THE WPA AND
FEDERAL RELIEF POLICY

BY DONALD S. HOWARD
Assistant Director
Charity Organization Department
Russell Sage Foundation

New York • Russell Sage Foundation • 1943
CONTENTS

Tables ........................................... 9
Diagrams and Illustration .................. 13
Foreword by Joanna C. Colcord ........... 15
Author's Preface .............................. 19

PART ONE
THE SETTING

CHAPTER

I. "The Problem of Relief" ................. 25
   Complexity of Relief Problems .......... 25
   Current Public Relief Measures ......... 27
   Numbers Granted Relief ................. 30
   Costs of Relief ............................. 35
   Amounts of Relief Grants ............... 40
   Public Relief, an Ancient Heritage .... 40
   Legal Basis of Public Relief .......... 41
   Conditions Adverse to Development of Relief Programs ......... 43
   A Fundamental Dilemma Underlying Relief Programs .......... 50

II. General Relief ............................ 51
   Legal Foundations of State Programs ... 52
   Administrative and Financial Arrangements . 53
   Form of Relief .............................. 57
   Groups Frequently Discriminated Against ... 57
   Differences Between States in Proportionate Numbers Granted Relief .. 67

III. Adequacy of General Relief Programs .. 70
   Evidences of Unmet Need .................. 70
   Amounts Granted as General Relief ....... 85
   Standards Governing the Size of Relief Grants .... 86
   Hands-Off Policy of Federal Government ...... 96
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

PART TWO
THE WPA AND ITS PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE WPA: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Basis of the WPA and Its Program</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Organization</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Costs</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE WPA: WORK AUTHORIZED AND UNDERTAKEN</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissible Projects</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Accomplishments</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibited Projects</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Requirements Regarding Projects</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation and Approval of Projects</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors’ Contributions</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Operation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal of Projects</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. WPA WAGE POLICIES</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis on Which Payment Is Made</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Security Wages to Wages Paid in Private Employment</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Actual Earnings to Scheduled Rates</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Scheduled Rates to Family Needs</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Scheduled Rates to Costs of Defined Standards of Living</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA Earnings Not Assignable</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA Pay: Wages for Work Done?</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. EARNINGS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INCOME OF WPA WORKERS</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Monthly Earnings</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Average Earnings to Other Relief and Assistance Benefits</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementation of WPA Earnings</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>Conditions of Employment</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours of Work and Hourly Rates of Pay</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rights to Organize, to Present Grievances, and to Strike</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX.</td>
<td>Conditions of Employment: Use of Available Skills Versus Skill for the Job</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment in Relation to Skills</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers to the Use of Workers' Special Skills</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The WPA's Use of Available Skills</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skill for the Job</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Training Projects</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X.</td>
<td>Conditions of Employment: Concluded</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Day's Work for a Day's Pay</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment Near Workers' Homes</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom from Discrimination and &quot;Politics&quot;</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accident Prevention and Compensation</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PART THREE

### Eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XI.</th>
<th>Eligibility: Age, Sex, and Race</th>
<th>269</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race, Color, and Creed</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII.</td>
<td>Eligibility: Politics, Citizenship, and Allegedly Subversive Activity</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allegedly Subversive Activity</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII.</td>
<td>Eligibility: Military Service, Residence, and Family Responsibility</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confinement in Penal or Correctional Institutions</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Status and Responsibilities</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER XIV. Eligibility: Need

Need, a Prime Consideration
Exceptions to General Policy
Responsibility for Certification of Workers
Appeals from Decisions Made by Co-operating Agencies with Respect to Need

CHAPTER XV. Eligibility: Measuring Need

Need Considered on a Family Basis
The Security Wage as a Measure of Need
Family Budgets as Measures of Need
Treatment of Income
Treatment of Assets

CHAPTER XVI. Eligibility: Relative Need

The Needy Versus Recipients of Relief
The Needy with Income Versus Those Without
Dependents of WPA Workers
Departures from Relative Need Policy
Differences of Opinion Regarding Relative Needs

CHAPTER XVII. Eligibility: Social Security Benefits and Continued Need

Eligibility for Social Security Benefits
Continued Need a Condition of Eligibility for Continued Employment

CHAPTER XVIII. Eligibility: Employability

Relation to Available WPA Jobs
Relation to Labor Market
Age, Physical and Mental Condition
Responsibility for Determining Employability
Appraisal of Success in Limiting WPA Employment to "Employables"

CHAPTER XIX. Eligibility: Unemployed, Seeking Work, and Available for Work

Unemployed
Seeking Work and Willing to Work
Available for Work
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XX. Eligibility: Unavailability of Other Work and Availability of WPA Jobs</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavailability of Other Work</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of WPA Jobs</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of Occupation upon Eligibility</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXI. Eligibility: Performance on the Job and Duration of Employment</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance on the Job</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Employment</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART FOUR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBERS EMPLOYED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXII. WPA Employment</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluctuations in Employment</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparisons with Private Employment</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA Employment in Relation to Unemployment and to General Relief Cases</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment by States</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII. Determinants of Volume of WPA Employment</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Amount of Money Available</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Defined Goals</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties Involved in Forecasting</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations Affecting Volume of WPA Employment</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forces Working for and Against More WPA Jobs</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensating for Bad Guesses of Future Needs</td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV. Determination of Monthly and State Employment Levels</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination of Monthly Employment Levels</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of Employment by States</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

### PART FIVE

#### THE BROADER ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXV. Measurements of Adequacy of WPA Employment</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimates of Adequacy</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentions That the WPA Has Employed Too Many</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentions That the WPA Has Employed Too Few</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria Used in Measuring Adequacy</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presumably Eligible Workers Unassigned to WPA Jobs</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employable Persons Granted General Relief</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in Relief Rolls Due to WPA Discharges</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Among Workers Discharged by the WPA</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of and Demands for State and Local Work-Relief Programs</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for Broader Federal Participation in the Total Relief Program of the Nation</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| XXVI. Federal Responsibility for Meeting Relief Needs | 643 |
| Increased Responsibility for Relief Only One Aspect of the Changing Role of the Federal Government | 643 |
| Considerations Favorable to Enlarging the Role of the Government in Various Social Programs | 645 |
| Factors Having a Special Bearing on Growth of Federal Responsibility for Relief Needs | 648 |

<p>| XXVII. Federal Responsibility: More Equitable Spreading of the Cost | 660 |
| Tendency of the Federal Government to Levy Taxes in Accordance with Ability to Pay | 660 |
| Broader Tax Base of the Federal Government | 667 |
| Uneven Distribution of Resources and Need | 672 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXVIII.</td>
<td><strong>FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY (CONTINUED)</strong></td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Precedents for Using Resources and Power of the Federal Government to Aid Disadvantaged Groups</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better Understanding Among Federal Officials and Legislators of Existing Needs</td>
<td>701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The “National Interest” and Federal Responsibility for Relief</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division of Opinion with Respect to Federal Responsibility for Relief</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIX.</td>
<td><strong>“SPECIAL” FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEEDS ARISING FROM UNEMPLOYMENT</strong></td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Principle Stated</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Principle Breaks Down</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Principle Is Given a New Lease of Life</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Considerations Advanced in Support of “Special” Responsibility for the Unemployed</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opposition to the Principle of “Special” Responsibility</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Special” Responsibility in Operation</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXX.</td>
<td><strong>FEDERAL VERSUS STATE AND LOCAL FINANCING AND CONTROL</strong></td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Case for Federal Control Over a Work Program</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arguments Raised Against Highly Centralized Control</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXI.</td>
<td><strong>FEDERAL CONTROL AND NATIONAL UNIFORMITY</strong></td>
<td>759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Control a Threat to Continuance of the Work Program</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Control a Threat to Federal Wage Standards</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Discrimination and Humane Administration</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations Upon Central Controls</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Much Uniformity Should There Be?</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Control Not Necessarily Inflexible</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

## CHAPTER PAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXXII.</td>
<td>Work Versus Unemployment</td>
<td>775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Jobs for the Jobless”</td>
<td>775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Case for Work as Opposed to Idleness</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXIII.</td>
<td>WPA Employment Versus Direct Relief</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Administration’s Stand Against Direct Relief for Employable Workers</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position of Congress</td>
<td>809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional Supporters of Work Relief</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Case for Work as Opposed to Direct Relief</td>
<td>811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Counter-Considerations</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXIV.</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Federal Government and Direct Relief</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Federal Government and Jobs for the Jobless</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td></td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Average Monthly Number of Workers Employed on WPA and Other Federal Work Programs; of Public Assistance Cases; and of Unemployed Workers, July, 1935, to June, 1941, by Fiscal Year</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Amounts of Federal Emergency Work Program Earnings and of Public Assistance Benefits, 1936 to 1941, by Calendar Year</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Distribution of States by Combined Amount of Federal Emergency Work Program Earnings and Public Assistance Benefits per Inhabitant, 1940</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Amounts of Work and Direct Relief Compared with National Income, 1936 to 1941, by Year</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Relation of Rate of Incidence of General Relief Cases in Each State to the Rate for the United States, 1936 to 1939, by Year</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Distribution by Class of Project of Expenditures on WPA Projects, July, 1935, to June, 1941</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Percentage Distribution by Class of Sponsoring Governmental Agency of Total Number of WPA Projects, July, 1935, to August, 1937</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Percentage Distribution by Class of Project of Costs of WPA Projects Sponsored by Different Classes of Agency, July, 1935, to August, 1937</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Expenditures on WPA Projects from WPA and from Sponsors' Funds, July, 1935, to June, 1941, by Fiscal Year</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Scheduled WPA Wage Rate for Unskilled Labor, May, 1935, and August, 1939, as Percentage of Cost of an Emergency Standard of Living, 31 Cities</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Average Monthly Earnings of Workers Employed by WPA, 1936 to 1941, by Year</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The WPA and Federal Relief Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Average Monthly Earnings of Workers Employed by WPA, Winters of Alternate Years, 1936 to 1942, by State</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Percentage Distribution of Workers Employed by WPA, by Class of Worker, Selected Months, 1936 to 1941</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Distribution of States by Average Monthly Earnings of WPA Employes, by Average Monthly Relief Benefits, and by Average Monthly Benefits to Families Receiving Aid to Dependent Children, January, 1938, and January, 1942</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. WPA Wage for Unskilled Workers Compared with General Relief Budget, 28 Cities, March, 1938</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Distribution by Class of Expenditure of Non-Labor Expenditures on WPA Projects, July, 1935, to December, 1939, and Percentage of Each Class Met from Sponsors' Funds</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Percentage Distribution by Age of WPA Employes, Four Selected Months, 1936 to 1942</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Number of Women WPA Employes, at Six-Month Intervals, 1935 to 1941</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Percentage Distribution by Class of County of All Gainful Workers and of Workers Employed by WPA, Specified Months, 1937 to 1941</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Average Monthly WPA Employment, 1935 to 1943, by Fiscal and by Calendar Year</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Average Monthly Number of Workers Employed by WPA, 1936 to 1939, by Year and by State</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Relation of Rate of Incidence of WPA Employment in Each State to the Rate for the United States, 1936 to 1939, by Year</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Relation of Rate of Incidence of Employment on Federal Work Projects, Excluding WPA, CCC, and NYA, to the Rate for the United States, 1936 to 1939, by Year</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Distribution of States by Per Capita Expenditures for General Relief Benefits and WPA Earnings, 1938 and 1940</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Distribution of 115 Urban Areas by General Relief Benefits Per Inhabitant, and by WPA Earnings Per Inhabitant, 1939</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Percentages of Labor Force, in Enumerative Check Areas, November, 1937, Totally Unemployed and Employed on Emergency Work, by Region</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>WPA Employment as Percentage of Total Unemployment and WPA Employment, March, 1940, by State</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Distribution of States by WPA Employment as Percentage of Estimated Number of Workers Eligible for WPA Employment, Three Selected Months, 1939 to 1941</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Number of WPA Employes and of Employable General Relief Cases, in 12 States, at Six-Month Intervals, 1937 to 1940</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Taxes as Percentage of Consumer Income in the United States, 1938–1939, by Income Class</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Distribution of States by Percentage of Labor Force Unemployed or Employed on Emergency Work, March, 1940</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Distribution of States by Estimated Number of Workers Eligible for WPA Employment Per 10,000 Population, February, 1940</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Distribution of States by Annual Income Per Inhabitant, 1937 and 1939</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Proportions of Total Families with Low and with High Annual Income, 1935–1936, Five Geographic Regions and Selected Cities in Each Region</td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Distribution of States by Estimated Combined Yield of Six Selected Taxes Per Inhabitant, 1935</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>WPA Expenditures from Federal Funds as Percentage of Total State and Local Tax Collections, Fiscal Year 1940, by State</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Relation of Incidence of General Relief and of WPA Employment to Annual Income Per Inhabitant, 47 States, 1939</td>
<td>684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Table 39. Relation of WPA Employment as Percentage of Total Unemployment in March, 1940, to Income Per Inhabitant, 47 States... 685

Table 40. Relation of Amount Per Inhabitant of WPA Earnings and of General Relief Benefits to Annual Income Per Inhabitant, 47 States, 1939... 688

Table 41. Relation of WPA Expenditures from Federal Funds Expressed as Percentage of Total State and Local Taxes, in Fiscal Year 1940 to Annual Income Per Inhabitant in 1939, 47 States... 690

Appendix

Table 1. Workers Employed on WPA and Other Federal Work Programs; Public Assistance Cases; and Total Unemployed Workers, July, 1935, to June, 1941, by Month and Both Fiscal and Calendar Year... 854

Table 2. Rate of Incidence of Employment on WPA and on Other Federal Agency Projects, and of General Relief Cases, 1936 to 1939, by Year and by State... 858

Table 3. Schedules of Monthly Earnings Prescribed at Various Stages of the WPA Program... 860
### DIAGRAMS AND ILLUSTRATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagram</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Index of Income Payments to Persons in the United States, January, 1929, to December, 1941, by Month</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Change in Average WPA Earnings in Individual States from Winter, 1936, to Winter, 1942</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Average Monthly Number of Workers Employed by WPA, 1935 to 1943, by Fiscal Year</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Number of Workers Employed by WPA, January, 1936, to June, 1941, by Month</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Number of Workers Employed by WPA Per 100 Unemployed Workers, and Per 100 General Relief Cases, January, 1936, to December, 1940, by Month</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Average Monthly Number of WPA Workers, Employes on Projects of Other Federal Agencies (Exclusive of CCC and NYA), and General Relief Cases, Per 10,000 Population, 1939, by State</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Distribution of States by Income Per Inhabitant, 1939, and by WPA Employment as Percentage of Total Unemployment, March, 1940</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. States Having High, Medium, and Low Rates of Incidence of General Relief Cases, of WPA Employes, and of Other Federal Project Employes, 1939</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. States Having High, Medium, and Low Rates of Annual Income Per Inhabitant, 1939; of WPA Expenditures from Federal Funds to State and Local Tax Collections in Fiscal Year 1940; and of WPA Employment to Unemployment in March, 1940</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ILLUSTRATION—Selected Accomplishments on WPA Projects, July, 1935, Through December, 1941** | 127   |
FOREWORD

N
ever before in the history of the human race has a public works program, whose principal object was the mitigation of need due to unemployment, reached the magnitude of the Work Projects Administration. This is true, however you measure it—by persons employed, money expended, or volume of results.

Because of the deep and wide implications of this program on the evolving economic pattern of the United States, and upon the well-being of its inhabitants, it was a subject with which the Russell Sage Foundation, established “for the improvement of social and living conditions,” necessarily found itself concerned.

Since 1936 Donald S. Howard, a member of the staff of the Charity Organization Department of the Foundation, has devoted the major portion of his time to the collection and study of material concerning the national relief policies, particularly those of the WPA; to consultation with administrators of these programs; and to independent field study. To this task he brought a background of seven years’ experience in various forms of social work, the year preceding his coming to the Foundation having been spent as director of one of the area statistical offices of the WPA.

In 1940, with the material of his four years of research collected and digested, Mr. Howard began to write the present volume. The attempt to record a living and developing organization presents enormous difficulties, especially in the case of a program so subject to sudden change as has been that of the WPA. Its program has been in operation now for seven years and during all that time there has been no place where one can draw the line and say: “Here is the end of a definite phase; from this point on we can project the future course of events.” Even while a chapter was being written, fresh information was coming in which might greatly modify what had been already set down.

The scholar concerned with past history has no such problems; he can collate, compare, deduce, and state his findings at leisure, untroubled by present events. Upon the contemporary historian lies the additional burden of keeping currently informed of daily
developments, often contradictory, unexpected, and piecemeal, in the field of his research. If this field is itself controversial and highly experimental; if there is little in the way of accepted theory and praxis for guidance; then his task becomes incredibly difficult. The plight of the contemporary historian is like that of Browning's wine-presser,

"dancing till breathless he grins,
Dead-beaten in effort on effort to keep the grapes under,
Since when he seems all but master, in pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going with basket on shoulder."

In approaching his task, Mr. Howard has sought not only to record factual data concerning the WPA program, but also to picture the varying currents of public opinion that inevitably shaped the program, and the conflicting goals in the minds of those who supported or opposed the legislation that established it, of the Congress that gave or refused to give funds, and even of the administrators themselves. Moreover, since the work program was inextricably bound up with the whole great panorama of relief of distress forced upon the nation by the depression of the 1930's, it had to be considered within this general framework as well.

Feared as unemployment is because of the deterioration it is believed to cause workers, it is even more dreaded because it throws them and their families into distress and need, which society attempts to assuage, in part, through giving relief and providing work. These alleviating measures are so costly, run athwart so many ideas deeply entrenched in the American mind, and conflict so decidedly with established ways of American life, that the remedies are likely to be considered fully as odious as the disease.

Important as unemployment has been in creating relief problems, it is not, however, the only factor, nor is it as important a factor as is commonly believed. Among other causes are sickness, physical and mental disabilities, broken homes, underemployment, and low wages. Relief is but the stepchild of other social and economic ills. Only by successful attack upon its forebears can much be done about the unwanted offspring. All-important as such attacks may be, they are not the subject of this volume. Here, attention is focused upon ways of dealing with some of the effects rather than with basic causes of distress.
Foreword

Problems of relief are so varied and so complex that no one volume can possibly treat more than a very few aspects of any of them. The facet selected for discussion in this report is federal policy in regard to relief needs not met through the assistance programs administered under general supervision of the Social Security Board or through subsistence grants administered by the Farm Security Administration. This qualification practically limits the discussion to federal policy with respect to general relief—in which area, as this is written, the federal government assumes no administrative or financial responsibility—and to administration of the program of the Work Projects Administration.

Primary consideration has been given in the text to the effect of federal relief policies upon the task of making necessary relief available to needy persons regardless of who they may be, where they may live, or what has caused their need. Innumerable further questions which harass relief administrators, if touched at all, are treated only incidentally.

It might seem that a volume dealing so largely with relief of the unemployed during the past decade is already outdated by the startling about-face in employment conditions caused by our entrance into the war. Unemployment, after having rated for ten years the doubtful honor of America’s “public problem number one,” although it has been far from eradicated, has suddenly receded from the foreground of public discussion. Nevertheless, and in spite of the bright glare from the floodlights of industries working overtime for war production, we cannot help recalling the widespread dearth of jobs that came after the close of World War I. The spectre of “post-war unemployment” looms large in discussions of social and economic planning for peace, which are now being carried on here and among our allies. We believe, therefore, that a volume which so carefully examines the record of a former post-war industrial disturbance, and the remedies sought in this country, will be a valuable document both now and when the guns and the bombs are at last laid aside, and the nations turn to reconstruct a new world on the ashes of the old.

