish boy who was to become one of the nation's leading painters, to a chap who was to become one of the eminent composers of his day, to a writer who was to create some of the best novels of his generation, to a young Jewish boy who was destined to film the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia. I was meeting men and women whom I would know for decades to come, who were to form the first sustained relationships in my life.

I sat in a corner and listened while they discussed their magazine, *Left Front*. Were they treating me courteously because I was a Negro? I must let cold reason guide me with these people, I told myself. I was asked to contribute something to the magazine, and I said vaguely that I would consider it. After the meeting I met an Irish girl who worked for an advertising agency, a girl who did social work, a schoolteacher, and the wife of a prominent university professor. I had once worked as a servant for people like these and I was skeptical. I tried to fathom their motives, but I could detect no condescension in them.

I went home full of reflection, probing the sincerity of the strange white people I had met, wondering how they *really* regarded Negroes. I lay on my bed and read the magazines and was amazed to find that there did exist in the world an organized search for the truth of the lives of the op-

pressed and the isolated. When I had begged bread from the officials, I had wondered dimly if the outcasts could become united in action, thought, and feeling. Now I knew. It was being done in one-sixth of the earth already. The revolutionary words leaped from the printed page and struck me with tremendous force.

It was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor the excitement of underground politics that claimed me; my attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. My cynicism—which had been my protection against an America that had cast me out—slid from me and, timidly, I began to wonder if a solution of unity was possible. My life as a Negro in America had led me to feel—that though my helplessness had made me try to hide it from myself—that the problem of human unity was more important than bread, more important than physical living itself; for I felt that without a common bond uniting men, without a continuous current of shared thought and feeling circulating through the social system, like blood coursing through the body, there could be no living worthy of being called human.

I hungered to share the dominant assumptions of my time and act upon them. I did not want to feel, like an animal in a jungle, that the whole world was alien and hostile. I did not want to make individual war or individual peace. So far I had managed to keep humanly alive through transfusions from books. In my concrete relations with others I had encountered nothing to encourage me to believe in my feelings. It had been by denying what I saw with my eyes, disputing what I felt with my body, that I had managed to keep my identity intact. But it seemed to me that here at least in the realm of revolutionary expression was where Negro experience could find a home, a functioning value and role. Out of the magazines I read came a passionate call for the experiences of the disinherited, and there were none of the same lispings of the missionary in it. It did not say: "Be like us and we will like you, maybe." It said: "If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find that you are not alone." It urged life to believe in life.

I read on into the night; then, toward dawn, I swung from bed and inserted paper into the typewriter. Feeling for the first time that I could speak to listening ears, I wrote a wild, crude poem in free verse, coining images of black hands playing, working, holding bayonets, stiffening finally in death . . . I read it and felt that in a clumsy way it linked white life with black, merged two streams of common experience.

I heard someone poking about the kitchen.

"Richard, are you ill?" my mother called.

"No. I'm reading."

My mother opened the door and stared curiously at the pile of magazines that lay upon my pillow.

"You're not throwing away money buying these magazines, are you?" she asked.

"No. They were given to me."

She hobbled to the bed on her crippled legs and picked up a copy of the *Masses* that carried a lurid May Day cartoon. She adjusted her glasses and peered at it for a long time.

"My God in heaven," she breathed in horror.

"What's the matter, mama?"

"What is this?" she asked, extending the magazine to me, pointing to the cover. "What's wrong with that man?"

With my mother standing at my side, lending me her eyes, I stared at a cartoon drawn by a Communist artist; it was the figure of a worker clad in ragged overalls and holding aloft a red banner. The man's eyes bulged; his mouth gaped as wide as his face; his teeth showed; the muscles of his neck were like ropes. Following the man was a horde of nondescript men, women, and children, waving clubs, stones, and pitchforks.

"What are those people going to do?" my mother asked.

"I don't know," I hedged.

"Are these Communist magazines?"