Since the foregoing words were written, but before the book had gone to press, President Roosevelt early in December, 1942, announced that the program of the WPA was soon to be concluded. In his letter directing the Federal Works Administrator
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

to close out all WPA projects by February 1, 1943, or as soon thereafter as possible, the President declared:

Every employable American should be employed at prevailing wages in war industries, on farms or in other private or public employment. The Work Projects Administration rolls have greatly decreased, through the tremendous increase in private employment, assisted by the training and re-employment efforts of its own organization, to a point where a national work-relief program is no longer necessary. . . .

I am proud of the Work Projects Administration organization. It has displayed courage and determination in the face of uninformed criticism. The knowledge and experience of this organization will be of great assistance in the consideration of a well rounded public-works program for the post-war period.

The present volume is the third in a series dealing with the emergency relief programs of this country, for the preparation of which the Charity Organization Department has been responsible. The first in point of publication was The Burden of Unemployment, by Philip Klein, a study of unemployment relief measures in 15 American cities in the winter of 1921–1922. Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression, by Leah Feder, published in 1936, covers the earlier years back to 1857, while the present volume carries the story forward through the great depression of the 1930’s, and into the early 1940’s.

The primary concern of this volume is with the lessons to be drawn from experience under the WPA and other relief programs, and the application of this knowledge to the development of any similar undertaking in the post-war period. The termination of WPA as a going concern does not, therefore, materially affect the purposes which the book is intended to serve.

Furthermore, the demise of WPA has seemed more than a probability during most of the period taken for writing this report. To subject the text to re-editing simply because the event has occurred sooner than was expected would unduly delay publication.

JOANNA C. COLCORD, Director

Charity Organization Department
Russell Sage Foundation
AUTHOR'S PREFACE

DURING THE COURSE of the present study the writer and other members of the Russell Sage Foundation staff have, within the past six years, analyzed literally thousands of documents—federal and state laws; reports of committee hearings and congressional debate on federal legislation; rules, regulations, and statements of policy of federal, state, and local agencies as well as their monthly, quarterly, annual, and biennial reports. While footnotes reveal something of the scope of the sources consulted, they reflect but a small fraction of the materials that have been collected and analyzed. As a general rule, sources of information used in this report have been cited only when they have been quoted directly. To authors and publishers who have generously permitted use of their writings and publications the writer of the present volume is deeply grateful.

Supplementing this study of documents and other published material, the writer has had the privilege of consultation and discussion not only with federal officials responsible for the administration of programs here described, but with state and local officials of the Work Projects Administration and of relief and welfare agencies in more than half the states. Without exception, the many officials consulted gave courteously of their time despite pressing duties which probably required late hours to complete. All of this assistance the writer sincerely appreciates.

Special thanks are due to the several members of the federal WPA staff who reviewed the manuscript at various stages and who gave invaluable aid to the writer.

Willingness on the part of various officials to discuss forthrightly their own failures as well as their successes and to do this frankly and honestly with an independent and often critical observer, has strengthened immeasurably the writer's confidence and faith in the integrity and open-mindedness of officials charged with responsibility for the administration of public services that are of vital importance to the nation's well-being. One cannot but contrast the situation in this country with that prevailing where open criticism of governmental agencies is unknown. To
be enabled to see through the eyes of responsible officials themselves not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of measures they administer and to be free to report what one hears and sees—these are indeed privileges to be enjoyed only in a democracy.

Since some of the observations offered by various officials consulted were "off the record" and "not for quotation" their views, when reported here, are presented anonymously. However, to give some indication of the source of such points of view, the text specifies whether the sources were federal, state, or local authorities. When the term "high official" is used it refers to one serving in a capacity not lower than that of head of one of the major organizational divisions of the federal, state, or local agency in which he is employed.

The scope of this study, geographically speaking, covers only the continental United States and excludes consideration of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Alaska even though many of the relief policies and measures discussed here applied to these territories as well as to "the States." For this reason, totals shown in certain tables in this volume differ slightly from those in the original tables from which data were taken. To simplify discussion, the District of Columbia is usually treated as a state with the result that the number of "states" reported usually totals 49.

Because of the breadth and complexity of matters treated in this report no attempt has been made to relate the entire study to any specified period of time. For example, federal laws, congressional debate, and congressional committee hearings consulted include some held as late as June, 1942; certain employment data for the nation as a whole relate to years as late as 1941 and 1942 whereas employment data for the several states usually relate only to 1939 and earlier years. Because relief policies and programs change so rapidly and even in a given locality differ widely from time to time, care has been exercised to indicate throughout the present volume the particular time to which facts as stated relate. Thus, although the date on which various policies are announced is frequently given, little effort is made to say how long after the specified date any of these policies were continued. However, policies or practices known to the writer to have been in effect only a short time have either been omitted from this report or their short duration has been noted.

In the interest of brevity even important details (such as the
Author's Preface

nature of a state agency prescribing a specific policy or the identifi-
cation of a Senate Committee before which certain testimony is
presented) are omitted from the text of this volume when these
can be ascertained from the footnote citing the source of the mate-
rial presented. Paging in the Congressional Record to which fre-
quent reference is made applies to that in bound volumes of the
Record for all issues prior to June 3, 1941. References to the
Record for dates later than that specified relate to temporary
paging.

“The Works Program” referred to repeatedly in this volume
was the name applied to the federally operated and preponder-
antsy federally financed program inaugurated in the summer of
1935 and continuing in full strength for about a year. At its peak
some 40 to 50 federal agencies co-operated in providing jobs for
workers meeting prescribed conditions of eligibility. The federal
agency which carried the lion’s share of the responsibility for the
Works Program and then continued to provide jobs for unem-
ployed workers long after other federal agencies faded out of
the picture was the Work Projects Administration—known prior
to July, 1939, as the Works Progress Administration. Through-
out this volume this agency is referred to as the WPA.

Unless otherwise specified, the terms “WPA employment” and
“workers employed by the WPA” refer to all workers employed
on projects of the WPA and include supervisory workers but do
not include administrative employes. The term “earnings of
WPA workers” refers to the wages paid workers employed on
projects and does not refer to salaries paid administrative per-
sonnel. By the term “WPA project” is meant a project financed
from WPA funds and operated by the WPA. Unless specifically
stated, the term does not apply to projects operated by another
agency even though these may be financed from WPA funds.
Similarly, the term “WPA expenditures” relates only to expendi-
tures for the program operated by the WPA and, unless so stated,
does not apply to activities financed from its funds but oper-
ated by other federal agencies.

At various points throughout this volume use has been made
of estimates of population for years between the 1930 and 1940
censuses. These estimates are those issued by the Bureau of the
Census in March, 1941.

While this study was still in progress the National Resources
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Planning Board initiated its much broader investigation into national relief policy including the operation of the social insurances, public assistance administered in accordance with the Social Security Act, and the youth programs of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration. Although the director of the National Resources Planning Board's study, Eveline M. Burns, and the present writer have conferred on the scope of their respective undertakings and their methods of approach, the timing of the publication of the two reports has been such that the findings of neither have been available to the other. While the National Resources Planning Board's study is more comprehensive than that reported here, the present volume treats much of its more limited subject matter in considerably greater detail than does the other study.

Throughout the present volume attention has been focused upon the various forces and factors, both personal and impersonal, that have operated in favor of or thwarted the various relief measures and proposals here reviewed. For this reason it is believed that the usefulness of this report will not be limited to the lifetime of any particular program or agency discussed here. Even after any one measure or any given agency passes from the scene, the various forces that gave it birth, those that nursed it along, those that hampered, hamstrung, and even tried to kill it off, will continue in operation. These factors must therefore be taken into account in planning the further course of existing agencies that may be continued and in charting the future of such agencies as may later be established.
PART ONE

THE SETTING
CHAPTER I

"THE PROBLEM OF RELIEF"

STRICTLY SPEAKING, one cannot speak of the relief problem as a single unit any more than of the health problem, the family problem, or the national defense problem. Each is a nexus of different, though complex and related problems.

COMPLEXITY OF RELIEF PROBLEMS

The complexity of relief problems arises in part from differences in the kinds of persons who need relief, variations in the nature of causes giving rise to their individual needs, and fluctuations in public attitudes. Difficulties arise, too, from disparities in the probable duration of people's needs, from the heterogeneity of measures designed to meet needs of various kinds, and finally, from the wide variety of administrative arrangements effected to carry out these programs.

America's answer to different classes of individuals having among common needs their own peculiar difficulties has been to set up an elaborate series of special governmental programs: one program primarily for certain dependent children, one for needy aged, and another for needy blind persons, who can meet prescribed requirements with respect to eligibility. Still another program, that of public employment provided by the Work Projects Administration (WPA), is designed to provide employment to limited numbers of needy employable workers meeting defined eligibility requirements. In addition, a special program has been organized to provide subsistence grants to farmers in need of such aid.

Subsequent to the outbreak of World War II, special provision has been made, usually from federal funds exclusively, for meeting the needs of aliens and even American citizens affected by action of the federal government. Included in this group are the families of aliens held in custody by the government. Included also are aliens and citizens ordered by the government to evacuate specified strategic areas.

Though not yet completed at this writing, plans are being
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy
devised for providing special war assistance to persons in the
United States who may be thrown into need as a result of enemy
action.

Finally, there were, prior to July, 1942, two youth programs—
that of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and that of the
National Youth Administration (NYA)—designed to give
young persons an opportunity either to continue their education
or to learn work habits, earn part of their own maintenance, and
in some instances contribute to the support of their families.
Over and above all these special programs, there is a broad pro-
gram of so-called general relief (or general assistance) for aiding
needy persons (or, rather, some of them) who do not qualify,
or who need more than they can get, under any of the special
programs already noted.

All these measures which provide public relief to persons in
their own homes are, of course, supplemented by provision for
the care of needy persons in institutions such as hospitals, almshouses, homes for the aged, orphanages, children’s homes, schools
for the blind, or similar public or private institutions. Finally,
in addition to all these governmental aids there are services ren-
dered by private philanthropic, charitable, and social service
agencies which help in a wide variety of ways to meet the needs of
distressed individuals and families.

The several units of this complex network of public relief pro-
grams have not necessarily arisen from giving to different classes
of individuals the kind of treatment peculiarly appropriate to their
needs; they have tended rather to derive from vagaries in public
attitudes toward the needs of different groups.

Administrative provisions to carry out the wide variety of ex-
isting relief programs are also about as complex as could be
imagined. In one locality, for example, the several relief pro-
grams may each be administered by a different agency. In another,
a single agency may administer several if not most of them.
Within a given locality one assistance measure may be adminis-
tered by a township, another by a county, another by a state, and
yet another by a federal agency. Any single state or federal
agency may, because of a wide range of factors, operate effect-
tively in one place but poorly in another. Because of this wide
variety of arrangements it is all but impossible to make generali-
izations about relief administration. Questions about provisions
The Setting

for needy persons, unfortunately, cannot be answered categorically. To be accurate, the answers must be related only to a given relief program in a particular locality and at a specified time.

Current Public Relief Measures

Existing public relief programs may be classified under four general headings—special or categorical assistance, farm security grants, employment provided by the Work Projects Administration, and general assistance or general relief.¹

Special Assistance

“Special assistance” is the term usually applied to the three assistance or relief programs administered in conformity with the Social Security Act—old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. These forms of aid are administered by state and local agencies in accordance with plans submitted to and approved by the federal Social Security Board. A state’s plan for administering any one of these types of assistance must assure: (a) that aid granted under the plan will be available in all parts of the state; (b) that it will be administered by or under the supervision of a single state agency; (c) that sound administrative practices will be observed; (d) that the personnel will be selected and retained on the basis of merit; (e) that hearings will be assured applicants for or recipients of assistance who think they have not been accorded fair treatment; (f) that the state will make some financial contribution to the program; and (g) that conditions of eligibility will not violate certain standards prescribed by federal law.

Upon meeting prescribed conditions, states may receive federal funds to the extent of 50 per cent of assistance grants not in excess of specified maxima. States are, of course, free to give assistance above these limits, but the excess must be met from state and local funds. Upon refusal of the Social Security Board to approve a plan or upon failure of a state to live up to its approved plan, federal funds may be withheld.

In January, 1942, federally approved plans for old-age assist-

¹ The programs of the NYA, the CCC, and of other federal agencies providing emergency employment frequently included among public relief and employment programs are not described here even though employment and financial data relating to these programs are included in discussions of costs and of the number of persons benefited.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ance were in operation in all 48 states and the District of Columbia, plans for aid to the blind were in operation in 44, and plans for aid to dependent children in 46 jurisdictions.¹

Federal policy with regard to special assistance programs is relatively well defined. Although there are still a few controversial questions such as the effectuation of merit systems for personnel, the tendency, particularly in the West, to regard aid to the aged as a "pension" rather than assistance based on need, the inadequacy of grants in many states, and the failure of the federal government to scale its contributions in accordance with state resources, current special assistance measures involve comparatively few controversies except over minor details. So well have these programs been accepted by the American people that both the Democrats and the Republicans in 1940 pledged their furtherance. In this volume discussion of special assistance is only incidental to discussion of more unsettled issues.

Farm Security Grant Program

Farm security grants, providing temporary aid for farmers, are administered directly by the federal Farm Security Administration (FSA) through its own regional and state offices. In spite of the fact that no state or local agency has direct administrative responsibility, county agents and home demonstration agents are frequently called upon (as are other state and local officials and agencies) for advice regarding disposition of applications and treatment of beneficiaries under the program. Grants are financed altogether from federal funds.

Even though the FSA, during the six years 1936 through 1941, provided subsistence grants for an average of approximately 100,000 farm families a month (the range being from more than 300,000 early in 1937 to fewer than 15,000 during the summer and fall of 1941), and although benefits have in recent years amounted to nearly 20 million dollars or more annually, this program has never received much publicity. This may be

¹ Of the three states in which there was no federally approved plan for aid to dependent children in January, 1942, Nevada lacked also an approved program of aid to the blind. The other two states having no approved program of aid to children were Kentucky and Iowa. Further states having no approved aid program for the blind were Delaware, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Missouri.

Characteristics of state plans under which the three forms of assistance are administered in the several states from time to time may be found in publications issued by the Social Security Board.
The Setting

explained, perhaps, on the ground that after the federal government professed to have quit the "business of relief" the continuance of a federal program of direct relief might have been somewhat difficult to explain. Then, too, many officials responsible for their administration appear to regard farm security grants as a mere appendage to their other and larger responsibilities for rehabilitating farmers. Finally, of course, was the fact that, in comparison with other current relief measures, the FSA grant program was a relatively small one.

Details concerning FSA grants, other than reports of expenditures and numbers aided, are scanty. For these reasons it cannot be said that the giving of subsistence grants to farm families is either popular or unpopular with the American people. The majority of non-farmers probably do not even know that it is done. In this volume, grants to farm families, like special assistance, will be treated only incidentally in connection with other issues.

General Relief

General relief, or general assistance, as it is sometimes called, is that form of public aid normally granted to needy individuals or families who are living in their own or other private homes rather than in institutions such as almshouses or hospitals (except for temporary care) and who (a) are not given employment by the WPA, old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, aid to the blind, or farm security grants; or (b) are granted one or more of these types of assistance but in such insufficient amount that supplementary aid becomes necessary. From 1933 to 1936 the federal government both contributed to this type of relief and participated in its administration. Since that period, however, general relief has been administered solely by state and local agencies without any degree of federal administrative or financial participation.

Unlike special assistance administered under the Social Security Act, general relief is not a popularly approved program. In fact, it creates constant ferment and has evoked some of the most heated and bitter controversies along the relief front. And, unlike the FSA grant program, it is neither inconspicuous nor little heard-of. Newspaper columns have blossomed out sporadically with dramatic and usually unfavorable stories about
incidents in the general relief program. The public, however aroused, has had little sound information about the program as a whole, despite well-publicized and recurring “relief crises” in city after city. Because of changes that are occurring in the general relief field, because of further changes that are being advocated on every hand, because of widespread demands for changes in federal policy in this area, and because all these are inextricably bound up with the major problems dealt with in this volume, general relief is discussed in some detail, particularly in Chapters II and III.

Work Projects Administration Employment

Employment for limited numbers of needy unemployed workers throughout the United States is provided by a federally controlled agency—the WPA—in co-operation with local agencies which have important roles in the administration of its program and must provide approximately one-fourth the cost of its projects. It is with this program that the present volume primarily deals.

Numbers Granted Relief

The vastness of existing public relief programs is immediately apparent when it is recalled that the total number of families aided each month runs into the millions. Exactly how many families it is impossible to say. Nevertheless, estimates made by responsible federal agencies suggest that during 1939 and 1940 the number of different households benefited directly under one or more of the nation's public relief programs in any one month ranged from five to seven million. These households were estimated to include some 14 to 21 million persons.

During 1939, the last year before “defense prosperity” actually set in, the average number of families benefiting from public relief or employment programs each month included more than 19 million persons. These represented nearly 15 per cent of the total population of the United States, one out of every six or seven persons in the country, a total approximately equivalent to

1 Including those of the CCC and NYA, the three special assistance programs, general relief, farm security grants, WPA employment, and employment provided by the Public Works Administration and other agencies from emergency funds. Social Security Bulletin, vol. 4, no. 2, February, 1941, p. 69.
The Setting

the entire population of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin combined.

The magnitude of relief problems is further evidenced by the fact that the numbers of persons given public relief (exclusive of the CCC and NYA benefits and non-relief employment on federal work programs) in some of the largest cities in a typical month would in themselves rival the population of important cities. For example, according to an estimate made by the writer in 1937, a total of some 1,100,000 different persons received some form of public relief (including WPA employment) in a single month in New York City alone.¹ Had these individuals been organized into a city of their own, it would have ranked as the sixth city of the United States—somewhat smaller than Los Angeles, but approximately 25 per cent greater than Cleveland.

Turnover of Relief Rolls

Impressive as may be the estimates of the number of persons given one form of public relief or another at any given time, the total number of different individuals aided over any considerable period of time is even more striking. Families receiving relief one month may be able to get along “on their own” the next. Conversely, families no longer able to make the grade under their own power are constantly turning to relief agencies for assistance over longer or shorter periods of time. This continuous turnover in relief rolls means that relief programs during the course of a year obviously serve many more families than they do in any one month. In New York City, for example, although the number aided through the Department of Welfare in any one month during the fiscal year 1940 never exceeded 582,164, it was estimated by the Department that it assisted over 900,000 different persons at one time or another during the year.²

When the Bureau of Labor Statistics made its study of consumer purchases and family income in 1935–1936 ³ it was found that a considerable proportion of families in the several cities

¹ According to an official estimate, the Department of Welfare, the Board of Child Welfare, and WPA aided an average of approximately 906,000 persons each month during the fiscal year 1940.—New York (City) Department of Welfare, Public Assistance in New York City: Annual Report, 1939-1940, p. 114.
² Ibid., pp. 7, 114.
³ See chap. 27 for a more detailed description of this study.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

studied had received some kind of relief at some time during the twelve-month period to which the investigation applied.

Among 29 cities for which comparable data are available it was found, for example, that the number of families receiving some form of relief during the year in question represented from 10 to 15 per cent of all families in seven cities; \(^1\) from 15 to 20 per cent of all families in 11 cities; \(^2\) from 20 to 25 per cent of all families in four cities; \(^3\) and more than 25 per cent of all families in seven cities, the largest proportion being 28.5 per cent in Pueblo, Colorado.\(^4\)

In New York City approximately 22 per cent of the families in the wage-earner group were classed as relief families. Among the families of clerical workers and of business and of professional persons, however, the proportions receiving relief were only 8.5 and 4.2 per cent, respectively.

When account is taken of the number of different families or persons granted relief of one kind or another over a period of years, rather than in a single year as in the study of consumer purchases, the total is, of course, appreciably increased. For example, estimates made by the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration of New York suggest that some five million men, women, and children (approximately 40 per cent of the population of the state) were granted emergency relief—to say nothing of those receiving other types of assistance—at one time or another during the sixty-eight months prior to that agency's liquidation in 1937. Still, the largest number aided in any one month was only a little over two million.

Estimates of numbers benefiting from WPA employment indicate that although employment during the four years 1936 through 1939 averaged only about 2.3 million workers a month, the total number of persons given employment at one time or another during this period was no fewer than 7.5 million. By 1941

\(^1\) Wallingford and New Britain, Conn.; Columbia, S. C.; Gastonia, Ga.; Muncie, Ind.; Springfield, Ill.; Billings, Mont.
\(^2\) Providence, R. L.; Atlanta, Ga.; Albany, Ga.; Mobile, Ala.; Columbus, Ohio; Logansport, Ind.; Peru, Ind.; Omaha, Nebr.; Springfield, Mo.; Denver, Colo.; Portland, Ore.
\(^3\) Beaver Falls, Pa.; Dubuque, Iowa; Aberdeen-Hoquiam, Wash.; Bellingham, Wash.
\(^4\) Other cities in this class were: Haverhill, Mass.; New Castle, Pa.; Connellsville, Pa.; Mattoon, Ill.; Butte, Mont.; and Everett, Wash.
**The Setting**

WPA employment was officially estimated to have been provided, at one time or another, to well over eight million different individuals—one-fifth of all workers in the country. Since these millions of workers had, on the average, from two to three dependents, it seems not unlikely that WPA wages to the end of 1940 had benefited directly some 25 to 30 million individuals—or approximately one out of every four or five persons in the United States.

It is obvious that so large a group of our citizens cannot, as popularly imagined, constitute a well-defined group of atypical individuals and social misfits, but more nearly represent a cross-section of the nation. Our relief programs are not a kind of human wastebasket into which only ne'er-do-wells fall and forever remain; they constitute a widespread life net which may, from time to time and for longer or shorter periods, be called upon to sustain a not inconsiderable proportion of the American people. If relief measures are organized in such a way that their influence upon this appreciable segment of the population is constructive and helpful, the total amount of benefit may be incalculable. If, on the other hand, relief programs are so administered that they harm rather than help those who come in contact with them, their deleterious effects will be widespread indeed.

**Families and Individuals Aided**

The social unit to which assistance is given under existing public relief measures varies somewhat from program to program. Old-age assistance and aid to the blind, for example, are normally granted on an individual basis. Aid to dependent children, farm security grants, general assistance, and WPA jobs, on the other hand, are usually granted on a family basis, although, of course, an individual living alone may be given any of these forms of aid excepting aid to dependent children.

The average family receiving aid to dependent children in 1939 and 1940 included approximately 2.5 children for whom assistance was allowed, some adult to care for the children, and perhaps also other adults or children not provided for through the grant; households granted general relief are estimated to average approximately three persons each, while those given WPA employment in 1939 averaged 3.75 persons.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

TABLE 1.—AVERAGE MONTHLY NUMBER OF WORKERS EMPLOYED ON WPA AND OTHER FEDERAL WORK PROGRAMS; OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CASES; AND OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS, JULY, 1935, TO JUNE, 1941, BY FISCAL YEAR

(Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year ending June 30</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers employed:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAb</td>
<td>1,995</td>
<td>2,227</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>2,911</td>
<td>1,971</td>
<td>1,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC and NYA</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other federal work projectsd</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public assistance cases:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security programs</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>1,852</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>2,308</td>
<td>2,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General relief</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>1,484</td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>1,647</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm security subsistence grants®</td>
<td>120t</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unduplicated number of households receiving public assistance or emergency work (official estimate)</td>
<td>5,886</td>
<td>5,660</td>
<td>5,474</td>
<td>6,751</td>
<td>5,860</td>
<td>5,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed workers (AF of L estimate)</td>
<td>10,176</td>
<td>8,541</td>
<td>9,640</td>
<td>10,655</td>
<td>9,634</td>
<td>7,675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a This table is a condensation of Appendix Table 1. Descriptions of data used here are included in footnotes to that table.
b Employment on projects operated by WPA.
c Average for eleven months, August to June.
d This item includes employment on other federal agency projects financed from emergency funds and also that on regular federal construction projects.
® Cases for which subsistence payments were certified.
f Average for six months, January to June.

In terms of both the number of households and the number of individuals aided each month throughout the past several years, the WPA program has been of first importance. The general relief program has ranked second. The monthly average number of families or individuals aided under the nation’s several relief programs from July, 1936, through June, 1941, is shown in Table 1. More detailed data are presented in Appendix Table 1, which shows that numbers aided within a given year have varied widely from month to month.1

1 Detailed discussion of differences in the number of cases granted general relief in the various states is presented in chap. 2. Similar discussion of employment provided by the WPA, CCC, and NYA and other federal agencies is included in chap. 22.
### The Setting

#### TABLE 2.—AMOUNTS OF FEDERAL EMERGENCY WORK PROGRAM EARNINGS AND OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS, 1936 TO 1941, BY CALENDAR YEAR

(Million dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar year</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work program earnings:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>1,566</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC and NYA</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other federal work projects&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>1,814</td>
<td>2,229</td>
<td>2,118</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>1,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public assistance benefits:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security programs</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General relief</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm security subsistence grants</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>677</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>1,068</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total</strong></td>
<td>3,115</td>
<td>2,654</td>
<td>3,237</td>
<td>3,186</td>
<td>2,724</td>
<td>2,228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<sup>b</sup> Does not include earnings on regular federal construction projects or those on emergency projects operated by other federal agencies but financed from WPA funds. The latter are included with WPA earnings in the first line of this table.

### Costs of Relief

Benefits paid to recipients of public relief<sup>1</sup> in the United States during 1941 amounted to approximately 2.2 billion dollars. In 1939 the total was nearly 3.2 billion dollars or approximately $25 for every man, woman, and child in the land. Of this grand total the largest amounts (in every year since the WPA was organized) went for earnings on WPA projects. The second largest amount prior to 1940 was for general relief, which since that year has ranked third, being exceeded by old-age assistance. Expenditures for 1941 were lower than those for any year since 1933. Benefits paid under the nation’s several relief programs in each of the past several years are shown in Table 2.

Although the federal government, during the years 1934

<sup>1</sup> Including the CCC and NYA programs but excluding earnings on regular federal construction projects.—Social Security Bulletin, vol. 4, no. 2, February, 1941, pp. 65, 67.
The WTA and Federal Relief Policy

through 1936, paid approximately three-fourths of the cost of the nation's total relief bill (including costs of administration and of materials, supplies, and equipment used on work-relief projects) it has borne a steadily declining proportion of the cost until in 1940 and 1941 it was paying only about three-fifths of the total bill. This is particularly noteworthy in view of all that has been said in recent years about the growing importance of the federal government as opposed to state and local government in many spheres of activity. By far the greatest part of this proportionate decline is attributable to the fact that since 1935 the federal government has contributed nothing to the cost of general relief and has borne a steadily declining though still preponderant share of the cost of the WPA program.

Earnings on federal work projects and amounts granted in public assistance in the various states show wide variations not only in total absolute amounts but also in proportion to population. In 1940, for example, work-relief and public assistance benefits granted in the several states amounted to only $10 or $11 per inhabitant in Virginia and North Carolina, but amounted to $30.19 per inhabitant in Massachusetts and to no less than $35.85 in Colorado. The distribution of states in accordance with the amount of public assistance and work program earnings per inhabitant in 1940 is shown in Table 3.

Even among states where the total public assistance and work-relief benefits per inhabitant are relatively comparable, the proportion of these benefits provided under one program as opposed to another show marked differences. In Massachusetts and Colorado, for example, where total benefits in 1940 averaged more than $30 per inhabitant, the proportion of the total going for special assistance (including aid for the aged) varied from approximately 30 per cent in Massachusetts to nearly 45 per cent in Colorado. Although total work and direct assistance benefits per inhabitant were approximately the same in New York and Indiana, general relief accounted for slightly more than 33 per cent of the total in New York but for only about 9 per cent of the whole in Indiana. Even more striking is the contrast between Connecticut and Arkansas. Although total benefits per inhabitant were roughly comparable in these two states, general relief represented about 19 per cent of all benefits paid in Con-
The Setting

TABLE 3.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY COMBINED AMOUNT OF FEDERAL EMERGENCY WORK PROGRAM EARNINGS AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS PER INHABITANT, 1940.\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount per inhabitant</th>
<th>States</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10.00 to $14.99</td>
<td>Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00 to 19.99</td>
<td>Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oregon, South Carolina, West Virginia, Wyoming</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.00 to 24.99</td>
<td>Arizona, Dist. of Col., Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Washington, Wisconsin</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.00 to 29.99</td>
<td>California, Illinois, Montana, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.00 or over</td>
<td>Colorado, Massachusetts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Earnings include those from employment by WPA, CCC, NYA, and other federal agencies on projects financed from emergency funds; earnings from regular construction projects are not included. Public assistance benefits include those of social security assistance programs, general relief, and farm security subsistence payments. Source of data: Social Security Bulletin, April, 1941, p. 48.

necticut but represented less than 1 per cent of those paid in Arkansas.\(^1\)

Relief expenditures, say some critics, are enough to put the country's credit on the rocks.\(^2\) Others, however, maintain that they are not nearly high enough to give needed security to millions of Americans. Though when viewed in toto and alone these expenditures are of tremendous size, they appear somewhat less mountainous when viewed in relationship to total income payments for the nation as a whole, since, in recent years, direct and work-relief benefits represented only 2 to 4 per cent of the total.

\(^1\) For discussion of interstate differences in WPA employment and expenditures see chaps. 22 and 32.

\(^2\) Further discussion of this issue is included in chaps. 31 and 33.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

When national income increases as it did between 1939 and 1942, the need for relief is likely to be lessened and such expenditures as are made for relief purposes represent a much smaller proportion of the national income than they do when national income falls to a lower level. Work and direct relief benefits and their relation to total income payments are presented in Table 4 and in Diagram 1. The latter, reproduced from the Social Security Bulletin, covers a longer period of time than this volume is primarily concerned with. It may be noted that the scope of both the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>National income (billion dollars)</th>
<th>Work relief</th>
<th>Direct relief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount (billion dollars)</td>
<td>Per cent of national income</td>
<td>Amount (billion dollars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b Earnings of workers employed by WPA, CCC, and NYA.
c Social security assistance program benefits, general relief, and value of surplus food stamps of Surplus Marketing Administration.

work and direct relief programs included in this table and diagram varies somewhat from that of programs included in Table 2.

Relief expenditures appear somewhat less formidable, too, when it is realized that all of the relief and assistance granted in each of the past several years has probably amounted to no more than two or three times what the people of the United States spent for cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, and smoking equipment. Furthermore, the yearly average of work and direct relief benefits granted over the past six years was probably less than the American people spend “in an average year” for distilled spirits, wines, and malt beverages.1

DIAGRAM 1.—INDEX OF INCOME PAYMENTS TO PERSONS IN THE UNITED STATES, JANUARY, 1929, TO DECEMBER, 1941, BY MONTH

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Amounts of Relief Grants

When viewed not from the top down, but from the disadvantage-point of the needy family dependent upon these grants for even the elementary necessities of life, relief expenditures appear anything but Gargantuan. Monthly benefits paid under the nation's various relief programs in 1939, for example, varied from an average of approximately $19 a month per case granted old-age assistance, to approximately $56 a month paid to WPA employees. However, since the average household receiving WPA earnings consisted of approximately 3.75 persons, only about $15 per month, or approximately 50 cents per day, was received for each person in the average WPA family. Old-age assistance, on the other hand, is normally granted on an individual rather than on a household basis. Grants to cases given general relief (averaging approximately three persons per case) in 1939 averaged approximately $24 a month. This meant about $8.00 per month, or 26 cents per day, for each person in the family.1

Public Relief, an Ancient Heritage

Historically, assistance given by governmental agencies may be traced even farther back than the Elizabethan measures from which public relief is commonly supposed to have developed. Municipalities both in England and on the continent of Europe, for example, are known to have provided relief to needy persons early in the sixteenth century. This assistance had been preceded by systems of relief-giving through the church and guilds which exercised some of the controls over individual conduct later assumed by government.

To see public relief in its proper setting, it must be understood that the volume of public aid in the United States exceeded that given by private relief agencies even prior to the Rooseveltian New Deal. It is a generally accepted fact that by 1929, three-fourths of all relief given in the United States was from public funds, and only about one-fourth from funds of private agencies. Analysis of such data as are available regarding relief expenditures in the United States from 1910 to 1935 led Anne E. Geddes, now associate director of the Social Security Board's Bureau of

1 For further analysis of average benefits paid under these and other assistance programs, see chap. 7.
The Setting

Public Assistance, to conclude that "the very great increase in expenditures in the depression years" represented not a new phenomenon in American relief history, but rather a "sharp acceleration of a tendency manifest throughout the preceding two decades." ¹

LEGAL BASIS OF PUBLIC RELIEF

Courts called upon from time to time to pass upon the constitutionality of legislative acts dealing with the relief function have declared repeatedly that final justification for such governmental function is the self-preservation of the state. Thus, relief given by state and local governments has been justified as an exercise of the police power. A federal power corresponding to the police power of the states arises under the general welfare provision of the federal Constitution.

Among high court decisions on this question of relief giving may be noted a frequently quoted opinion of the Supreme Court of New Hampshire.² This advisory opinion, rendered in 1931, states in part:

The validity of pauper acts has never been assailed. . . . The support of paupers has long been accepted exercise of valid authority under the police power in promotion of the general welfare. . . . In the avoidance and relief of pauperism the state acts for its own benefit and welfare.

Two decisions of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania are also of great significance. In the first of these ³ the court declared:

The care and maintenance of indigent, infirm and mentally defective persons, without ability or means to sustain themselves, and other charges of a like nature . . . became direct charges on the body politic for its own preservation and protection. As such, in the light of an expense, they stand exactly in the same position as the preservation of law and order. . . .

Several years later, when the same court was again called upon to pass upon the constitutionality of a relief measure,⁴ it reiterated its earlier declaration to the effect that:

. . . the obligation of the government to care for poor persons was not a charitable undertaking any more than the performance of any other public function is a charity.

² In re Opinion of the Justices, 85 N. H. 562, 564; 154 Atl. 217, 221.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

... the support of the poor, meaning such persons as have been understood as coming within that class ever since the organization of the government, persons who are without means of support, ... is and has always been a direct charge on the body politic for its own preservation and protection. ... 

While state and local responsibility for providing relief has been long recognized and approved by the courts, assumption of such responsibility by the federal government has only recently been accorded formal recognition and approval.

The legal basis for recognition of the validity of federal efforts in this field was laid down in a decision on the federal Agricultural Adjustment Act announced by the United States Supreme Court in 1936. Speaking therein of the power conferred upon Congress by the constitutional provision to "lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States," the court stated:

The view that the clause grants power to provide for the general welfare, independently of the taxing power, has never been authoritatively accepted. ... The true construction undoubtedly is that the only thing granted is the power to tax for the purpose of providing funds for payment of the nation's debts and making provision for the general welfare.

... the power of Congress to authorize expenditure of public moneys for public purposes is not limited by the direct grants of legislative power found in the Constitution.

Funds in the Treasury as a result of taxation may be expended only through appropriation. ... They can never accomplish the objects for which they were collected unless the power to appropriate is as broad as the power to tax. The necessary implication from the terms of the grant is that the public funds may be appropriated "to provide for the general welfare of the United States." These words cannot be meaningless, else they would not have been used. The conclusion must be that they were intended to limit and define the granted power to raise and to expend money.

Building upon this interpretation of the welfare clause, the Supreme Court declared in 1937, in a decision upholding the constitutionality of Title IX of the Social Security Act:

During the years 1929 to 1936, when the country was passing through a cyclical depression, the number of the unemployed mounted to unprecedented heights. ... Disaster to the breadwinner meant disaster to dependents. ... It is too late today for the arguments to be heard with tolerance that

1 United States v. Butler et al., 297 U. S. 1, 64-66; 102 A.L.R. 914.
2 Article I, sec. 8. (Italics are the author's.)
The Setting

in a crisis so extreme the use of moneys of the nation to relieve the unem¬
ployed and their dependents is a use for any purpose narrower than the
promotion of the general welfare.

In another case 1 decided the same day, involving Titles II and
VIII of the Social Security Act, the Supreme Court declared:

Spreading from state to state, unemployment is an ill not particular but
general which may be checked, if Congress so determines, by the resources
of the nation. . . . The ill is all one, or at least not greatly different, whether
men are thrown out of work because there is no longer work to do or be¬
because the disabilities of age make them incapable of doing it. Rescue becomes
necessary irrespective of the cause.

Reference to "rescue . . . irrespective of the cause" of need
appears to concede the federal government's power to come to the
aid of necessitous people regardless of whether their want results
from unemployment, old age, or any other cause that might de¬
prive them of work or render them incapable of working.

Conditions Adverse to Development of
Relief Programs

Although from a legal point of view the question appears to be
settled that relief-giving is a proper function of the federal as
well as of state and local governments, the terms "self-preser¬
vation" and "general welfare" are much too vague to be of material
help in determining how far governments should carry these re¬
sponsibilities. From what is the state to preserve itself—starva¬
tion? robbery? riot? revolution? Or must subtler aspects also be
taken into account? Does the preservation of the state call for
measures that will prevent malnutrition, forestall public resent¬
ment over the relative resourcelessness of millions of citizens,
safeguard against the deterioration of morale or preserve
families and homes? The term "general welfare" is no easier
of definition than "preservation of the state," and provides no
better objective basis for measuring the extent to which govern¬
mental relief measures could or should be carried.2

2 Concrete illustration of how consideration of relief measures is clouded by un¬
certainty as to how far these should go was provided in a radio broadcast in which
Henry S. Dennison, president of the Dennison Manufacturing Company, declared:
"At the hard minimum enough must be paid to avoid hunger marches piling on top
of each other to social revolution. Any form of government would do that much.
The difficulties and differences of opinion begin when for one reason or another
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

While orderly development of relief programs may be hampered by this lack of objective standards, almost any type of public program is subject to the same difficulty. Who knows, for example, whether the United States should raise an army of five million or ten million men, or an air force of 100,000 or 500,000 planes? And who can say whether the public schooling now given American youth is too much or too little, or the number of police too many or too few?

Relief measures are frequently hampered by public resistance to increased taxation, or by suspicion of “bureaucracy,” inefficiency, and governmental red tape.

These are obstacles which hinder the development of public services in general. There are other attitudes and concepts, however, which constitute a peculiar handicap to the expansion of relief programs. One of these is the fact that relief measures seem to negate and run counter to a number of fundamental concepts about the American way of life; that people who really want work can find it; that those who are given relief are pauperized thereby; and similar concepts rooted in past experience and mores. Another is that relief administration, touching intimately as it does the personal lives of millions of people, is conceived to be even more susceptible of prostitution to political ends than are other public services. Finally, the difficulty persists of defining and getting the public to understand what people really need; and what, if not available, will prove detrimental not only to those most directly concerned but also to the community at large.

“People Can Find Work If They Want It”

Foremost, perhaps, among obstacles in the way of developing more liberal relief programs has been the widespread feeling that in this land of opportunity, any individual can find some way to
maintain himself and his dependents without relief if he will only exert the necessary initiative and effort. This consummate faith of the American people in the ability of men to provide for themselves has influenced immeasurably the nature and extent of relief programs established in the United States. Only with the greatest reluctance have the American people in general and legislative bodies in particular come gradually during the past ten years to realize and admit that there were actually too few jobs to go around.

In spite of the unwillingness—or inability—of our people to bring themselves to face this stark reality, the volume of evidence in support of it is incontrovertible.