"Yes."

"And do they want people to act like this?"

"Well . . ." I hesitated.

My mother's face showed disgust and moral loathing. She was a gentle woman. Her ideal was Christ upon the cross. How could I tell her that the Communist party wanted her to march in the streets, chanting, singing?

"What do Communists think people are?" she asked.

"They don't quite mean what you see there," I said, fumbling with my words.

"Then what do they mean?"

"This is symbolic," I said.

"Then why don't they speak out what they mean?"

"Maybe they don't know how."

"Then why do they print this stuff?"

"They don't quite know how to appeal to people yet," I admitted, wondering whom I could convince of this if I could not convince my mother.

"That picture's enough to drive a body crazy," she said, dropping the magazine, turning to leave, then pausing at the door.

"You're not getting mixed up with those people?"

"I'm just reading, mama," I dodged.

Questions

1. Many Americans became dissatisfied with the status quo during the Great Depression. Which grievances shaped the response of African Americans to the social and economic hardships of that era?
2. Why did Communism appeal to Wright as a possible solution to the problems he faced?
3. Judging from Wright's account, what factors prevented Communism from becoming a more popular movement?

23-14 The Federal Antilynching Bills (1938)

Changes in the national Democratic Party and the federal government during the New Deal cost the Democrats' southern wing a measure of influence. However, that wing remained potent, especially when, beginning in 1937, it worked with other conservative Democrats and the Republicans to thwart New Deal initiatives and even reverse programs. When Republicans and northern Democrats (*not* the administration) pushed a federal antilynching measure through the House of Representatives during 1937, southern Democrats blocked its enactment in the Senate the next year. In doing so, they revealed the importance of race to their wing of the party.

This selection comprises *Time's* coverage of the Wagner–Van Nuys Bill in the Senate and the *New York Times's* report of the January 10, 1938, speech of Senator Pat Harrison, a Mississippi Democrat.

Source: Excerpts from *Time* (January 24, 1938): 7–8; "Anti-Lynch Bill Splits Leaders" from *The New York Times* (January 11, 1938), 18. Copyright © 1938 by The New York Times Co. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the Material without express written permission is prohibited.

(a) The Wagner–Van Nuys Bill

Last spring under the spur of the two blow-torch lynchings at Duck Hill, Miss. (*Time*, April 26), the Gavagan Bill, a similar anti-lynching measure, passed the House. Passage by the Senate therefore meant that the bill would become law barring the unlikely event of a Presidential veto. So as predicted, Texas' Tom Connally promptly organized a filibuster. Not as predicted, that filibuster last week rounded out ten days and had gathered so much momentum that Tom Connally jubilantly announced he would keep it going if necessary until Christmas.

Filibuster. The actual contents of the Wagner–Van Nuys Bill, as simple as they were familiar, would scarcely keep the U.S. Senate busy for that period. Like its predecessors, it provided for Federal prosecution, and a \$5,000 fine or up to five years' imprisonment, or both, for sheriffs & peace officers who did not afford criminals and suspected criminals reasonable protection from mobs (any gatherings of more than three persons). Its other principal provision, the payment of an indemnity up to \$10,000 to the family of a victim of mob violence by the county whose officials are responsible, is already in the statute books of twelve States.

(b) The 1938 Speech of Senator Pat Harrison

ANTI-LYNCH BILL SPLITS LEADERS

Harrison, Using Bitter Irony, Says Some Back Measure for Political Gain

GIVES WARNING TO PARTY

Asks It Keep Faith With South—Assails Plan as Wedge for New Curbs on States

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 10.—The racial issue over which the North and South have long differed drove today a deep cleavage in the Senate leadership when Senator Harrison assailed colleagues with whom he long had worked closely for sponsoring the Wagner Anti-lynching Bill. He spoke with blunt irony of members to whom he ascribed Presidential or Supreme Court ambitions and asked them if for the sake of votes they would "betray" the South.