Even before the crash of 1929 the National Federation of Settlements, after intensive study of causes and effects of joblessness among families known to settlements in various cities reported widespread involuntary unemployment. "The significance of this study," wrote Helen Hall, chairman of the Committee responsible for its prosecution, is that it is "a measure, not of what rouses our American communities to action in bad times, but of what for the most part they are blind to when times are 'good.' . . . No one who reads any number of the case records presented," continued Miss Hall, "can feel happy in his mind that one should leave it to people so disadvantaged to combat, single-handed, the industrial changes and dislocations which tear at the structure of their homes." ¹

After extensive study of what is termed "an average group of unemployed workers and their families," Webster Powell and Ewan Clague wrote in 1933:

The trouble was that they [unemployed workers], and perhaps their employers, were engulfed in an economic disaster of the first magnitude, a disaster too great for any individual action to be effective. Under such circumstances no blanket charge of personal responsibility can be laid against these workers." ²

² According to Clinch Calkins, who in Some Folks Won't Work summarized the findings of this study, these should have dispelled "several widely held ideas" such as the impression that "unemployment comes only in hard times," that the only unemployed workers who suffer are those "who have been too thriftless to save," and that "if a man really wants to find work, he can find it."—Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., New York, 1930, pp. 19-21.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Still more recently E. Wight Bakke of the Institute of Human Relations, after exhaustive study of unemployed workers in New Haven, wrote: "No doubt individual cases can be found of persons who are work-shy. But out of our six years of attempts to find genuine cases of refusal of jobs with any claim to minimum standards, we have developed a thorough conviction that this state of affairs is so unusual as to be of no real concern for public administration." 1

Extensive study of work relief in Massachusetts led Elizabeth W. Gilboy in 1940 to a comparable, though somewhat more conservatively stated, conclusion. "The opinion that the continuance of work relief is desirable," she writes, "must be based on the assumption that applicants for work relief are employable, and that they became unemployed as a result of economic and social forces beyond their control. That this is true of a great many of the work-relief applicants in the last few years, probably a majority of them, seems to me to be indicated not only by the Massachusetts data which form the basis of this study, but by the scattered evidence on the nature of work-relief applicants in other states." 2

A Fortune article, based upon that magazine's regular survey technique and covering some 1,100 sample cases in 11 cities in 1937, declared that the many people who thought that "the trouble with unemployment" was the unemployed, were "almost completely wrong." Answering its own question, "Are the relievers bums?", Fortune replied with an emphatic "No," then went on to explain that:

More than two-thirds of our sample of the 1935 relievers held their longest jobs for more than five years. A fifth of the total sample had held the same job for twenty years and more before hard times caused employers to let them go. A quarter of the total worked at one job for from ten to twenty years. And a fifth were good enough workmen to keep the same job for from five to ten years. This is an employment record that argues a good deal for the steady-going habits of those who were thrown out of work by depression. Moreover, of the entire sample, less than a tenth had lost their jobs through personal failure in their own business or through being fired for their own clearly apparent fault. 3

A report prepared for the Royal Institute of International

1 The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, p. 369.
The Setting

Affairs by a group of members under the chairmanship of Viscount Astor, and covering international aspects of unemployment, declared:

Differentiation between distress due to unemployment and distress arising from other causes . . . does not arise fundamentally from the question of whether the onus of distress lies on the individual. The notion that the righteous man “shall not want,” and that poverty is the result of a man’s own fault or his parents, is a very old one. It is only slowly being destroyed by a changed attitude of mind towards the philosophical and psychological questions involved in the determination of man’s character and fate, by the conviction that there is no justification for the assumption that distress is necessarily due to failure of duty, whether it is directly connected with industrial conditions or not.¹

For those who were still living under the illusion that anyone wanting a job could find one, it was doubtless a shocking—though for their social education, perhaps, a salutary—experience to hear Bruce Barton while a member of Congress from New York publicly confess that in spite of all his own earnest effort, his wide business contacts, and influential acquaintances, he had been unable to find a job of any kind for one young man in whom he was interested.

Resting upon the belief that where there’s a will there’s a job is the assumption that except among the aged, the sick, the incapacitated, and young children, relief needs could be practically liquidated if only people would go to work. However, not only joblessness, but underemployment, low wages, relative unemployability, death of breadwinners, premature old age, and a host of other ills have thrown large numbers of families into need. Instead of denying relief on the ground that, by hook or by crook, people could provide for themselves, many administrators and observers have urged that need should be met wherever it is found to exist and that other means than denial of relief should be relied upon to bring available jobs and workers together.²

“Relief Pauperizes Those Who Receive It”

A second reef upon which relief proposals have frequently been wrecked is the widespread conviction that relief undermines the initiative, self-reliance, and self-respect of those who accept it.

² This issue is further discussed in chap. 20.

47
This doctrine was industriously preached even by social agencies during the last century when there was still a western frontier calling for settlement; and the idea has persisted although the social and economic picture has radically changed. Today, refusal of relief is no real answer to the problem of pauperization since it only substitutes for relief-receiving an even more demoralizing experience—resourcelessness and destitution. Nevertheless, the likelihood of impairing morale and initiative through relief-giving is recognized as a very real danger. Relief administrators have therefore sought ways in which needed relief might be administered so as to do as little harm as possible to the individuals aided.¹

Before accepting uncritically easy generalizations about the “pauperizing” effect of relief one would do well to recall what happens when only inadequate assistance or, perhaps, no aid of any kind is available to those who are in need. When people fall into need they frequently must move to cheaper quarters with all that this means in disrupting children’s school routines, a family’s church relationships, the breaking up of neighborly friendships, and the like. They must sometimes leave behind, or give to the moving-man as a price for his services, a piano, davenport, or other piece of furniture. As need increases, further inroads are made on standards of living. Insurance is allowed to lapse. Worn garments cannot be replaced. Shoes go unmended. Children drop out of school. The social world in which needy families live grows ever smaller, shrinking by degrees as first one relative or friend and then another turns away for fear of being touched for yet another “loan” which probably can never be repaid. Perhaps a family must even be broken up, the children being placed in an institution or foster home; or perhaps the wife and children return to her parents while the husband either returns to his, or—as often occurs—takes to the road in an effort somewhere to find some job that will enable him to reassemble his split family under its own roof.

By contrast with these by-products of society’s neglect—hunger, insufficient clothing, eviction, increasing social isolation, doubling-up, impaired health, broken homes, utter despair, and all that happens to fathers, mothers, children, and their family soli-¹ Some of these safeguards are discussed in some detail in chap. 33.
The Setting
darity as they slip ever deeper into the slough of unrelieved want—even relief which one does not work for may come as a godsend. Its effect, when compared with the greater soul-devastating destruction of inescapable poverty, may be positively salutary.¹

"Relief and Politics Can't Be Divorced"

So accustomed have the American people become to the infiltration of venal politics in many areas of public service, that doubt is frequently expressed whether public relief and politics can ever be divorced completely enough to assure decent care to those who are really in need and to prevent dissipation of resources among political favorites who do not properly qualify for aid. As a result, there has been great reluctance by many persons to expand relief programs lest they serve only to extend spheres of influence of corrupt political practices. Braver souls, on the other hand, though admitting the danger, have advanced proposals for taking politics out of relief and have rejected the more timid alternative of refusing to meet need simply because it opened up the possibility of exploiting the needy.²

"But People Aren't Starving"

Uncertainty as to the degree of poverty likely to cause physical and social deterioration sufficient to justify or necessitate relief-giving has been a fourth obstacle to the development of relief programs in the United States. In fact, this question as to how

¹ Of this Homer Folks, veteran social work leader and long-time secretary of the New York State Charities Aid Association, has written: "There is . . . [a] belief that the mere fact of being in receipt of public relief is, in itself, necessarily demoralizing. In the main, this, I think, is a confusion of the misfortune of being forced down to the level of need with the actual receipt of relief. No one would dream of denying that the experience of being deprived of income, exhausting savings, of being subjected to an ever more imminent state of complete resourcelessness, is a distressing, a terrifying, and, to many, a demoralizing experience. . . . But when bottom has been reached, when need is not only imminent, but existent, the relief of that need is enormously less demoralizing than that the need should continue unrelieved. It is infinitely less demoralizing to receive aid than to resort to illegal and anti-social methods of securing incomes. In fact, at its best, the receipt of relief can be a cohesive social factor. Relief itself provides a certain measure of security, and the better it is administered, the more sense of security it provides while need continues. The absence of relief in such cases would be indeed demoralizing. Its presence need not be, should not be, and under reasonable relief administration, is not demoralizing."—Making Relief Respectable: A Radical Reconstruction of Our Conception of Public Relief, pp. 13-14.

² Factors which have contributed to political exploitation, together with steps taken for its control, are discussed in some detail in this volume, particularly in chaps. 4 and 12.

49
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

depth people can sink into resourcelessness before they become a public concern is of paramount importance. If agreement could be reached on this point, and if the public could be convinced that by falling below a given standard of life a family might injure not only itself but others as well, it is altogether likely that existing uncertainties and fears about personal culpability, politics, and the pauperizing effects of relief-giving would disappear before the greater certainty of the evil effects likely to follow the continuance of inadequate relief programs.

A Fundamental Dilemma Underlying Relief Programs

On the one hand, then, the American people have relied upon public relief programs to preserve living standards among the nation’s most disadvantaged families. This they have done for their own good as well as for the good of their less fortunate fellows. On the other hand, fears and misgivings have served as a brake upon interest in preserving and raising living standards. Perplexing and difficult as it may be for the American people to give with one hand what is considered essential to the protection of living standards while with the other hand they try to keep from giving too much, this dilemma is probably no more bewildering than difficulties encountered in other fields. In the treatment of lawbreakers, for example, society with one hand attempts to punish while with the other it seeks to rehabilitate and socialize.

One result of this conflict between certainties, uncertainties, and incompatible aims in the field of public relief has been that an admittedly unhappy middle course has been followed. Throughout the following pages reference is made again and again to shifts in emphasis, reversals of relief policy, and compromise upon compromise as attention becomes focused first on one and then on the other horn of this dilemma, and as one and then another set of fears or beliefs gains temporary ascendancy over others.
CHAPTER II
GENERAL RELIEF

General relief is commonly regarded in the United States as the last line of defense against destitution. Needy people who are eligible for special assistance, Farm Security grants, WPA, CCC, or NYA employment, are, so long as appropriations for these services hold out, usually given such types of aid. However, since funds available for these programs are frequently far from sufficient to meet existing needs, and since rules governing eligibility for aid under them preclude aid to many needy people, general relief very often must be relied upon to save resourceless families from destitution and demoralization. Because of this fact it would appear that the nation's program of general relief, like the innermost ring of defense surrounding an important military objective, should be fully organized and strongly fortified against any eventuality. Instead, it is the nation's worst organized, most ineptly administered, and least adequate relief program. "Chaotic" and "haphazard" are terms justifiably applied to it.

Speaking of the administration of general relief, William Haber, professor at the University of Michigan and chairman of the National Resources Planning Board's Committee on Relief Policy, declared in 1940:

On the basis of a reasonably adequate understanding of the experience of most of our states, I have no hesitation in saying that, with the exception of some of the large cities, management of direct relief is as chaotic today as it was in 1933; that the genuine need of hundreds of thousands of people in many areas of the country is not being met; that funds are inadequate; that administration has discarded all the progress of six years of reasonably good experience; that political manipulation is as rampant as ever.¹

In further denunciation of general relief administration as it was in 1940, C. M. Bookman (executive vice chairman of the Cincinnati Community Chest, and also a member of the National

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Resources Planning Board's Committee on Relief Policy) declared:

General relief . . . has been so inadequate that there is today a widespread condition that has been aptly described as "slow starvation." It has weakened the resistance of thousands of men, women, and children; has contributed to the development of physical deficiencies, illness, and defects; has broken human morale and, to a very serious extent, destroyed employability. . . .

The present reliance on the state and local community to finance general relief is unsound, inhuman, and disastrous.¹

Nevertheless, the federal government since 1935 has pursued a hands-off policy and has refused to assume any degree of financial or administrative responsibility by which existing conditions might be improved.²

Legal Foundations of State Programs

General relief programs in a few states (notably New York and Pennsylvania) are based upon public welfare laws which compare favorably with those underlying old-age assistance and other special assistance programs. In several other states (such as New Jersey, Illinois, and, until recently, California) which have attempted to keep their provisions for general relief abreast of changing needs, such provisions have been established not as integral units of broad, long-term public welfare programs, but as more or less temporary "unemployment" or "emergency relief" measures.

In most states, however, there has been little pretense of modernizing general relief programs. Rooted in the seventeenth century, these measures, persisting into the twentieth, plague the nation's conscience. They raise a troublesome question—whether our nation, which has set itself to defend a hemisphere if not a world against tyranny and despotism, has not also the responsibility of guarding its own people against deprivation and want.

In a few states general relief provisions are not single pro-


² A single almost negligible exception to this generalization is that Congress, each year since 1939, has authorized the commissioner of the WPA to call attention of city, county, and state governments to unemployment existing in their bailiwicks and to urge co-operation in meeting resulting problems. See, for example, Pub. Res. No. 24 (H. J. Res. 326). 76th Congress, 1st Session. June 30, 1939, sec. 27.
grams but combinations of two or more schemes, each of which is designed to aid different types of individuals. In Alabama, for example, what might be termed the general relief program embraces three different types of provision: local relief and two state-aided programs for the mentally and physically handicapped, and temporary aid to persons ineligible for any other type of assistance. In New York general relief embraces not only “home relief” but aid to veterans and to the non-settled.

Administrative and Financial Arrangements

A state wanting to participate in the nation’s special assistance programs administered in conformity with the Social Security Act must contribute something to the cost of these programs. It must also give assurance that some state agency will assume responsibility for seeing that benefits provided under any of these schemes are available in all parts of the state and that these are administered efficiently.

In the field of general relief no such provisions exist. As a result the widest heterogeneity of administrative and financial arrangements prevails. However, there has been some progress in the field of greater state participation. Between 1931 and 1940 the number of states which have assumed some degree of administrative or supervisory responsibility rose from eight to 32. The number making financial contributions for general relief increased from 13 (including four states in which contributions were made only for poor relief) to 36.

On the one hand there are a few states, such as Pennsylvania and Arizona, which have assumed complete financial and administrative responsibility for all general relief. A few states have assumed complete responsibility for some segment of the

---

1 To say that states must give assurances of this type is not to say that they always make good their word. There is, for example, the testimony of Gertrude Springer, who, after a visit to Texas in 1941, wrote: “... lowering their voices and looking over their shoulders,” Texas social workers say Texas “has gotten away with murder in the administration of old-age assistance and with its dalliance with a merit system—not yet established. From time to time the Social Security Board has pressed the state to tighten its law on eligibility for OAA, particularly in regard to property and insurance exemptions and ability of relatives to support. Indeed, such pressure is now being exerted with a rumored deadline of July 1 for suspension of federal grants. Texas people do not seem to take the warning too seriously: ‘What,’ they say, ‘threatening us again? Oh well, we’re used to it.’”—“This Thing Called Relief,” in Survey Midmonthly, vol. 77, no. 6, June, 1941, p. 174.

2 California fell by the wayside in 1941 as a result of the legislature’s refusal to appropriate funds for unemployment relief.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

general relief field. Typical of these are Rhode Island, Delaware, and Nevada—and, until recently, California—in which the state assumes full responsibility for "employables" as opposed to "unemployables," who are left to the care of local governmental units.

At the opposite extreme are a number of states such as New Hampshire, Vermont, Indiana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Texas, where, during the past several years, the state has carried no financial or administrative responsibility for general relief.

State Supervision

Midway between these extremes lies the majority of the states, in which general relief is administered by local agencies under the supervision of a state agency. Sometimes state supervision is restricted to relatively small segments of the general relief program. It may be limited to certain subdivisions which receive state funds ¹ or to relief for certain types of cases (such as non-residents or "employables") financed wholly or in part by the state.² In some states, even though state funds are contributed for general relief, little or no effective state supervision is in force.³

In a few instances states not contributing to costs of general relief have effectively supervised its administration. When such supervision has been possible it has usually been because the same local authorities administering general relief were also responsible for old-age assistance, aid to the blind, or aid to dependent children, which the state agency is required to supervise.

Local units responsible for general relief administration are

¹ In New Jersey, for example, application of the formula used for distributing state funds in 1938 meant that 271 of the state's 567 municipalities received no state funds for general relief and were, therefore, not subject to state supervision.
² In Massachusetts and Connecticut state supervision is limited to cases lacking settlement and receiving assistance from state funds. The comparatively small proportion of total expenditures going for this care, subject to state supervision, is indicated by the relatively small amounts of state funds used for general relief.
³ Even in Illinois, where the program of general relief is of relatively high standard—as these programs go—the responsible state agency (the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission) during recent years had relatively little control over standards of relief given in the 1,455 townships and other subdivisions. Only in 1939 was the Commission given power with respect to standards and even this was restricted to seeing that grants provided within any given subdivision were determined on some uniform basis. This power did not authorize the Commission to exercise controls to guarantee that grants be made on any uniform basis as between different subdivisions.
The Setting

sometimes county, sometimes city, and sometimes township agencies. In some states, such as New York, the responsible unit may be any of these. The existence of numerous small administering units adds greatly to the complexity and cost of relief administration. In New Jersey, for example, general relief (early in 1940) was administered by approximately 560 different municipalities, in New York by approximately 900, in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota by more than 1,000 local bodies each, and in Illinois by 1,455 townships and other responsible units.

Sometimes local units responsible for general relief are local welfare departments which administer not only general relief but also one or more of the special assistance programs. In other states these units may have no direct responsibility for other welfare or assistance programs. In New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois, where township authorities are responsible for general relief, other local authorities administer the special assistances. This division of responsibility often creates a serious administrative problem of caseloads much too small for efficient administration.

In New Jersey in May, 1941, among 33 municipalities having a population of 20,000 or more, six municipalities gave general relief to fewer than 100 cases each. The smallest caseload in any of these cities was 11. Among 40 municipalities in which the population ranged from 10,000 to 19,999, 28 gave general relief to fewer than 100 cases while the general relief caseload in each of 69 municipalities having a population of 5,000 to 9,999 all fell below this limit. In 48 of these 69 municipalities the number of cases granted general relief was under 25.

In Illinois during 1939 only 152 of the 1,455 local units administering general relief had an average monthly caseload of 100 cases or more. In California in July, 1941, there were only 25 of the state’s 58 counties in which unemployment relief was granted to as many as 100 cases.

Financial Participation

During the year 1939–1940, when for the country as a whole state funds accounted for approximately 60 per cent of all expenditures for general relief, there were 3 states in which general relief was financed wholly from state funds and 3 additional

1 This is true, for example, in some localities in New York, and in Pennsylvania.
2 Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and Arizona.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

states in which state funds accounted for at least 95 per cent of all such expenditures. Among the remaining 30 states which made some contribution to general relief costs, state funds represented from 75 to 94 per cent of the total in 5 states, from one-half to two-thirds in 10, and from one-fourth to one-half in 10. In 5 states making some contribution to general relief costs the amount fell below 25 per cent of the total, amounting in Nevada to only about 4 per cent. In the remaining 12 states general relief was financed wholly from local funds.

Of the 17 states which during 1939-1940 made the lowest proportional contribution or contributed nothing to the cost of general relief all contributed, in amounts ranging from 25 to 51 per cent of total expenditures, toward old-age assistance. Although 6 of these 17 states did not have approved plans for aid to dependent children, the remaining 11 all shared the cost of this type of assistance, the proportions ranging from 28.8 per cent in Vermont to 65.7 per cent in New Hampshire.