"Is the faith of the South to be broken?" he asked. "Is its love for the Democratic party to be shattered and its devotion to those who have made that party great to be dissipated?"

But while he pleaded in this manner, the greater part of his speech, which consumed an hour, was scathing in its comment and as blunt as any he ever delivered in his attacks on former Republican Administrations.

"Let me say to all aspiring gentlemen in this body who may retain some hope of becoming the nominee of the Democratic party," he declared, "that they had best stop, look and listen. It is always better to put advocacy of a question upon better and higher grounds than that."

WARNS AMBITIOUS

"And those sweet, amiable gentlemen who every time a newspaper correspondent calls them go out with a fluttering of the heart because they think news has come from the White House that their nomination is going to be sent to the Senate to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court caused by the resignation of Mr. Justice Sutherland, had better beware. They do not add to their standing as lawyers or their qualifications for places on the highest tribunal in this land by voting for such a legislative monstrosity as that now pending before the Senate, which destroys the dual form of government and robs the States of their sovereignty."

Senator Harrison maintained that "this bill will not appease anybody," and that, despite that, "we see the people of the South confronted with the terrible situation of a Democratic majority betraying the trust of the Southern people, destroying the things that they have idolized and in which they believe."

"The groups that form the Society for the Advancement of the Colored Race and others may be satisfied with it for a little while; those who are advocating the bill here may win favor with them for a little while, but paid lobbyists and representatives of these organized groups are never quiet; they must be active. They must be busy and when they have had this work performed, they must get to work upon another thing."

PICTURES POSIBILITIES [SIC]

"I read the other day that the Negro Representative from Illinois had introduced a bill to abolish Jim Crow car laws in the States, to abolish those laws which provide for the segregation of the races. The next thing in all probability will be a bill to provide that miscegenation of the races cannot be prohibited, and when that has been accomplished they will come back here and seek the help of the majority party in power to take away from the States the right to say who shall vote in their elections, to say that every colored man in every Southern State should take part in the primaries in the State."

Questions

- On what fears did Harrison play to gain support for opposition to the federal anti-lynching bill?
- Harrison referred to "primaries" as well as "elections" in his speech. What was the importance of Democratic Party primary elections in the South during the 1930s?

23-15 Field Report on Arizona to Harry L. Hopkins (1934)

Lorena Hickok

Lorena Hickok (1893–1968) was born in Wisconsin and became a reporter for the Associated Press in 1913. Sympathetic with the New Deal and a close friend to Eleanor Roosevelt, Hickok came to work as chief investigator for Harry L. Hopkins, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Hickok wrote detailed field reports in 1933 and 1934 from all over the country, including this 1934 letter to Hopkins in which she documents the New Deal relief programs in the Southwest. Her reports—while certainly shaped by the blatant racial and ethnic prejudices of the times—raised serious concerns about both people's growing dependence on government-supplied relief payments and the underlying socioeconomic problems that the New Deal failed to address.

Source: Excerpt from Lorena Hickok, letter to Harry L. Hopkins from Phoenix, Arizona, May 4, 1934, 237–243.

Phoenix, Arizona, May 4, 1934

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

... I lost a day this week. On Sunday, driving across desert from Lordsburg, N.M., to Tucson, I turned over in loose gravel on a road which seems to be a sort of political football. The towns of Douglas and Bisbee, wishing to keep the road as bad as possible, have enough influence at the Statehouse to prevent its being repaired. The result is about one wreck a week, with a couple of fatalities every month or so. Douglas and Bisbee are interested because it diverts traffic away from them. . . . So, since I had apparently carried most of the weight of the car on the back of my neck during the split second while it was rolling over, the doctor seemed to think it might be a good idea for me to spend Monday in bed, which I did. Incidentally, sir, you have to have a darned good neck to get away with anything like that. I think mine had no doubt got toughened up these last five or six weeks from carrying the weight of the world on it. . . . Since Monday I've been moving fast, with little opportunity to write.

Anyway, I haven't felt much encouraged to write. Damn it, it's the same old story down here, wherever I go.

Two classes of people.

Whites, including white collar people, with white standards of living, for whom relief, as it is now, is anything but adequate. No jobs in sight. Growing restive.

Mexicans—or, East of the Mississippi, Negroes—with low standards of living, to whom relief is adequate and attractive. Perfectly contented. Willing to stay on relief the rest of their lives. Able, many of them, to get work, but at wages so low that they are better off on relief.

So many Mexicans and Negroes on relief that, with a limited amount of money, we are compelled to force the white man's standard of living down to that of the Mexicans and Negroes.

I believe that in the whole Southern half of the United States you will find this to be the big relief problem today. Certainly it is in every urban community. I've encountered it everywhere I've been on this trip: Alabama, Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, although not so bad there, and Arizona.

Add to it newspaper publicity—carried out of Washington by the press associations, I am told—that has led the population to believe that everyone in the state on relief is going to get \$21 a month cash, no more and no less, under the new program, and you have Arizona's problem. The Mexicans all want "the \$21 a month the Government has promised us." The whites, who have actually been getting more than that on direct relief, don't see how they can get along on it and are worried stiff. It represents a "raise" for the Mexicans, from relief with which they were perfectly satisfied and which apparently was adequate, and a "cut" for the whites. . . .

I have been writing you right along that the only way I could see to clean up this Negro-Mexican business would be to reinvestigate thoroughly the Negro and Mexican case loads, closing the intakes to get them out of the habit of registering for relief for a few weeks and to turn the case workers loose for the reinvestigation, and to force every Negro or Mexican who could get any work at all, at WHATEVER wages, to take it and get off the relief rolls. . . . I must admit that there are people in the set-up who don't agree with me on this. They argue first of all that we are forcing these people into peonage. Employers, particularly farmers and housewives—the two worst classes of employers in the country, I believe—will take advantage of the situation. I've written you about housewives who think Negroes, Mexicans, or even white girls ought to be glad to work for their room and board. And last week in New Mexico I heard about sheep growers who want to hire herders at \$7 a MONTH! It is also argued that, particularly in cities, thousands of the Mexicans and Negroes actually CAN'T get work—that, if there is any job, no matter how lowly and how poorly paid, a white man will take it, and that there would be Hell to pay if a Negro or a Mexican got it. I don't believe that, however, to the extent that some people do.

It's almost impossible to get to the bottom on this farm labor proposition. The farmers—sheep and cattle men, cotton growers, and so on—are all yelling that they can't get the Mexicans to work because they are all on relief. But when

Mexicans and Spanish-Americans won't go out and herd sheep for \$7 a month because they can get \$8 or \$10 on relief, it seems to me that the farmer ought to raise his wages a little. Oh, they don't admit trying to get herders for \$7 a month. If you ask them what they are paying, they will say, "Anywhere from \$15 a month up." But our relief people looked into the matter and found out what they actually were willing to pay.

A thing that complicates the whole situation right now is our hourly rate under the new program. In Arizona, for instance, the minimum is 50 cents an hour. We adopted it because it is the hourly rate on public works in the state of Arizona. But, don't you see, it's a "political" hourly rate? Jobs on highways on public works in Arizona are dealt out as political patronage. The ACTUAL prevailing wage in Arizona is nowhere nearly that high. Up to now there haven't been many people getting 50 cents an hour in Arizona—and damned few Mexicans. Now we come along and announce we are going to pay everybody on relief 50 cents an hour. You can imagine the furor.