When state funds for general relief are allocated to local agencies the state may undertake to reimburse localities for a stated percentage of their disbursements. Or, the state may agree to distribute available funds according to some more elaborate formula, leaving to local authorities responsibility for whatever costs were not thus provided for.

Whether state programs of general relief are administered by isolated local agencies or are integrated with other assistance programs, whether they are administered with or without state supervision or by state agencies themselves, and whether they are

1 Missouri, Louisiana, and New Mexico.
3 Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, North Dakota, Colorado, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.
5 Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nevada.
6 New Hampshire, Vermont, Indiana, South Dakota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Texas.
7 Data for these comparisons have been taken from Social Security Bulletin, vol. 4, no. 3, March, 1941.
8 This is the case in New York, for example, where the state pays 40 per cent of the costs of general relief.
9 For example, the formula used for the distribution of state funds in New Jersey resulted in giving no reimbursement to 271 of the state’s 567 municipalities. Twenty-nine municipalities, at one extreme, received from state funds less than half of what they spent for general relief. At the opposite extreme 24 were reimbursed between 90 and 96 per cent of their expenditures.
The Setting

financed wholly or only partly from state funds, are not questions in themselves important. What really matters is whether existing arrangements succeed in bringing to resourceless individuals and families the help that they need.

Form of Relief

Special assistance granted under the Social Security Act, for which federal funds may be used, must be in cash rather than in “kind” or in the form of “store orders,” and must be given “unconditionally.” This means that recipients may not be required to work for their grants. Neither may they be required to use the grant in some predetermined manner once it has been given to them. State and local relief programs, however, present another story.

Analysis of state relief practices shows that cash relief, which is the rule under special assistance programs, is the exception under general relief programs. According to a report of the Social Security Board, cash relief, as of January, 1940, predominated in only 17 states and the District of Columbia.

Groups Frequently Discriminated Against

While the characteristic inadequacies of state and local general relief programs frequently make it impossible to give any aid, much less assistance adequate to need, to all who meet prescribed conditions of eligibility, five classes of needy persons are frequently discriminated against, not only when funds run low, but as a matter of general policy. These are (1) persons who are in need, but who are less needy than others for whose aid inadequate funds available for relief are reserved; (2) persons (or the wives and children of such persons) who cannot meet prescribed residence requirements; (3) employable workers (including also their unemployable children and other members of their families); (4) single persons; and, finally, (5) aliens.

1 However, it is significant that practice under the Social Security Act has been increasingly to insist upon state financial and administrative responsibility and to play down local autonomy.

2 Recipients of general relief are frequently required to work for their relief. Local work relief, work-for-relief, or “work-or-starve” programs developed for this purpose are described in chap. 25.

3 These were Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, and California.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The Needy vs. the Most Needy

Standards used in determining eligibility for assistance not infrequently result in denying relief to admittedly needy persons simply because funds are inadequate to help any but the most needy.¹

Closely linked with this question of standards of need is the situation created by public demand for enforcement of "family responsibility."²

State laws allow considerable discretion with respect to support from relatives; but some public officials do not wish and some do not dare, in view of public attitudes, to interpret these provisions liberally. When their administration is flexible it means that only immediate relatives whose own standards of living will not be unduly lowered by so doing, are required to give support to needy persons. At its worst, however, enforcement of family responsibility becomes a hated vestige of sixteenth and seventeenth century attitudes and conditions, through which people already poor are made still poorer. Frequently these attempts to force people "to take care of their own" serve only to estrange friendly relatives, and to leave needy families, who have had to cut one social tie after another as they sank slowly into the slough of poverty, more alone than before.

¹ Standards of need for general relief are further discussed in chap. 3.

How even a slight relaxing of standards of need can result in increasing relief rolls was well illustrated by a Philadelphia study (of 1937) which showed that among 502 cases rejected during a period of two weeks covered by the study, 239 were denied relief either because they had earnings from current employment or were living with relatives who, in conformity with relief standards in effect at the time, had "surplus income." The average weekly income of these 239 cases was $14.70, their budgeted needs $10.90. Thus, the average weekly margin of self-support which resulted in denying relief to these families was but $3.80. Nearly 40 per cent of the cases were ineligible because of a weekly margin of less than $3.00. Thus, but a slight raising of relief standards would have made a considerable proportion of cases eligible for assistance. Availability of such a cushion, according to the report of this study, did not mean that these families were not in need since public relief standards in effect at the time were lower than those in private agencies. —Philadelphia County Relief Board, How Self-Supporting Are the Ineligibles?: A Study of 502 Rejected Applications for Relief. Philadelphia, February 15, 1937, pp. 3-5.

² State laws vary greatly with respect to which relatives are supposed to be held responsible for their poor kin. Those most frequently held responsible are husbands and wives, parents and children. In a number of states, however, responsibility is also imposed upon grandparents and grandchildren and in a few instances upon brothers and sisters as well. For an analysis of laws on the subject (as of January 1, 1939) see Robert C. Lowe's State Public Welfare Legislation. WPA, Research Monograph 20, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939, pp. 63-67.
The Setting

In some jurisdictions, if needy persons have relatives deemed capable of helping them, they are automatically disqualified for relief even though no aid from their kin is actually forthcoming. In other instances relief may be granted but only on condition that the recipient hales into court any responsible relative able to help him. Sometimes, in the interest of family harmony, this requirement may be waived in favor of court action initiated by relief authorities.

Under the special assistance programs which have been established and expanded during recent years, emphasis upon "family responsibility" has waned. It continues to flourish vigorously, however, in the field of general relief. Even here it is widely regarded as a noxious growth, to be eliminated as quickly as possible because of the high costs of the litigation entailed, because of the severe strains placed on family ties, and because enforcement of the principle usually means compelling the poor to care for the poorer.¹

Residence Requirements

A serious barrier to the granting of relief to needy persons is the requirement that in order to be relieved by a responsible governmental unit a person must have lived within a given jurisdiction for a specified period of time.² Although these requirements have always been complicated and restrictive, they have been materially stiffened during the past several years. Between January, 1938, and September, 1939, for example, the number of states requiring at least three years' residence as a condition for receipt of relief increased from 12 to 16.³ In fact, sufferings resulting from

¹The American Association of Social Workers in 1940 declared: "Compulsive features of laws and rulings regarding family responsibility should be abolished."—Platform on Public Social Services, 1940.
²For searching analysis of this issue see Edith Abbott's Public Assistance, University of Chicago Press, 1940, vol. 1, pp. 156-176.
³For discussion of the effect of residence upon eligibility for WPA employment see chap. 13.
increasing from one to three years the residence requirement in Illinois soon indicated that things had gone too far, and led in 1941 to a return to the one-year requirement. Similarly, a change in Pennsylvania's law raising from one to two years the length of time required to qualify for general relief was soon wiped from the books. Though Illinois and Pennsylvania have during the past several years had to relax residence requirements which had been increased, California's Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Employment in 1940 recommended raising to five years its already relatively severe three-year residence requirement. As a result, the legislature specified that persons entering California after June 1, 1940, may qualify for relief only after five years' continuous residence.

Among the 16 states in which (in September, 1939) receipt of relief was conditioned upon at least three years' residence, Connecticut required four years, and Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Kansas five. Even in the most liberal jurisdictions residence of at least a year is almost invariably required either by law or in practice.

When it is recalled that residence for prescribed periods must frequently be established not simply within a state but within the county, city, or township in which application is made, the difficulties imposed are easily visualized. When residence in a small subdivision such as a town or township is coupled with provisions that this must be "continuous," "without interruption," or "immediately preceding application," severe hardship frequently results even though relatively short periods of residence are required.

State laws show a wide variety of provisions, as, for instance, that any period of time during which an applicant may have received public or private relief, been an inmate of a charitable or correctional institution, or had WPA employment, must not be counted toward the period required to qualify for relief. When

---

3 Cruel anomalies which arose from this short-lived increase in residence requirements are described in the Social Service Review, vol. 14, no. 2, June, 1940, pp. 347-350.
5 Typical of situations of this kind are those in which workers go from one township to another to find jobs or to live with relatives until a new job can be found.
The Setting

a number of these restricting qualifications are found together, as in Maine, where residence in a town for five successive years without receiving "supplies as a pauper" is required to establish eligibility for general relief, they become onerous indeed.

Many states have legal provisions that needy persons lacking residence sufficient to qualify for relief in the locality where they happen to be living may be temporarily aided. Or, such persons may be given relief in one subdivision subject to reimbursement by another. Unfortunately, liberalizing provisions of these types are not utilized freely. As a result needy persons who cannot meet residence requirements for relief in the community where they happen to be living when they fall into need, are frequently returned to the state, county, or town in which they may be able to qualify for aid. In a few areas persons who cannot meet residence requirements for relief in any state or locality may be aided wherever they happen to be living when they fall into need.

Residence sufficient to qualify one for receipt of relief is not only difficult to gain, but is easily lost. As of September, 1939, absence from a state for periods ranging from no more than thirty days (as in South Dakota), four months (as in Utah), or six months (as in Mississippi) might strip one of eligibility for general relief. In some states it is enough to leave the state with the "intent" of establishing residence elsewhere.\(^1\) In most states, however, absence of less than a year (or perhaps of three years,\(^2\) or five\(^3\)) from the jurisdiction in which one has become eligible for relief does not disqualify him for the receipt of aid. In a few states eligibility for relief is not interrupted because of a change of residence, until eligibility is established elsewhere.

Because a family's eligibility for relief usually is governed by the status of its head, it frequently happens that a wife and children who have long lived in a given community may suddenly be rendered ineligible for relief because the paterfamilias, who may be in search of a job, or seeking to regain health, remains away from home too long.

\(^1\) Such small oversights as forgetting to leave behind household furnishings, a trunk, or even some old clothes have sometimes been construed as "intent" to leave a given community and have proved to be effective bars to the receipt of relief when persons have returned to their communities after even temporary absences of short duration.

\(^2\) As in Vermont.

\(^3\) The case in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Hardships imposed upon families, as well as the endless administrative difficulties and expense resulting from residence requirements, have led to frequent demands for their abolition, or at least liberalization and standardization.¹ Important as success in this area may be, it must be kept in mind that unless accompanied by a strengthening of general relief programs, any widening of scope would probably mean only further reductions in the standards of aid at present given to those who can meet the residence requirements already in effect.

As a remedy for some of the problems arising from residence requirements, the so-called "Tolan Committee" in 1940 recommended that Congress establish a federally aided program that would "provide general relief for non-settled persons." In support of its proposal, the Committee declared that it has been:

... constantly confronted with the general-relief question, and particularly the relationship of the settlement laws to migratory, transient, and non-settled persons, and the responsibility of the States for these individuals. ... The committee found that in many States no general-relief program had been developed and that in many other States where relief was greatly needed no adequate program had been developed.²

Other groups which have urged federal grants for general relief have recommended that these be made available to states only on condition that they would not deny aid to needy persons on the basis of residence.

These, and other similar recommendations have received support from a wide variety of organizations and individuals who believe in preserving what one observer has termed the great American doctrine of salvation by locomotion, or are concerned over the fact that a man who moves from one state to another or even from one town to another within the same state can become a refugee in the United States.

¹ For a vigorous statement of the case against existing residence requirements see Edith Abbott's Public Assistance, vol. i, pp. 133-150.

Proponents of federal aid for transients often cited in support of their views the fact that the federal government during FERA days operated an extensive program of aid to transient individuals and families. See, for example, Reed, Ellery F., Federal Transient Program: An Evaluative Survey, May to July, 1934. Committee on Care of Transient and Homeless, New York, 1935.
The Setting

Employable Persons

A second group frequently denied relief as a matter of course, and the first to be "purged" when relief funds begin to give out, consists of "employables" and their families. Discrimination against these people is attributable to a number of factors: belief that "anyone who wants a job can find one"; the theory that "employables" are a federal responsibility and that relief granted them by states and localities only delays the day when the federal government can be induced to make proper provision for them; and that, since there simply are not enough relief funds to go around, the "employables" (and their families) would probably suffer least, since they would be most likely to benefit from whatever jobs might be available.

When the WPA early in 1939 obtained from state and local relief agencies statements of their policies with respect to giving assistance to needy employable persons, severe restrictions were found to be in effect in many areas. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia were reported as giving "no relief" or "practically no relief" to employable cases—that is, to families with potential breadwinners.

Approximately a year later (January, 1940) according to a report of the Social Security Board, relief was available to employable cases nowhere in South Carolina; in Delaware in but one of the state's three counties; and in Louisiana only in "one large urban county and a few cities and towns." In six other states relief to employable cases was said to have been given "sporadically or on an emergency basis only." Among the remaining 39 states which presumably gave relief to both employable and unemployable cases, it was reported that there were at least three states (which, however, were not identified) in which "practices with regard to assistance to employable cases varied considerably among the local units." 4

1 See chap. 29.
3 Missouri, Nebraska, Mississippi, Arkansas, Idaho, and Arizona.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Employable persons are frequently discriminated against even in those states whose regulations set forth that relief is normally available to them. To pick but a few illustrations at random: in Pennsylvania in 1941 able-bodied single persons between the ages of twenty and forty were declared ineligible for general assistance on the ground that jobs were available; from Alabama it was officially reported in 1941 that “for several years” there had not been relief funds enough to help families which included an able-bodied worker; in Ohio, even in such industrial centers as Cleveland, Toledo, and Cincinnati, employable persons have been repeatedly thrown off relief rolls as crisis has followed crisis. In Louisville, during 1939 and 1940, employable persons were offered assistance only on a temporary basis; in Colorado they have been refused aid and, even in Denver, have been denied help from time to time, when funds ran low; in Utah aid to employable persons has been only on “an emergency basis,” and in the state of Washington denial of assistance to such persons has been common when relief funds began to give out. Sudden discontinuance of the State Relief Administration in California in 1941 seemed likely to throw some 100,000 families of employable persons into need. Indeed, it appears as though the whole move to “return relief to the counties” in California was designed to cut employable persons off relief.\(^1\)

Reports made to the Social Security Board indicate that in the 39 states which in January, 1939, gave relief to both employable and unemployable cases, the items allowed in relief budgets were in general the same for both groups. However, information available from other sources reveals that employable cases are frequently allowed less nearly adequate grants, since they are ex-

\(^1\)Writing in the Nation of this situation, Alden Stevens declared: “The Associated Farmers and various other California tory groups have long wanted to see relief turned back to the counties, partly because they have sought to strip a liberal Democratic governor of power, but even more because in many cases they control the county officials, and all through that control can more easily have people thrown off relief at harvest time. As the Pixley Enterprise, which represents these interests, put it, ‘The way for the taxpayers of Tulare County to assist in this ‘back-to-work’ movement on the part of the continuous reliefer is to see that the able-bodied are denied county welfare aid as long as there is work to be had in the San Joaquin Valley.’ The Enterprise is being pretty frank. Efforts to force down agricultural wages by impressing relief clients into the fields are often made but seldom talked about. Relievers are wanted in the fields, not because they make good workers—most of them are not in good enough physical condition—but because a large number of people looking for work has a psychological effect that makes it possible to hire labor at a lower rate.”—Vol. 153, no. 3, July 19, 1941, p. 52.

64
The Setting

pected in one way or another to earn enough to cover their rent, part of their food allowance, or some other share of their needs.¹

Needy persons who earn some part of their own support (either by employment in private enterprise or on WPA jobs) are often denied relief even in communities which do not refuse aid to employable persons as a whole. This is done on the ground that to give assistance under these circumstances would mean “subsidizing private industry” or relieving the federal government of a part of its responsibility. The fact that it is the needy families who suffer, and not industrialists or federal officials is ignored.

Distinguishing between the employable and the unemployable is a difficult matter, if not, as is sometimes held, a sheer impossibility. Differences of opinion between authorities not infrequently entail great suffering. A family denied assistance by one authority on the ground that some member is employable may be refused aid by another agency because it does not include an employable person.

Then, too, “employable” is frequently considered as being synonymous with “able-bodied.” In one southern state a person capable of making his own way to a relief office was said by this act to classify himself as able-bodied and therefore “employable” and ineligible for help! In Delaware the term “employable,” so far as disqualifying persons for relief is concerned, has been reported to include “almost everybody . . . except those on the waiting list for old age assistance.”² Obviously, able-bodiedness or employability when loosely defined may have little if any bearing upon a person’s chances of actually getting a job, yet may nevertheless result in his being denied relief of any kind.³

Single and Unattached Persons

Persons without dependents are frequently among the last to be granted relief, and the group most likely to be denied aid when relief funds run low. Such discrimination has no basis in law, yet

¹ Not infrequently, however, allowances for employable cases are somewhat more liberal than those for others. Sometimes this is due only to the fact that these cases include more persons and sometimes to the fact that provision is made for carfare, lunch money, or other expenses incident to work some member of the family may be doing.
³ Actual instances in which needy employable persons and their families have been thrown into great distress because of denial of relief are reported in the subsequent chapter.

65
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

is often resorted to as the lesser of two evils, when there is not sufficient relief for all who are in need. It is also utilized (as in Pennsylvania in 1941 and in many agricultural states at planting or harvest time) to compel presumably employable single persons to find jobs.¹

Citizenship

Aliens comprise a fifth group categorically denied general relief in a few states. When members of the staff of the Russell Sage Foundation analyzed relief practices and policies throughout the United States in the fall of 1938, it was discovered that an applicant's citizenship affected eligibility for general relief in only three states.² Since that time restrictions against aliens have been put into effect in Pennsylvania and California while those already established in Ohio have been stiffened.³

Although general relief in some jurisdictions is denied to certain classes of aliens, provision is usually made to grant assistance, when necessary, to citizen members of their households.⁴ Thus, denial of relief to aliens frequently means spreading still thinner allowances that are none too liberal to meet the needs of those for whom they are intended, to say nothing of an alien parent, spouse, or other relative. In the last analysis, therefore, withholding relief from aliens is the equivalent of a tax or fine imposed upon citizens who chose or inherited aliens as heads or members of their families.

As a step toward bringing needed help to aliens and their fam-

¹ Further reference to these "drives" against single and unattached persons is made in the next chapter.

² In Connecticut aliens were ineligible for local relief, yet might be granted state-aided general assistance; in Montana, state funds could not be granted to aliens illegally within the United States; and in Ohio alien relief applicants were required to produce "satisfactory information" regarding legality of entry into the United States.—Social Work Year Book, 1939. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, pp. 508, 543, 561.

³ The Pennsylvania requirement is that alien applicants, to receive relief, must have filed prior to January 1, 1940, a declaration of intent to become citizens. California has restricted relief to aliens who entered the United States prior to July 1, 1924, and to those who entered the United States legally since June 30, 1924.

⁴ The importance of this measure has been emphasized by a number of studies. One of these disclosed that 70 per cent of the members of alien-headed families aided by the California State Relief Administration from July, 1937, to December, 1938, were citizens.

In March, 1939, in Pennsylvania, 14,200 alien-headed families included 42,000 citizen dependents.

A third study, made in Denver, revealed that 62 per cent of all the persons in 384 alien-headed families denied relief during the first six months of 1938 were citizens.
The Setting

ilies, the Family Security Committee, appointed to advise the federal Director of the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services, has recommended that, if the federal government should initiate a program of grants to states for general relief, these should be conditioned upon a state's willingness to impose no citizenship requirement as a condition of eligibility for this type of assistance.

Although denial of relief to any category of needy persons may seem to be a disservice only to the persons thus denied aid, the final justification for relief-giving is that it is also necessary for the well-being of the community. Despite this fact, restrictive characteristics of the kinds described above distinguish general relief programs sharply from other social services such as schools, police, and fire protection.