You've got the Latin temperament to deal with down here, too. Latin and Indian. They don't "want" things. They haven't any ambition. A man who is half Spanish and half Indian has an entirely different slant on life from ours. To begin with, it's a semi-tropical country. The Spaniards came here generations ago. They are easy-going, pleasure loving. It isn't in their makeup to "get out and hustle." And the Indian in them certainly wouldn't make them ambitious. The Indian never was a hustler. He wanted just enough, no more. Your Mexican, or your Spanish-American, is a simple fellow, with simple needs, to be obtained with the least effort. And if he could work five days a week at 50 cents an hour or three days a week at 50 cents an hour, he'd work three days, even though it meant less income. His attitude is: "Why work any more after you've got enough?" And when it comes to working seven days a week, 10 hours a day, for no more than, or even less than, he'd be getting on relief—well, he just can't see that at all. . . . And so, this 50-cent hourly rate is just swell for a Mexican, even though the number of hours he can work and the amount of money he can get per month on it are limited. And \$21 a month, earned at the rate of 50 cents an hour—why, that's just Heaven to him! He'd have a grand time on \$10 or \$12. And has been.

The Mexican or Spanish-American diet is so different from ours. Chili beans, red beans, a little grease, flour or cornmeal, a few vegetables and a little fruit in the fall. It's a cheap diet. But they've thrived—or would it be "thriven"?—on it for 500 years. We're silly to try to change it. As a matter of fact, doctors over in New Mexico have been making a study of that diet, observing the effect on the children. They've had the surprise of their lives. Those children are a darn sight better off physically, on that diet, than most of our white children are in families living on minimum subsistence rations.

In Tucson not long ago arrived a huge shipment of surplus commodity butter. They had no place to keep it. They had to ration it out to Mexicans and Indians as well as

whites. The Mexicans and Indians had never tasted butter before. They didn't even like it. They tried to fry beans in it—and came back yelling for lard!

Now if these people can live on \$10 or \$12 a month and be reasonably healthy and so contented that they won't even take work when it is offered them, let alone go out and look for it, why, in the name of common sense, raise them above that? Especially when we have a limited amount of money. I'll grant that the work that is offered them pays darned little—that it's practically peonage—but it's all they've ever known, and I doubt if the Relief administration is financially in a position to battle low wage scales all over the South and Southwest.

There is a way of handling the problem, other than throwing the Mexicans and Negroes off relief—and the local relief administrations have been doing it. Discrimination. Two standards of relief. The idea will sound horrible in Washington, but—I'm beginning to wonder.

The only place where they've come right out and admitted to me that they've been doing it is in Tucson. They were doing it before Federal money came in, there, and during April, between CWA and the new program, which went into effect May 1, they went back to it. They said April had been the smoothest month they'd had for a long time.

In Tucson—without any publicity, but so quietly that people didn't even know they were being classified—they divided their case load into four groups, Classes A, B, C, and D. They have about 2,800 families on relief there: 1,200 Mexicans, American citizens, but with a low standard of living; 800 Yaqui Indian families, political refugees from old Mexico; 800 white families.

Into Class A went 60 families. Engineers, teachers, lawyers, contractors, a few former businessmen, architects, and some chemists who used to be connected with the mines. They and each of the other three groups had their own intakes. No mixing. They gave this group a \$50 a month maximum, 50 per cent cash. It took care of them fairly adequately, rents, clothing, and everything. They set up projects for them, manning their auxiliary staff with them. Although they were required to work only a few hours a week for what they were getting, these people have been giving full time, voluntarily.

Into Class B went 250 families, on a maximum of \$36 a month, from $33\frac{1}{3}$ to 40 per cent cash. It consisted of some white collar people—clerks, stenographers, bookkeepers, and so on—and skilled labor. Many of these people were able to augment their incomes by a few days work now and then.

Into Class C went 1,000 families, on a \$25 maximum, 30 per cent cash. It consisted of white unskilled labor and Mexican and Spanish-American unskilled labor with standards of living higher than those of most Mexicans.

And into Class D went 1,490 families, on a \$10 maximum, all in kind. These were the low class Mexican, Spanish-American, and Indian families.

They have a commissary in Tucson—and I'm beginning to wonder, too, if a commissary IS such a bad thing

where you've got a large crowd of people with low standards of living to feed. As a work project, they raise two-thirds of the vegetables distributed through the commissary. They buy milk wholesale, giving it out at 8 cents a quart instead of 15 as charged retail. Incidentally, from school districts where these low class Mexicans and Indians live and where distribution of milk to children has been going on for years there came a few weeks ago word that the health of the children had improved to such an extent that they no longer needed to distribute the milk!

"Now this all may seem pretty bad to you," the relief administrator told me, "but you're going to quit some day and leave us, here in these communities, to carry on. We'll never be able to carry on under the conditions Washington is imposing on us now."

And so—I'm wondering if perhaps we should try to set up a national standard and impose it on a state like Arizona, a town like Tucson. I'm wondering if we shouldn't give these state and local committees a little more latitude, a little more discretionary power. . . . Don't think I can't see the dangers in it. And I realize the terrific pressure brought to bear by the Labor crowd on those wage scales. But, dammit, man, our job is to feed people and clothe them and shelter them, with as little damage to their morale as possible. And that's all, as I see it. We haven't got the money to do any more. I can't see—I've never been able to see—that it was the job of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to fight the battle of the American Federation of Labor. We ARE feeding people, clothing them, and providing shelter for them as best we can. But what are we doing to their morale? I've been on the road nearly a year now. More and more I've come to the conclusion that, the less we interfere with the normal lives of these families, the less damage we're going to do to their morale. If, by relief, we raise a family's income beyond whatever [it] has been before or beyond what it has any chance of becoming normally, we are damaging the morale of that family. And if we lower a family's standard of living too much, we are going to ruin its morale, too—or make a rebel out of the head of that family.

In Tucson, if we enforce that 50-cent hourly wage rate with the limit on hours, we're going to do both of those things, I'm afraid.

I was in Tucson May 1, the day the new program went in.

All the Mexicans who could read—and even more who couldn't—were over at their intake, demanding the \$21 a month "the Government has promised us."

In the office of the administrator, I sat talking for an hour with half a dozen white collar clients. Among them were a landscape painter, a certified public accountant, a former businessman, an architect, a former bank cashier. All save the artist were men of 45 or thereabouts. All had been in the group of 60, Class A. We went over their budgets, to see if they could possibly get along on that \$21 maximum.

Said the painter:

"I pay \$6.50 a month rent. There are three of us, my wife, my 18-months-old baby, and myself. We have three rooms in a garage. No water. An outside toilet. The baby's

food costs us \$6.03 a month—\$4.11 for milk, .46 for Cream of Wheat, .26 for prunes, \$1.20 for vegetables. He should have more, but he can get by on that. Our lights and coal oil for fuel come to \$4.30 a month. Add \$6.50 for rent, \$6.03 for the baby's food, and \$4.30 for light and oil, and you get \$16.83. Subtract that from \$21, and you see my wife and I will have \$4.17 a month for food for ourselves. Can't do it."

The certified public accountant was trying to hang onto his home. "If I lose that," he said, "it's the end—that's all." He has a Federal Home Loan, which requires that he pay \$10 a month interest. That leaves him an \$11 balance, and he has six in the family and a baby coming. In April he got \$40 and managed to get by, although, of course, he had to keep one of the children out of school to help his wife because he couldn't hire any one. He wasn't kicking about that, however.

The former bank cashier also had six in the family—himself, his wife, his parents, his crippled sister, and her child. He wasn't paying rent. They had moved in with friends. But they were paying half of the electric, water and fuel bills.

"I'm afraid for my parents," he said. "Lord only knows how we'll get along. They are unhappy now and feel they are in the way. It's a bad situation."

The former businessman, who told me that, when the depression hit, he was worth \$60,000—and other people told me he was telling me the truth—had only three in his family, his wife, himself, and a son, who had to leave college, but who has been unable to get steady work of any kind. He is paying \$15 a month rent, having recently moved out of a \$25 apartment. That leaves \$6 a month for food for the three of them.