Children in a family moving into a new community are not only permitted but are required immediately to enter school, in and at the expense of their new neighborhood. They are not required to wait for at least one year, or even five, as for relief. Policemen and firemen called upon in time of emergency by newcomers in a community do not refrain, as must relief administrators, from giving needed protection, however costly, until those who are endangered can prove that they have lived in the jurisdiction for a prescribed period.¹

Differences Between States in Proportionate Numbers Granted Relief

Existing variations in state policies affecting the administration of general relief inevitably cause wide differences in the number of persons aided. This is clearly apparent in Table 5 which shows for the years 1936 through 1939 the rate of incidence of general relief (the monthly average number of cases granted general relief per 10,000 population) in each state as a percentage of the

¹ Speaking particularly about denial of aid to aliens, though what he said is equally applicable to all other groups which are frequently denied needed assistance, A. Delafield Smith, of the Office of the General Counsel of the Social Security Board, in an address in 1939, declared: "Welfare concerns itself, basically, among other things with the relief of all those stresses and strains which hinder the material processes of assimilation and integration from a national standpoint . . . If the law's purpose is to better the conditions of life in this country, it should be written and interpreted accordingly and as applying equally to all those who live under the same police jurisdiction."—"Social Security and the Alien," in Interpreter Releases (Foreign Language Information Service), vol. 16, no. 30, June 26, 1939, p. 274.
TABLE 5.—RELATION OF RATE OF INCIDENCE OF GENERAL RELIEF CASES IN EACH STATE TO THE RATE FOR THE UNITED STATES, 1936 TO 1939, BY YEAR a

(Rate for each state as percentage of that for United States)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>119^</td>
<td>121^</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>115^</td>
<td>125^</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>117^</td>
<td>120^</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>105^</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>103^</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>86^</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>79^</td>
<td>59^</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>40^</td>
<td>52^</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>109^</td>
<td>85^</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>32^</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16^</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>45^</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>47^</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>35^</td>
<td>18^</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>46^</td>
<td>42^</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>10^</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>28^</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>42^</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>132^</td>
<td>131^</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68
rate for the United States as a whole. In 1939 the number of general relief cases in Mississippi and Alabama, in proportion to population, was only 4 and 6 per cent, respectively, of the average for the United States. In Pennsylvania the incidence of general relief cases was more than twice that for the country as a whole. In New York, Illinois, and California this rate of incidence exceeded the national average by margins of 53 to 81 per cent.¹

Wide discrepancies of this kind, naturally, raise three questions: Is relief too lavish in those areas where the rate of incidence of general relief cases is high? Is it too niggardly in areas where the incidence is low? Or do the figures perhaps reflect more or less realistic differences in actual needs? Facts which must be taken into account in any attempt to answer these questions are presented in the chapter that follows.

¹ For further analysis of data of this type and for comparisons with the incidence of WPA employment in each state, see chap. 22.

---

The Setting

TABLE 5.—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>75^b</td>
<td>71^b</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>67^b</td>
<td>52^b</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>108^b</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>82^b</td>
<td>52^b</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>65^b</td>
<td>76^b</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>103^b</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>113^b</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ Actual rates for each state are given in Appendix Table 2.
^ Rate based in part upon estimated data.
CHAPTER III
ADEQUACY OF GENERAL RELIEF PROGRAMS

Considerations of the adequacy of general relief measures must take into account two factors: the extent to which relief has not been available to persons who needed it and the degree to which aid given to those who can qualify for it is sufficient to provide them with the elementary necessities of life.

EVIDENCES OF UNMET NEED ¹

In the opinion of one highly competent relief authority and statistician, the number of cases granted general relief late in 1940 and early in 1941 would have been approximately doubled if all states had met existing needs as nearly adequately as had those with the best organized general relief programs. Conclusive evidence as to whether this estimate is too low or too high is, of course, not at hand. However, there are indications that many needs have gone unmet.

"Surplus Commodities Only"

One measure of such needs is found in the extent to which "surplus commodities only" are granted to needy persons who fail to receive the relief to which these surplus foodstuffs are supposed to be only supplementary. For the purposes of this discussion, it is maintained that the giving of surplus commodi-

¹ The term "unmet need" as used in this discussion refers primarily to denial of or failure to grant assistance to persons who may be in need. It applies, therefore, to the problem of coverage, rather than to questions regarding the adequacy of such grants as are made to persons who are assisted. This latter issue is discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Whether persons are in need because of the inadequacy of WPA jobs or of other special assistance programs or the shortcomings of general relief measures is a moot question. Unmet need is treated in this volume primarily as an indication of the inadequacy of general relief programs since these are regarded as the last line of defense against destitution. Despite this fact, certain evidences of unmet needs among employable persons and more particularly among those previously employed by or regarded as eligible for WPA employment are not discussed here but in chap. 25.
ties only represents, not inadequate relief, but no relief at all—i.e., unmet need.¹

To many, the term “surplus commodities only,” frequently encountered in descriptions of social programs in many sections of the United States, is only a three-word phrase tacked on to round out the story of what happens to an unknown number of needy families which for some reason or other are not given relief. To observers having first-hand knowledge of relief conditions, the phrase is a hollow-sounding expression which usually means that a community is failing to meet its responsibility toward needy, hungry, poorly clad, and miserably housed men, women, and children. To those who know most intimately the significance of “surplus commodities only,” it means slow starvation, cold, and demoralizing destitution.

Typical of conditions in many areas and at various times in recent years were those revealed in a report on Texas where, in October, 1939, some 7,000 needy families in San Antonio received only apples, corn meal, wheat flour, and wheat cereal. These represented $2.65 worth of food for each family given commodities that month. For each person this meant about six pounds of food.

The uncertainty of and fluctuations in the kinds and amounts of food on which recipients of “surplus commodities only” must keep alive are illustrated by the range of items that are distributed from time to time. In San Antonio in September, 1940, 12 items were available—cracked wheat, corn grits, white and graham flour, rice, ham, lard, pears, prunes, raisins, eggs, and oranges. In April, 1939, however, the list included only “wheat and graham flour,” and in September, 1938, only grapefruit juice.

Periodic reports from a number of states show regularly the number of families which each month are given surplus commodities only. This number in South Carolina, for example, in July, 1941, was no fewer than 10,280, and in Virginia in June of the same year 6,434.

Reports on the distribution of surplus commodities, unfortunately, do not reveal the extent to which commodities only are

¹Since federal surplus commodities in some communities are not limited to families who are not in need of relief but are also available to families having what is termed a “marginal income,” a family’s receipt of “commodities only” may not always reflect unmet relief needs. However, as the following discussion makes clear, families receiving surplus commodities often have no other source of income.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

given to families which need further assistance. From two states, however, official estimates are available. In Virginia, during the fiscal year 1941-1942, for example, the number of "non-assistance" cases granted only surplus commodities averaged approximately 3,450 per month. All of these, according to state relief officials, were in need of additional relief which could not be granted simply because it was not available. During the year 1941-1942 in North Carolina an average of 13,806 cases a month received surplus commodities but no relief although approximately half of these 13,806 borderline cases were, according to current relief standards, regarded as in need of financial assistance.

Facts brought to light by a 1940 Florida study, sponsored by the State Legislative Council and made by the state chapter of the American Association of Social Workers, reveal that during the two-week period covered by the study a total of 1,424 families (including no fewer than 5,410 persons, an average of 3.8 persons per family) applied for surplus commodities in the Florida counties selected for study. Of the 1,220 families which were granted surplus commodities slightly more than 51 per cent had no income. In these families were 1,941 individuals for whom federal surplus commodities were reported to be "their sole means of subsistence." Nearly a third of the families given commodities had incomes ranging from $1.00 to $5.00 a week. Approximately 10 per cent had incomes of $5.00 to $10 a week. Only about 6 per cent had weekly incomes of more than $10.1

When some 13,000 families in Arkansas late in 1941 were receiving federal surplus commodities only and another 17,000 families were participating in the stamp plan, it was officially established that at least 50 per cent of those receiving these types of assistance could have qualified for general relief if such had been available.

Early in 1942 it was reported to a House Committee that throughout the United States some 6,900,000 persons were receiving federal surplus commodities. Of these, 1,600,000 were thought to have received only surplus commodities and no other type of assistance.

When it is recalled that, under federal regulations, surplus

The Setting

commodities are supposed to be given in addition to and not in lieu of relief, it is understandable why needy families who must get along without the relief grant which such commodities are supposed to supplement undergo severe hardship.¹

Reports and Studies of Unmet Needs

Comprehensive information regarding unmet needs throughout the United States, unfortunately, is not available. This lack is attributable in part to the difficulty of gathering such information and to the absence of any governmental agency of national scope carrying responsibility for meeting these needs. Despite the dearth of general information about the extent of unmet need, there are a number of recent reports which, though limited in scope, attempt to estimate unmet needs in various sections of the United States in recent years.

Summarizing information received from local chapters in "more than half the states" in May, 1940, the American Association of Social Workers reported:

General relief intake has been closed for varying periods in a considerable number of communities. In more instances, however . . . intake . . . has been limited to the point where practically no applications are accepted. . . .

In the majority of communities funds for general relief are inadequate to meet needs; certain groups, particularly non-residents, aliens, and transients, as well as the so-called employables, are consistently neglected or discriminated against. . . . In many communities there is acute suffering on the part of a large proportion of the needy unemployed and dependent.²

In January, 1939, when the WPA surveyed relief conditions throughout the country it was estimated that at the close of the previous year between 700,000 and 800,000 families in the United States were in need of but were not receiving public aid.

Data which present graphic pictures of unmet need have recently come from several states. One of the most comprehensive of available reports comes from Texas, where a study of what were termed "basic social needs" revealed that (as of about April, 1939) there were in 230 of Texas' 254 counties some 290,000 families which were in need. Of these only the 94,000 employed

¹ Further reference to localities in which only surplus commodities have been made available to needy families will be found in succeeding sections of this chapter.
² Highlights in the Trends. New York, 1940, p. 5.
by the WPA were thought to be receiving aid that was at all com-
mensurate with their need. At the opposite extreme were approxi-
mately 12,000 families (including an estimated 50,000 men, 
women, and children) receiving only the barest essentials in gen-
eral relief, and another 70,000 families granted no assistance of 
any kind and receiving only small amounts of surplus commodi-
ties, which during the winter of 1939–1940 averaged but $3.88 
a month for an entire family. Commodities given to families of 
four in April, 1939, consisted of only 3 pounds of dried beans, 3 
pounds of butter, 24.5 pounds of white flour, and 25 pounds of 
grapefruit.¹

Studies made in Missouri at about the same time the Texas 
study was in progress, indicate that general relief policies had 
resulted in untold suffering. In St. Louis the inadequacy of relief 
funds was said to have necessitated arbitrary restrictions which 
“in actual family situations . . . often worked hardships.” 
Visits made to 346 families (a random sample of the 1,800 which 
applied for but were refused relief during the first three months 
of 1940) revealed that:

... one-third of the families visited spent money for two items only: food 
and shelter. One family said that they spent all their cash income on food 
which even so was 20 per cent less than the amount required for food. They 
were living rent-free in condemned property, which had neither inside nor 
outside toilet facilities and with open sewage in the backyard. They had 
what coal they picked up. They spent nothing for clothing, utilities, in-
surance, and the other necessaries for living, as they were living on one-
third the minimum subsistence budget. 

In several instances, families went entirely without light in spite of the 
fact that the months covered by the study were winter and early spring 
months when the hours of darkness are long. They were extremely poorly 
housed, being even more crowded than families receiving relief. 

... 69 out of every 100 families reporting had less food than was required 
by the food budget used in this study. Half reported a food deficiency of 
20 per cent or more, and almost one-fourth reported a food deficiency of 50 
per cent or more.²

In nearby Boone County in May, 1940, home visits made by 
members of the League of Women Voters revealed that, among a 
sample of 16 families which had been refused general relief and

¹ Texas Social Welfare Association, Need: A Study of Basic Social Needs. Special 
Publications, vol. 1, no. 1, Austin, November, 1940, pp. 6-7, 10.
² Missouri Association for Social Welfare, Stones for Bread: A Description of 
Relief Needs in Missouri. St. Louis, September, 1940, pp. 31-36.

74
The Setting

had no work relief, "more than half had no income and depended solely on help from others." Nearly half the families slept, cooked, and ate in one room. Poor housing, much sickness, and little medical care appeared the fate of most.¹

Late in 1941, in Arkansas, when such needy persons as were receiving public assistance under the Social Security Act were being granted only about 50 per cent of what they were entitled to receive and when some 10,000 aged persons, 2,000 mothers of dependent children, and 500 blind applicants could not be granted assistance in any amount, general relief was, for want of funds, restricted to those “most urgently in need.” For the most part, this meant restricting aid to families whose heads were temporarily or permanently handicapped.

From Alabama, in October, 1941, it was reported that some 2,500 families were being granted general relief. More than 12,000 families approved for aid were not receiving general relief or any other type of assistance. They did, however, receive “surplus commodities only.”²

On the basis of a study of relief needs made by the Louisiana Chapter of the American Association of Social Workers it was reported that in February, 1942, some 14,000 persons in 6,440 families had been found to be eligible for financial assistance but were not receiving it because of the inadequacy of relief funds. At the time, the state was aiding some 135,000 individuals in 63,820 families.³

Tragic though the unmet needs of 14,000 persons may be, these do not represent the state’s total unmet need inasmuch as they do not reflect the needs of persons who, because they knew it to be futile, had not yet applied for assistance or who, under the highly restrictive policies then in effect, could not qualify for aid because of employability or because their need was not quite desperate enough to entitle them to a place on the long list of those already awaiting the day relief funds might be available.

Scattered cities have also contributed spot studies which add to the volume of evidence of unmet need. The limited funds available for relief in Louisville, Kentucky, made it possible in 1940 to

¹ Ibid., pp. 32, 50.
² Alabama Social Welfare, October, 1941, p. 3.
provide some assistance to all "in direct need who applied for aid" during only two winter months. Employable persons bore the brunt of this shortage of funds.¹

Studies made in two Ohio cities late in 1939 also reveal desperate conditions. Study of 155 individuals and childless couples in Cleveland who, between November 23 and December 7, 1939, had been denied relief from the Emergency Division of Charities and Relief, revealed that as a result of this stoppage 138 persons suffered from inadequate food. They had to subsist on such diets as:

- 1) stale bread, tea, and beans;
- 2) fried mush;
- 3) apples, cereals and butter;
- 4) stale bread and occasional meals;
- 5) commodities and occasional food from relatives, neighbors, or landlord;
- 6) apples, corn meal and sandwiches;
- 7) oatmeal;
- 8) apples, beans and squash.

One "frail looking man of 60" who lived alone "in rooms without heat except as he . . . [found] wood in the neighborhood" was reported to have "lived on apples and food which his landlord, who is on W.P.A., could give him, what he could salvage from garbage cans, and what he could beg from the market. He had no electricity and no coal oil for his lamp."

Among the 155 cases there were three instances of actual eviction and 24 more in which people were living in daily fear of dispossession. Clothing needs were said to be "severe" in 29 instances. The clothing of "most" individuals visited was reported as "meager." According to the report, 14 persons were compelled to resort to begging during the period of the study. Still others were known to have solicited handouts from restaurants, neighbors, and grocery stores.²

Evidence of harrowing unmet need in Toledo is revealed by a study conducted under the auspices of the Council of Social Agencies, and covering a 10 per cent sample of 3,253 "employable" cases which were cut off relief in September, 1939, and which by early November still had no employment and no resources to provide food and rent, to say nothing of such luxuries as winter clothing, household supplies, and medicine. Findings indicated

² Cleveland Chapter, American Association of Social Workers, The Humane Side of a Relief Crisis. December 22, 1939, pp. 20-25. The 17 cases which (among the 155 studied) were not suffering from lack of food had secured private or WPA employment, had been extended credit for food, or were fed by relatives or landlords.
that early in November of the same year more than two-thirds (67.4 per cent) of those included in the survey were "in varying degrees of actual need." Of these, "many" were reported as "living under unbelievable conditions." Investigators reported that "many" were scavenging. Cases in "actual want" were reported as suffering from "lack of food and clothing and from illness resulting from insufficient fuel or food."

More than a third (36.7 per cent) of the families with children of school age reported that children had been absent from school during October, 1939, because they lacked necessary food and clothing.

Among 259 cases of the 325 studied for which data were available, nine families were found to have been evicted between the time relief was cut off and the time the study was made. Evictions were in process in eight more cases and had been threatened in another 31.¹

In comparing the bits of evidence already alluded to, it should be noted that the Texas study revealed chronic conditions growing out of need long unmet, while in two Ohio cities, they represented the consequences of a sudden emergent shortage of relief funds interrupting a program which sometimes (between recurrent crises) had been fairly adequate.

None of these studies can be termed broad-gauged surveys of unmet needs; they are restricted to relatively small groups of needy persons. The Texas study, for example, did not go beyond those already known to be receiving relief from some source or known to have been found eligible for WPA employment or surplus commodities. Both the Ohio studies covered only relatively small groups of persons who had once received relief but who had subsequently been cut off. It is regrettable that facilities have not been adequate to permit broader studies of unmet needs.

Earlier Studies of Unmet Needs

Widely prevalent unmet need is no new phenomenon. When the federal government, which in 1932 began to help states and localities in the maintenance of general relief programs, discontinued this participation (during the latter part of 1935),

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

breaches soon appeared in the nation's defense against hunger and want.

1935–1936. This was particularly apparent in a number of states (New Jersey, Georgia, Arkansas, and Colorado) where the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and WPA in 1935 and early in 1936 initiated studies to ascertain what had become of former relief recipients not transferred to WPA jobs.¹

More than two-thirds of 159 cases removed from relief rolls in 17 counties of Georgia were found, at the time of the study, to be "seriously in need of continued assistance."²

Of the 110 cases studied in Macon not one was found to have been "provided with adequate care by another welfare agency." Total incomes, including the value of medical care and donated mattresses and clothing, were ascertainable for 107 households, half of which were found to have received less than $8.60 during the month ended August 15, 1935; 30 households, or nearly one-third, received less than $6.00. A few persons admitted that they begged; others denied doing this, declaring simply that people gave them things when they took a sack and asked for them! More than 20 stated that they depended on food donated "with no assured regularity" by friends, neighbors, and former employers. Others reported visits to stores and markets where on occasion they salvaged food.³

In Atlanta the story was much the same. Of 102 cases studied, 35 represented families of "unemployable" persons. Living conditions in most of these households were reported as being "extremely unsatisfactory, many families reporting lack of food, clothing, and medical care. A number of persons were found ill in bed. Five families reported no cash income during the period from July 15 to August 15. Eighteen others had incomes of less than $6.00. Not infrequently, clients reported that their time was largely taken up with the search for food from refuse cans,

¹ Since these studies have never received the attention they deserve, several are referred to here at some length.

78
or from curb market waste." Among 67 families of employable persons, 17 were entirely dependent on friends or relatives, the remaining families having received some income from employment.\(^1\)

Of the 149 households studied in Little Rock, Arkansas, where federal aid for relief for unemployable persons had been discontinued in July, 1935, all had suffered a loss in income between that date and October. The average income loss was 40 per cent, the average income in each of the two months being respectively $11.76 and $7.01.

In the five New Jersey communities in which relief expenditures had declined most sharply after the withdrawal of federal funds, the total household incomes of 46 per cent of the cases studied were found in May, 1936, to have fallen below amounts granted for relief in March. Incomes in 28 per cent of the households fell below their budgeted needs by as much as 30 per cent. In other New Jersey communities deprivation had been somewhat less severe.

Further glimpses of local relief administered in nine areas of the United States without benefit of federal aid were presented early in 1936 to a national conference of the American Association of Social Workers. Though they came from widely different areas,\(^2\) there was an ominous sameness in all reports. Information in the following paragraphs has been taken from This Business of Relief.\(^3\)

From Nebraska it was reported that the average allowance of $25 per month during FERA days had been reduced by a third or a half "in the middle of the severest winter in possibly fifty years"; that there was a reversion to granting relief in the form of commodities instead of cash; that relief rolls were arbitrarily reduced; that, in a limited number of cases at least, children were kept from school for want of proper clothes; that needed medicines and special diets were not available; that children were not provided with milk; and that allowances in some counties were cut to exclude everything but food and fuel, the latter being provided only in "very miserly amount."