"All this—it breaks you down," he said quietly. "We men who have been the backbone of commerce, who have had ambitions and hopes, who have always taken care of our families—what is going to become of us? I've lost twelve and a half pounds this last month, just thinking. You can't sleep, you know. You wake up about 2 A.M., and then you lie and think."

"Why, I've sat across the tables from Jesse Jones and talked contracts with him, running up into many thousands of dollars! But I'd be afraid to face him now. You get so you feel so whipped!"

There was a moment's silence. Then the former bank cashier spoke.

"Yes," he said, "all those years of practical experience you and I have had don't count for anything now."

"When you're 45 and trying to get a job, they say to you, 'I'll get in touch with you later, Mr. So-and-So. Mighty glad you dropped in.'

"But you never hear from them."

In Albuquerque the other day, I was talking with a lawyer, a former judge, who is one of the big men in the town.

"The Government has got to take care of these people," he said, "if it takes your hat and mine. Why, we don't know the beginning of taxation in this country yet. And if society, as it is now organized, can't give a man a job, then the Government, representing all the people, must do it—a decent job, at a living wage."

Questions

1. What complications in the level of relief payments and local prevailing wages did Hickok describe? How does the question of race or ethnicity seem to complicate this situation further?
2. What comparisons did Hickok make between the South and the Southwest?
3. What political as well as other concerns did Hickok identify or foresee in administering a national relief program?

23-16 *Deserts on the March* (1937)

Paul B. Sears

In the 1930s, the federal government assumed many new responsibilities in terms of managing the economy and otherwise providing for the general welfare. The spirit of reform did not extend just to people, however. It also brought with it a new attitude toward the land. The massive dust storms on the Great Plains, which seemed to blow away everything but the farmer's mortgage, exposed agriculture as dangerously out of step with the environment. Many Americans left their farms in Oklahoma, Nebraska, and North Dakota and headed to the West Coast in search of a better, more stable way of life. The government started new conservation programs and responded in many other ways. The views of the country's scientists, such as those of ecologist Paul B. Sears (1891–1990), whose *Deserts on the March* provided a compelling narrative and explanation for the dust bowl, influenced government policymakers.

Source: Excerpt from Chapter 7, "The Great Pattern," in *Deserts on the March* by Paul B. Sears (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 87–92. Reprinted by permission of the University of Oklahoma Press.

The picture, then, of the continent undisturbed by man is one of the most abundant life possible. Forests extend far inland and the grass extends beyond them to its utmost possible limits. Deserts are shrunken to their least possible compass under the existing climatic conditions. In the midst of this order there is, of course, no absolute uniformity. Hilltops are drier and more exposed than valleys and ravines, although if it were not for the constant shifting of the earth's crust the hills would be cut down and the valleys slowly built up. Within each province the drier and more exposed situations tend to have those kinds of vegetation which would occur in valleys farther inland. For example, the bur oak, which grows in stream valleys in Nebraska and Oklahoma, grows on very dry hilltops in Indiana. The shorter grasses which are found in eastern Colorado are also found on the drier hilltops in central Kansas. But here again the course of nature has its effect and as time goes on the pattern of vegetation in any place tends to become more and more uniform and appropriate to the climate. Even on the hilltops there is some accumulation of humus which makes possible to a considerable extent the upward climb of valley plants. Just as the desert in the interior comes to occupy the least possible space, so do the drier types of vegetation within each area.

The picture we have drawn is a fair description of the continent of North America when the white man entered upon it. There were, of course, extensive Indian cultures and in Mexico genuine civilization, but the primitive tools which the Indian possessed did not enable him seriously to disturb the general balance. Like the other living creatures, he fitted into the picture rather than dominated it. His agriculture, while sound and skilful, was necessarily casual and restricted. The more systematic and extensive agriculture of the mound builders had long since passed into oblivion. He depended largely upon game and fish but he made moderate use of these and all other resources about him. There is in the whole story of Indian economy nothing to compare with the ruthless, methodical, and finally successful extermination of the wild buffalo, the passenger pigeon and the plains antelope. Even with the aid of the white man's railroad and high-powered firearms these great, enlightened, progressive and humane measures required some time for their completion.

Observe the changes inaugurated with white settlement. The first point of contact was with the forest and its denizens. All the resources of European mechanical invention were brought to bear against nature. The forest was speedily stripped by every means at the command of civi-

lized man. Its removal was not governed by the need for lumber. The sweep was clean; trees of all ages and sizes were destroyed. Nor were the immediate needs of the actual population for agricultural land considered. Every effort was made to produce a surplus for export without regard to maintaining any balance between need and supply, removal and return. We have already described the details of this relentless and extravagant march towards the interior of the continent. The forest which had been so slowly developed wherever trees could grow was destroyed. On land unfit for agriculture it was replaced either by grassland or by a second growth of pioneer and hence inferior type of forest. Moving west into the grasslands, with certain honorable exceptions, plow, fire and overstocked herds of cattle did to the native grass what the ax and fire had done to the forests of the east. Here again there was considerable land not suitable to continuous agriculture. After the first wave of destruction, instead of returning to its original, bountiful crop of nutritious grass, it too was covered by inferior or pioneer types. The second-growth plants in the grassland area did not represent the best that the climate could produce in a state of nature. Instead they are akin to the drier, less desirable forms which composed the native vegetation still further inland. Actually the area of short grass, cactus and scrub shifted eastward into what had been lush prairie.

Thus was broken the magic girdle which had thrown its green expanse about the shrinking desert. As time went on the further destruction wrought by man released the forces of wind and water which had been held in check. No longer was the surface protected against their action by a continuous carpet of plant life. Quickly the mantle of tempering soil with its sponge-like humus was washed and blown away from the uplands, lodging in the valleys, choking them with its new

burden and concealing their rich alluvium. Gullies grew at the margins of the hills. Between what clumps of green were left appeared the color of the bare soil—the sure mark of the desert. In places the wash of wind and water scoured away everything that was loose, leaving floors of bare rock and pebbles not to be distinguished in their practical significance from the so-called desert pavements which mark the most barren and hopeless spots on the earth's surface.

Thus the white man in a few centuries, mostly in one, reversed the slow work of nature that had been going on for millennia. Thus have come the deserts, so long checked and held in restraint, to break their bonds. At every step the girdle of green about the inland deserts has been forced to give way and the desert itself literally allowed to expand. On the coast where once was forest the trees are gone. In the grassland which once was unbroken is inferior growth and much bare soil. Just as we have seen that under extremely favorable conditions the vegetation can move inland beyond its usual climatic limits, so now we see the process reversed. With the restraining influence of soil and vegetation broken, the desert moves outward from its proper climatic confine, and because of cultural or artificial conditions comes to occupy the place that rightfully belongs to other provinces.

The laws which govern the development of soil and vegetation are as inescapable as the laws of the conservation of energy and of matter upon which they are based. No matter how complex or seemingly mysterious the operations of the organic world, they are still based upon cause and effect. It is as impossible to get something for nothing as it is to make water run uphill. Balance and equilibrium are demanded by nature. If man destroys the old order he must take the consequences. There is no magic which will undo the mischief he has wrought.

Questions

1. Compare this document with Document 16-3. On what points do John Wesley Powell and Paul Sears seem to have agreed, despite the sixty years that separates these two documents?
2. What role did Sears seem to imply the federal government should play in the agriculture of the Great Plains?

Question for Further Thought

1. Drawing on the text and documents for Chapter 23, compare and contrast the roles of women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans in government and the private sector during the New Deal and the effects of government policies on these groups.