Complete exhaustion of relief funds, except in St. Louis, appeared to con-

---


79
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

front Missouri. Relief in many counties averaged only $6.00 or $7.00 a month and "difficult times" were predicted for those in need.

Florida families were reported to have been cared for with extreme inadequacy, relief allowances in most counties not exceeding $2.00 a week, and "most counties" providing from $2.00 to $6.00 a month in addition to federal surplus commodities. "Without federal relief there is no doubt that until the next session of the legislature approximately 25,000 families will suffer seriously."

Since Alabama had received sufficient federal funds to carry the relief program to February 1, 1936, no crisis had yet developed in that state. Nevertheless, it was predicted that no state appropriation was likely to be made unless the federal government continued to grant funds for relief. Early in February cities and counties in Alabama were reported to have in hand only 10 or 15 per cent of funds needed to carry on the general relief program.

Relief in Arkansas had been restricted to unemployable persons. Thousands of widows with children under working age found themselves classed as "employable," yet were not eligible for WPA employment. They therefore were unable to obtain any type of public assistance. Average relief grants per family were $4.00 per month in rural areas; city dwellers got a whole dollar more!

In the great majority of parishes of Louisiana funds had been "altogether inadequate," those available in New Orleans being "wholly insufficient," necessitating the discontinuance of relief "to some 800 mothers' aid families . . . [with] tragic results."

Relief grants in Denver had dropped to an average of about $17 in November, the average in preceding months having been approximately $27. Admittedly necessitous persons were known to have been denied any relief at all.

From Washington State it was reported that funds were sufficient only to care for families in which no one could work. Concern was expressed over employable persons ineligible for, as well as those eligible but not assigned to, WPA employment.

Further reports submitted to the American Association of Social Workers early in 1936 from other states and localities (including New York, Michigan, Minnesota, Kansas, and Texas) testified to the inadequacy of existing relief provisions.¹ One disastrous effect of the withdrawal of federal aid was said to have been the "serious breakdown in the adequacy and availability of relief which affected adversely the health and well-being of those needy families and individuals who could not be cared for through the restricted federal work program."²

The Setting

In late 1935 and early 1936 still another study of relief conditions was made by the American Public Welfare Association in four states—New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Alabama. Conditions were summarized thus:

With the withdrawal of Federal funds for relief of the unemployables, the local unit has again come into its own and these multiple, small, administrative units created by the ancient poor laws pave the way for a starvation scale of relief, the entrance of poor personnel, and of politics in its most destructive form. The result is the destruction of all that we want to preserve in people and the sapping of the very lifeblood of society.

When in July, 1936, the WPA studied the sources of income of 6,144 cases which had left relief rolls some time prior to October, 1935, it was found that the proportion of cases which, after leaving relief rolls, had neither employment nor relief, increased steadily with each passing month until, at the time the study was made, 7.3 per cent of the cases fell in this category.

1937. Reports received by the American Association of Social Workers from 23 states and the District of Columbia early in 1937 indicated that inadequacy of relief funds in these areas resulted in "(a) arbitrary rulings which denied relief to all of those declared employable on the ground that as such they were the responsibility of the federal government, (b) reducing relief grants to below subsistence levels, (c) elimination of such items as medical care, special diets for needy ill and milk for children, and (d) adopting rigid rules designed to make relief extremely difficult to obtain." 2

Two local studies made in Baltimore and Cincinnati during 1937 show clearly how attempts arbitrarily to cut down on relief or to purge relief rolls throw economically helpless families into dire need. The Cincinnati study was made soon after another of Ohio's many recurring crises had led to "denying relief to all but the sick, the old, the disabled, and the unemployable." Although "some exceptions" were said to have been made in instances where young children were involved, the general policy was to deny

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

relief to families in which there was "an able-bodied, employable person."  

When 190 laymen, under the direction of the Bureau of Government Research, late in June, 1937, visited some 1,300 families which had received relief in May, their findings were said to have "indicated that about 7,220 cases representing about 22,400 persons were 'entirely without resources. . . .'" One investigator who visited 11 families that had received relief the previous month found "several, some of them including children, reduced to the point of actual hunger much of the time. They had practically nothing to eat," he reported, "except occasional surplus products, food supplied by friends or neighbors, and fruit salvaged from garbage at the markets. He found one family whose chief subsistence had been on scraps supplied them from the tables of a near-by restaurant, whose proprietor thought the family was getting them for the dog."  

The Baltimore study, conducted by the Citizens Alliance for Social Security (comprising a number of professional, labor, women's, and civic organizations) was designed to discover what became of families "purged" from public relief rolls in June, 1937. Covering a sample of 206 cases, nearly half the number supposedly eliminated by the purge, this study revealed that by the time the survey was made, approximately one-eighth (12.6 per cent) had again been granted public assistance of some type; more than one-eighth (14.6 per cent) were families which previously received relief (for which, because of changes of policy, they were no longer eligible) to supplement WPA earnings which were inadequate to meet their needs; nearly two-fifths (38.4 per cent) had some kind of employment; approximately one-fifth (21.8 per cent) could not be found because they had moved or were not at home when visited in connection with the study. The remaining 12.6 per cent of those who had been cut off from relief rolls were reported as being "urgently in need of relief" but were given no assistance.  

1938. Early in 1938, after another survey covering "43 rep-

2 Ibid., pp. 11, 18-19.
3 The Relief "Purge." Baltimore, August, 1937, pp. 3-4.
The Setting

resentative areas" in the United States, the American Association of Social Workers declared that there was "a large group of men, women, and children undergoing untold hardships in many sections of the country."¹ There were, it was reported, "untold numbers on the verge of dependency . . . denied any kind of help" because they were employable, aliens, transients, or were not "destitute enough"; or because funds were simply not available. Expedients resorted to by state and local governments when attempting "to spread resources over growing needs" included establishment of policies that made relief "hard to get and difficult to endure"; closing relief offices periodically; and refusing aid to new applicants. "While standards of relief and practice vary from state to state and even between counties within states," the report declared, "the same situation prevails throughout the country, different only in degrees." These conclusions were supported by detailed statements from 28 states.

Another rapid sampling of relief conditions, made late in October, 1938, and reported by the Survey Midmonthly² was based on information received from "informed people all over the country." From one informant came the prayer, "God help us this winter, if WPA cuts down. The people have no place to go but relief, and relief has nothing to give them." The report concludes that as to coverage of need, "there is no single answer. In cities where applicants are accepted on the basis of their need, with no other limitation, there seems to be fairly good coverage, particularly if state funds are available. But where the basis of acceptance is not the need of the applicant but the cash on hand—if any—there is no such thing as coverage."

Reports from Texas stated that employable persons in San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas received no aid except federal surplus commodities and, although they might receive aid in Fort Worth, allowances were so small as to "mean very little." In the state of Washington only a negligible amount of relief, and that largely on an emergency basis, was given to able-bodied employable persons.

¹Information presented in this paragraph is taken from A Survey of the Current Relief Situation in Forty-three Representative Areas in Twenty-eight States of the United States. March 21, 1938, pp. 3-4.
²Vol. 74, no. 11, November, 1938, pp. 339-344.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Two studies of relief needs were made by the WPA in 1938. One of these covered nine cities, the other ten.\textsuperscript{1} In none of these cities were existing needs found to have been adequately met. It was estimated that in January, in a majority of the cities studied, 25 per cent or more of employable persons believed to be in need were not being aided from public funds, the proportion varying from more than one-fourth in Chicago, St. Louis, and New Orleans to almost two-fifths in Cleveland and nearly one-half in Atlanta. Single persons, non-residents, and families having a member employed in private enterprise were denied aid in a number of these cities, regardless of amounts earned or of budgeted needs.

In the second study, made in June, 1938, one-half of the families whose need was found to be serious enough to make them eligible for WPA employment were receiving no public relief except possibly federal surplus commodities. Relief was denied in the South to families including any member able to work. Recurring crises had thrown relief programs in Cleveland and Chicago, particularly, into “an almost unbelievable degree of disorganization.” Only desperately needy families with small children or seriously ill members received any aid except surplus commodities in Cleveland. Heavy demands for relief and a shortage of relief funds necessitated the closing of relief offices in Chicago.

Some indication of effects of unmet need in Memphis during the summer of 1938 was given by a study sponsored by the Council of Social Agencies. This covered 319 families or “lone persons” who had applied for but had been denied assistance by any one or more of the seven agencies participating in the study. Ninety-six per cent of this rejected group were found to be in want. The average monthly budgetary need was estimated at $8.94 per person. Income averaged only $4.38 a person. Among 100 families visited in their homes 23 were said to be “in need, but not actually suffering.” Another 28 were reported as in “desperate need,” had “no resources of any kind,” and were “entirely without food at the time of the home visit.” Symbolic of this des-

\textsuperscript{1} The first study covered Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta, New Orleans, and San Francisco. The second reflected conditions in the same cities with the addition of San Antonio.
The Setting

perately needy group was a family of four, the head of which had applied for relief to carry the family until he might receive unemployment compensation for which he had applied. When visited, one week after he requested relief, it was found that:

... the family had no food in the home, having had nothing to eat that day or the previous day. In addition, they had been evicted, and the wife's mother had given them $2.50 of her none-too-adequate old-age pension to rent a room for the week. In a few more days they would again have to move, if unable to pay the rent, and there seemed no hopes of being able to do so.¹

These earlier studies of unmet need, like the later ones already summarized in this chapter, are based primarily on conditions among people who had once been given relief but had been cut off or who had applied for assistance of some kind but had been denied aid. The findings therefore cannot be assumed to reflect at all realistically the extent of unmet need among that vast mass of people who may have been in want but who never applied for relief for the simple reason that they knew there was none. What living conditions were among them will probably never be known.

Amounts Granted as General Relief

Monthly grants for general relief in 40 states reporting comparable data during January, 1941, averaged $25.20 per family. State averages ranged from more than $35 in New York and Rhode Island to as little as $5.77 in Arkansas and only $3.03 in Mississippi. This meant that the average relief family in Mississippi received only 10 cents a day—less than one-tenth of the averages in New York or Rhode Island.²

No less striking than interstate differences are those among local subdivisions in a single state. Not many states publish the average relief grant in each local subdivision. However, data from a few states indicate fairly wide ranges. In New Jersey in August, 1941, for example, general relief grants in 71 municipalities whose population ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 averaged from as little as $5.98 per case to as much as $34.09. In the township with the lowest average, relief cases were said to have had

¹ Joyner, Ruth Gaugh, A Study of Families and Individuals Refused Care by the Relief Agencies in Memphis from June 28-August 8, 1938. Memphis Council of Social Agencies, pp. 15, 11-12.
² Further data with respect to general relief grants are presented in chap. 7.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

supplementary income from other sources which averaged $20.43 per case, which was slightly below the average supplementary income in the municipality having the largest average relief grant. In the municipality reporting the next to the lowest average relief grant (of $8.25) families were reported to have had no other income.

Average grants in Illinois are reported by county, although the township is the local unit usually responsible for relief administration. In February, 1940, county averages per case ran from $8.02 to over $31.28.

Standards Governing the Size of Relief Grants

Comparisons of average relief grants made in the various states or in different political subdivisions of the same state are likely to be misleading. Differences in the size of the average family aided, discrepancies in the length of time grants are supposed to provide for families, and differences in resources families have in addition to their relief grants, all make comparisons hazardous. In the case of the New Jersey averages just cited, for example, families in one locality had additional income (not total resources, necessarily) averaging $39.14 (supplementing average relief grants of $26.44) whereas families in other subdivisions had no other income whatever to supplement materially lower grants.

Therefore, instead of trying to draw conclusions from comparisons between states and localities of grants actually made, it is preferable to compare the standards by which allowances are determined. Unfortunately, data necessary for such analysis are scanty and are themselves subject to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, enough information on relief standards is available to permit fair judgments of prevailing differences and to make possible realistic appraisal of their adequacy.

Formal Studies of Relief Standards in Various Areas

Among the most comprehensive available studies of comparative relief standards have been several that were made by the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission.

Standards in Seven Large Cities. One of these studies (made in 1938) covered standards in seven large cities of the United
The Setting

States—New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis.¹

This comparison showed that during October, 1938, relief standards in all seven cities included provision for food, shelter, fuel for cooking, fuel for heating, and allowances for working members. All cities except Chicago also made provision for electricity.² Only New York and St. Louis made some further allowance for household supplies. Provisions for clothing, medical care, carfare, and other necessities varied widely from city to city.

Among six of the seven cities (excluding Cleveland, whose standards were not comparable) total monthly allowances for a family of four for five basic items—food, shelter, fuel for both cooking and heating, light, and household supplies—ranged from $44.89 in Pittsburgh to $60.66 in St. Louis, a difference of $15.77 or more than 35 per cent of the lowest total. In these cities amounts for food ranged from only 77 to 87 per cent of what has been defined by the Department of Agriculture as an “adequate diet at minimum cost.”³

At the time this study of relief policies was made, the Chicago standard was 15 per cent below what relief authorities themselves regarded as an absolute minimum to preserve health. As is frequently the case, this abandonment of established standards was necessitated by the fact that available funds were not sufficient to permit the granting of relief in accordance with the officially approved criteria.

Even more drastic standard-slashing was to follow. As a result, relief granted in Chicago for four months during 1939 provided only 65 per cent of what was regarded as an irreducible minimum.⁴

What this meant to Chicago’s needy men, women, and children

¹ Standards for these seven cities were reduced to a common base: needs of a family of four (a man, woman, boy of fifteen, and a girl of eight) having no other income. Further corrections were made for differences in costs of living. Surplus commodities distributed to relief families were not taken into account in making these comparisons.—Information used in this discussion is taken from Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Budgetary Standards and Practices in Illinois during October, 1938. [Chicago], July, 1939.

² What a summary sentence like this meant in human terms was that in twentieth century Chicago, the home of the Insull utility empire, children in relief families had to study by candle light and kerosene lamps as did children in Mrs. O’Leary’s day before the Chicago fire.

³ For further comparisons of relief standards in various cities see chap. 7.

⁴ At various other times grants have represented only 70 or 80 per cent of prescribed standards.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

was disclosed by a study made by the Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund in co-operation with 25 social and health agencies. This study covered 512 relief families and led to the following conclusions:

The 65 per cent allowance on budgeted items was totally inadequate to meet family needs. Expenditures for all items with the exception of food were in excess of relief granted. Eighty-two per cent paid more for rent than the amount allowed. Fifty-four per cent paid more than the amount allowed for fuel. Light, cleaning supplies, ice and clothing were purchased although allowances for these items were made in only a small number of cases. Excesses in rent and fuel and unbudgeted expenditures were met at the expense of the food allowance or by going into debt. Only one per cent of the families spent as much money for food as is needed for an adequate diet at minimum cost. Sixty-one per cent spent less than half of the minimum cost of an adequate diet. Seventy-seven per cent of the families were in debt for one or more items. Fifty-three per cent of the families were in debt for rent, 45 per cent for food, 29 per cent for light, 25 per cent for cooking fuel, 3 per cent for ice, and 3 per cent for clothing.

Of the 80 per cent grants which followed the 65 per cent allowances the McCormick Fund reported:

The allowance of 80 per cent of the budget effective since November 5 is likewise inadequate. Grants for budgeted items are not sufficient to meet minimum requirements, and the budget still does not provide for all essential needs of the family. . . .

Even though the 80 per cent allowance for food approximates the amount necessary for a minimum adequate food budget when supplemented by surplus commodities and by milk which is now being distributed, in reality it falls far short of this since it must provide for other family needs. The distribution of surplus commodities which has made a contribution to family food needs does not sufficiently supplement the food allowance to insure families against serious food inadequacy so long as inroads are made to meet other needs. Surplus foods are an undependable item as they vary greatly in amount and kind. Their inclusion in determining the food budget standard is against the ruling of the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation.

Unless adequate allowances are granted for all budgeted items and for essentials not now budgeted, the present food allowance will continue to be drained off to meet other needs. . . . The chief strain upon the food allowance comes from the expenditure for shelter.¹

Fear of landlords apparently was more compelling than fear of malnutrition and debilitation.

The Setting

And these observations, it must be remembered, do not apply to the “deep South” which makes no pretense of having adequate general relief programs. They apply to Chicago, second city of the United States.

What is most significant, perhaps, about the McCormick Fund’s criticisms of Chicago’s “80 per cent standards” is that these were only 6 per cent below standards in effect in October, 1938 (the date to which the intercity comparisons already alluded to applied) when Chicago would have provided allowances approximately 6 per cent more than would have been given a family of four in Pittsburgh, and represented approximately 90 per cent of the average for six of the seven cities included in the earlier study.

Intrastate Differences in Relief Standards. Wide variations in standards are characteristic not only of widely separated areas but are also found among various subdivisions of a given state. This is well illustrated by an extensive study of local relief standards in 152 relief units in Illinois in 1940. This disclosed that a family of four (consisting of a man, woman, boy of thirteen, and girl of eight) with no income, might have been eligible for as much as $87.94 a month in relief in one locality and for as little as $14.18 in another. If relief in kind is eliminated from the comparison, the range was from $63.08 in one area to only $8.00 in another. Thus, within a single state, relief to a family of given size in one county might have amounted to only 16 or 13 per cent of what the same family might have received in another political subdivision.

An earlier Illinois study (made in 1938) of general relief standards in 101 relief units showed that eight used no particular standard. Of the 93 units which did have standards only 33 were thought by local relief authorities themselves to be adequate.¹

Of the 60 relief-administering units which admitted that their relief standards were too low, 36 reported this inadequacy as being due to failure to provide enough for the various items allowed; 23 declared both that the amounts allowed were too little

¹ Even these allegedly “adequate” standards showed wide variation, however. In over half of them food allowances, for example, were less than 70 per cent of what the United States Department of Agriculture has defined as an “adequate diet at minimum cost.” Worse still, some of the units claiming “adequate relief standards” failed to make any provision for light, water, shelter, or clothing, or made provision for these essentials only under certain circumstances.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

and that the allowable items were fewer than were considered adequate. Only one unit reported an insufficiency of items alone.\(^1\) Measured against the Department of Agriculture's "adequate diet at minimum cost," food allowances ranged from only 36.4 per cent adequate in Moline Township, Rock Island County, to 101.5 per cent in Cicero Township, Cook County.\(^2\)

Adequate standards, unfortunately, do not of themselves guarantee adequate relief grants. Among the 93 Illinois units which professed to follow a standard budget, 26 admittedly failed to do so. Reasons most frequently cited for this failure included shortage of funds, resources of relief families other than income, and the employability of relief recipients.\(^3\) Further reasons included public opinion, opinion of local authorities, and precedent. Among the 67 units which reported that relief grants were actually made in accordance with the standards established, 39 had either "restricted" or "very restricted" standards, which either omitted several important budget items or made provision for these only under certain circumstances.

Scattered Information About Standards in Various Areas

In addition to more or less formal studies of relief standards in various cities and localities (such as have been noted already) there is available from a number of states and cities scattered information that is most revealing.

Missouri, 1940. In Kansas City a study made in 1940 showed that the total income of half the relief families studied was 50 per cent or less of their elementary needs as determined in accordance with a "minimum standard budget" prescribed by the home economist and dietitian of the State Social Security Commission. Seventeen per cent of the families had less than one-third of what was required to meet their basic needs.

In human terms, it was reported, these deficiencies meant that "men and women and children often go hungry . . . sick people

\(^1\) Comparisons of the maximum amounts allowed in the various relief units for food, clothing, fuel, shelter, light, and household supplies show that the most liberal food allowance was about 2.7 times the lowest allowance, the most liberal shelter allowance was 6 times the least liberal, and the most generous clothing allowance 12 times the lowest.

\(^2\) In these analyses the value of surplus commodities was not included inasmuch as these were intended to be in addition to and not in lieu of relief actually granted.

\(^3\) Potential workers were expected to earn at least part of what was needed by their families.
The Setting

cannot get to the clinics because they have no carfare ... sick men and women and often children have no inside water supply, no means of preparing cooked foods ... some of our citizens live in clapboard shacks and move from one condemned building to another, keeping just ahead of the wreckers.”

Staggering as these revelations may be, it must be recalled that these conditions prevailed among the most favored of Missouri’s general relief population, the “unemployables.” As for the “employables,” their lot was even worse, for at the time of this study they were ineligible for any relief except in cases of extreme and dire necessity.

Unfortunately, all this misery was nothing new to Missouri. The State Social Security Commission itself revealed that in October, 1938, only about 4 per cent of some 3,000 relief families studied “received grants considered as being adequate for their minimum needs.” Approximately 70 per cent of the grants were found to range from half to much less than half enough “to meet the basic needs as determined by planned budgets.”

Kansas, 1941. Late in 1941 it was officially reported from Kansas that local welfare offices responsible for the administration of general relief were meeting only about 69 per cent of the barest minimum subsistence needs of the unemployable group and only about 38 per cent of such needs of the employable group.

Louisiana, 1942. A study of relief needs in Louisiana early in 1942 revealed that the Department of Public Welfare, because of the inadequacy of its funds, could add to whatever income needy families already had only enough money to give the average relief family about 70 per cent of its minimum needs. “In other words,” as a report by the Louisiana Chapter of the American Association of Social Workers put it, “for every dollar which these people needed for their bare necessities, they actually had only seventy cents. Of this seventy cents, fifty-two cents came from the Welfare Department and eighteen cents from the family’s relatives.

1 Kansas City Chapter, American Association of Social Workers, Beyond the Border Line: A Study of “Unemployable” Families Receiving General Relief in Kansas City, Missouri, November, 1940, p. 27.
friends, or from their own small earnings. When it is remembered that only the necessary items are included in the family budget, and that the estimated cost of obtaining these items is based on the strictest economy, it is obvious that to have only seventy cents on the dollar means that the family is seriously affected by this inadequacy.”

Texas, 1938-1939. In Texas (where as shown in an earlier section of this chapter, no relief at all is available to thousands of needy families) such relief as is granted falls far, far short of meeting recipients’ needs. While, according to the Study of Basic Social Needs, employable persons normally were refused relief (except WPA employment and “surplus commodities only”) the “plight of those unfit for work” was reported to have varied from “surplus commodities only” in approximately 20 per cent of the counties of Texas, to “groceries and rent” for only a very few families in several counties. “With the return of the relief burden to local governments,” says this report, “plans for meeting human needs in Texas were partially paralyzed. The effects of this social relapse are to be found only in part in this report. Its most compelling effects may be found by all who seek them: in hovels beneath viaducts, in early deaths encouraged by the diseases of hunger, in high infant mortality rates, in juvenile delinquency, in crowded hospitals for the insane, and in the degradation of the body and of the spirit among our neighbors—the men, women, and children whom we keep alive but to whom we deny an opportunity to live.”

California, 1941. Just prior to its liquidation by the legislature, the State Relief Administration estimated that food allowances for families receiving unemployment relief fell short of “a subsistence budget” by some 21 per cent. This meant that families of four which really needed $40.28 a month for food were then receiving only $33.30. Furthermore, there was then in effect in California a statutory ceiling on relief grants which restricted

---

2 Preliminary returns from a second study made by the Texas Social Welfare Association (in 1942) were said to reveal substantially the same conditions among needy families—except for those in which someone was able to work—as had been found during the earlier study. For the families of women, as for those of persons handicapped by age, illness, or lack of skill, the story was said to be “about the same—surplus commodities and physical and spiritual disintegration.”
The Setting

maximum allowances to $58 a month. This meant that families of five or more which had no other resources were by law deprived of what was regarded as necessary to meet their needs since even families of five were thought to require at least $65.88 monthly.¹

Denver, 1937-1940. Still further evidence of the extent to which general relief grants fall short of meeting family needs comes from Denver. Here, since June, 1937, relief grants amounting to only 40 per cent of prescribed standards have been the rule rather than the exception.

In an effort to discover what this meant in terms of food deficiencies, intensive study of 304 relief cases was initiated by the Denver Bureau of Public Welfare. In this study, conducted in 1940, the Dietetics Department of the University of Colorado's School of Medicine evaluated the diets of 264 families in terms of "the food elements necessary to maintain health and protect the body from disease." The results of this analysis were startling. Diets of relief families were found to provide only: 51 per cent of the necessary calories; 40 per cent of the phosphorus needed; from 30 to 40 per cent of the required protein and iron; from 20 to 30 per cent of the needed calcium and vitamin A; from 10 to 20 per cent of the required vitamins B and G; and only 5 and 6 per cent, respectively, of the essential vitamins C and D.

"This faulty nutrition," it was reported, "cannot help but be detrimental to the well-being of these individuals, and, if continued, will lead to more dire results in the future which will prove costly to the individual and to the community." ²

Second only to hunger, cold was what gave most distress to these families. One solution to this problem was to stay in bed. Thus, families could not only save heat but could also "bear it to eat only once a day."

Even stealing was resorted to. "Theft of coal and wood," it was said, "was readily admitted by some. Others asserted that they did not steal, but they begged. . . . One man readily acknowledged that the only way he was able to eat was by stealing food from his neighbors' truck gardens." ³

¹ California State Relief Administration, Rising Costs of Living. [Los Angeles], May 29, 1941.
³ Ibid., pp. 38-39.
Cleveland, 1939. Still another city which has given only partly adequate relief to those who are granted aid—to say nothing of those who are denied assistance or cut off the rolls in emergencies—is Cleveland. During the crisis of November, 1939, Cleveland relief standards would have provided for a family of four (a husband and wife, a boy of fourteen, and a girl of seven) a food order for only 54 cents a day. Adding to this amount the estimated value of 12.5 cents in surplus commodities this family might have received, it would have had 66.5 cents, or 16.6 cents a person, a day for food.

Under normal conditions in Cleveland this family of four would have been eligible for a food order amounting to 80 cents a day. By adding 12.5 cents for surplus commodities, the total would amount to 92 cents or about 5 per cent short of the Department of Agriculture's standard.¹

Although surplus commodities (which as already noted are irregular, unpredictable, and under federal policy are supposed to be an addition to, rather than a substitute for, relief) may supplement food allowances in such a way that they may “normally” be regarded as relatively adequate, it must be recalled that unless sufficient provision is also made for other imperative needs “adequate” food allowances become illusory.²

Various States and Cities, 1938. Relief standards such as have been described here prevailed, regrettably, not in a few areas and only occasionally but have been characteristic of general relief programs as a whole. That this was true during the latter half of 1938 was clearly revealed by reports sent to the Survey Monthly in response to an inquiry with respect to general relief standards then in effect.

From New Haven, for example, it was reported that relief allowances were “without question minimum,” that allowances for rent and utilities were “least admirable.” In Pittsburgh, allowances were but slightly more than half of the “minimum for health and decency”; while in Philadelphia, rent allowances set at less than half the irreducible minimum for that city, were depressing the living standards of relief families.

In Washington, D.C., it was “a case of the neediest being cared for by

¹Cleveland Chapter, American Association of Social Workers, The Humane Side of a Relief Crisis, Appendix 1.
²Although it is usually food money which is diverted to meet other pressing needs, the converse sometimes occurs. A letter received by a Chicago social worker stated the problem baldly: “Miss, we have ate our budget of coal and light also rent. ples excus and help.”
The Setting

the next neediest." In Atlanta the fact was admitted ruefully that cases aided represented not existing needs, but available funds; average relief grants had been reduced from $10.17 to $8.05 per family; and undernourishment, not illness, was driving many cases to hospitals and clinics. In Florida, the meager aid available was limited to unemployables and acute emergencies. From Alabama it was reported that only temporary aid was available, except to the mentally and physically handicapped; that only most urgent cases were aided and these inadequately—"just enough to keep the most needy families alive." From Cleveland the word was that allowances were 10 per cent below estimated needs for minimum subsistence, and that clothing was given only in emergencies. From Los Angeles it was reported that allowances for rent were "not realistic," and although food allowances for employable persons were regarded as adequate, those for unemployables were "quite inadequate." 1

Various States and Cities, 1939. Describing conditions as they prevailed approximately a year after the Survey's report was issued, the author of the present volume wrote:

Reports received from cities as widely separated as Seattle, Denver, Minneapolis, Detroit, and Atlanta all indicate that relief allowances have, within the past twelve months, provided only a fraction—perhaps 80, perhaps 60, perhaps 40, or even but 25 or 30 per cent—of what home-economics experts regard as an irreducible minimum. As a result, many a relief recipient receives less for one day's food than is spent in some households for a dog. And although children, like monkeys in zoos, need fresh lettuce, bananas, oranges, and spinach, only the monkeys are assured these necessities. Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, within the year limited relief grants, for a family of four, to approximately $12 a week, or $1.70 a day. One cannot but wonder what these might have been if Philadelphia had been merely, as some cities advertise, a friendly city. Rule-of-thumb methods used in some areas prescribe one dollar, or perhaps a dollar and a quarter, per person per week for food. These amounts, which cannot decently feed a human, are sometimes augmented by perhaps 10 or 15 per cent to cover incidentals.

Miserable as general relief standards frequently are, the whole trouble is not in the starvation level of life they impose. Almost as bad as their inadequacy is their uncertainty. Without warning, relief offices sometimes close for indeterminate periods. Or a specified percentage of relief grants may suddenly be lopped off. 2

Inadequacies like these not only spell hunger and cold for resourceless men, women, and children, but rob them of hope, undermine morale, threaten their health, and keep them in constant fear.


The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

of losing credit with friends, relatives, creditors, and landlords. What is more, too low relief standards negate many of the:

. . . values that might otherwise accrue from broad social, educational, health, and recreational programs upon which Americans pride themselves. Can hungry children play, cold children learn, half-fed children remain well, develop properly? What of destitute and harassed parents who suffer far more from realization of what is happening to their children than from their own deprivation? Can they be good fathers and mothers? Can they rear today the best type of citizens for tomorrow? Difficult if not impossible as these tasks seem, miserable if not intolerable as are circumstances confronting millions of needy persons in this country, they constitute the lot of those of our fellows who are most insecure, most harassed by necessity, worst fed, worst clad, and worst housed.1

Hands-Off Policy of Federal Government

Not the least perplexing aspect of the great gaps in and inadequacy of state and local general relief programs is that the federal government since 1935 has been willing to pursue, in this important area, a laissez-faire policy.

Indeed, during the years 1933-1935, when the federal government was granting funds to states, it was not, strictly speaking, for the purpose of providing general relief. Federal aid was supposed to be restricted to the “unemployed,” or, as it was sometimes stated, to alleviate distress “arising from unemployment.”2 By quitting the business of relief in 1935, the federal government virtually invited the chaotic, haphazard and obviously insufficient programs which followed.

The administration's position on this issue is particularly difficult to understand in view of the all but unanimous demands for federal participation in establishing a broad, decent program of general assistance for the nation as a whole. Support for such co-operation has long been urged by the American Association of Social Workers,3 the American Public Welfare Association, the

2 For further discussion of the nature of responsibilities assumed by the federal government see chap. 29.
3 See, for example, the following statements made by the American Association of Social Workers: Outline for a Federal Assistance Program, Approved by the Delegate Conference, February 16, 1936; An Outline of the Position of the American Association of Social Workers in Respect to Governmental Employment, Social Insurance, and Assistance Programs, 1938; AASW Position on Public Social Services: Resolution Passed at Delegate Conference, Grand Rapids, May 24, 1940.
The Setting

National Council of State Public Assistance and Welfare Administrators, the Council of Local Public Welfare Administrators, the Council of State Governments, the Family Welfare Association of America, Community Chests and Councils, Inc., and a wide variety of other organizations made up of individuals having first-hand evidence of the pressing need for the federal government's help in this area.¹

Among the many advocates of federal responsibility for general relief have been a number of semi-official bodies such as the 1940 White House Conference on Children in a Democracy ² and the Family Security Committee appointed by the federal Director of the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services to advise him with respect to social and health needs arising from the defense program or likely to affect family security.³

Even these do not exhaust the sources of support for federal aid for general relief, which has also been urged by a number of high federal officials. Prominent among these officials are Katharine Lenroot, Chief of the Children’s Bureau; Ewan Clague, Associate Director of the Social Security Board’s Bureau of Employment Security; Paul V. McNutt, Director of the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services; Charles P. Taft, his assistant; Arthur J. Altmeyer, Chairman of the Social Security Board; and the Social Security Board itself. The list also includes high

¹ Groups like these have urged federal collaboration in the field of general relief as an essential step in broadening rather than restricting the nation's welfare services, and as a necessary supplement to and not in lieu of a work program. Much to the embarrassment of groups which take this position, demands for federal aid for general relief have also come from various organizations which appear to be primarily interested in economy and seem to be cool to the values of a national program of providing jobs for unemployed workers.

² Recommendations adopted by this Conference included the following: “The Federal Government should adopt a policy of continuing and flexible work programs for the unemployed, operated and primarily financed by the Federal Government and carried on in cooperation with State and local governments. . . . As supplementary to this program and in no way displacing it, the Federal Government should provide aid to the States for general relief covering all persons in need who are not in the categories now the objects of special Federal concern.” —“General Report Adopted by the Conference,” in Proceedings of the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy. Children's Bureau, U. S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau Publication no. 266, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1940, p. 23.

³ For the recommendation of this Committee, its supporting brief and resolutions and recommendations advanced by a wide variety of organizations and many individuals, see Brief in Support of Recommendation in Favor of a Category of General Public Assistance to Be Added to the Social Security Act. The Committee, September, 1941.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

officials within the WPA,\(^1\) for example, Corrington Gill,\(^2\) longtime assistant commissioner of the WPA; Josephine Chapin Brown,\(^3\) formerly director of social service of the FERA and later director of intake and certification of the WPA; and Marie Dresden Lane, long-time member of FERA and WPA regional staffs.\(^4\)

In the face of this almost universal approval, opposition to federal participation in a nationwide general assistance program has come from only two really important fronts—the United States Conference of Mayors, and, despite differences of points of view among many high federal officials, from the Roosevelt administration itself.

Opposition from both these sources is not grounded in the belief that all is well with the state-local relief programs.\(^5\) But, since both the mayors and the administration are committed to a work program as the primary device through which federal aid reaches needy employable persons, they oppose federal participation in general relief because they fear that such a step would jeopardize continuance of the work program.\(^6\)

The case of the administration was never put more forcibly than it was in 1936 by Aubrey Williams, then deputy administrator of the WPA. Frankly admitting that existing relief measures

\(^1\) These, however, did not represent the official position taken by the WPA.


\(^5\) See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1941, p. 204.

\(^6\) This reason, of course, is not the only one. There is, for example, a hearty distrust of “doles”; fear that resumption of federal aid for general relief would only repeat the official headaches and generally unsatisfactory experience under the FERA; and finally, fear on the part of local (especially city) officials that a federally aided program of general relief would not be likely to leave them the same important role they have played in connection with the WPA program. A further consideration frequently advanced has been that in some mysterious way the federal government does not have responsibility for the needs of persons who cannot be (or are not) employed on federal work projects. Each of these issues is further discussed in subsequent chapters, primarily chaps. 29, 32, and 33.

Although wrecking of the WPA program is frankly admitted to be the chief end of certain advocates of getting the federal government back into the relief business, it is not the hope of most authorities who support this change. They have made it clear repeatedly that resumption of federal responsibility in the field of general relief must be in addition to and not in place of other existing measures.
were failing to meet the need, Mr. Williams declared to an audience made up largely of social workers:

I have pondered long and seriously the reasons that bring many of you to urge a resumption of federal relief...

I realize what it means to you to read of families cut off relief in different localities, to see the distress of these same families besieging your agencies for some small bit of aid. I know how you must feel when you read of soup lines in Houston and organized begging in New Jersey, when you see states setting up border patrols against the unemployed and jungles flourishing by the freight yards...

On the bright side of our picture we have these: a definite acceptance of the responsibility of our federal government to provide work for a proportion of its able-bodied unemployed; and an acceptance of its responsibility to aid the states to provide social security on a decent, self-respecting basis to its own people. I do not believe for a moment that we can keep these gains on the one hand and have relief on the other...

Relief is flexible and elastic. It can be stretched to include every social ill, to assist every man, woman, and child who is in need...

But in reality it is that very flexibility and elasticity of relief that menace our hard-won victories. For why should states pass legislation for social-security measures if there is hope of securing an all-purpose relief grant from the federal government? And why should taxpayers accept the cost of a work program if half the amount of money can be stretched to aid twice the number of people through a relief program? You have only to read the Congressional Record to learn that the issue is not whether we shall have a federal work program plus federal relief but whether federal relief could not displace the work program.¹

In their zeal to emphasize this angle of the question, federal officials frequently overlook the equally important fact that the absence of broad and decent general relief provisions may threaten the integrity, and therefore the very existence, of work programs. This danger has, however, been recognized by at least some WPA officials in various sections of the country, who have admitted that the absence of reasonably adequate relief measures has resulted in workers being employed on WPA jobs who were not regarded as genuinely employable or adaptable to a work program. Despite their unemployability or lack of adaptability such workers have sometimes been accepted for and continued in WPA employment merely because the responsible officials could not bring themselves to condemn to utter resourcelessness men and women whose only

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

offenses were inability to qualify for any other form of aid and failure to measure up to acceptable standards of employability.

That this has occurred is evidenced by Fortune magazine which in 1937 reported that in Greenville, South Carolina, for example, funds for general relief were so inadequate that they had to be doled out to the needy "in almost microscopic fragments." As a result, the WPA took care of some of those who should have been given direct relief but were "too proud to beg." This, according to the Fortune account, meant that "one project of the Greenville WPA has been wholly carried out by men over sixty or certified by a doctor as unfit for work." ¹

Although such a situation was no doubt an unusual one, no less an authority on WPA affairs than Corrington Gill in 1939 urged "further extension of the security program" to include federal aid for assistance for that "large mass of destitute persons not yet eligible for old-age assistance. Many of these people," he continues:

... are unemployable or semi-employable because of physical or mental infirmity; they constitute a drag on the wage structure and bring instability into the labor market. Unable to get steady jobs, they live a wretched existence. Many of them get direct relief from state and local relief agencies now; sometimes they get only surplus commodities doled out by local relief agencies. In general the standards are low and there is need for a thoroughgoing reform here. Some of them get work relief jobs to the detriment of the work program. It would be better for them, for the work program, for local governments, and for the public at large if a general relief program with federal financial support cared for this numerous group.²

Furthermore, if an employment program must suddenly be expanded to provide jobs for large groups of workers unexpectedly thrown into need, it is altogether likely that projects may be undertaken which are not ready for efficient prosecution and before needed materials and supplies are at hand; or that surplus workers must be crowded in upon projects already fully manned.³

¹ "Unemployment in 1937," in Fortune, vol. 16, no. 4, October, 1937, p. 188B.
³ Of this matter Harry Greenstein, one-time state relief administrator and also administrator of the CWA in Maryland, declared: "One of the criticisms leveled against the WPA is that it is impossible to develop sufficiently diverse socially desirable projects to utilize to the best advantage the skills of those on work projects. As a result, the unemployed in many instances are artificially fitted to the projects, with loss of efficiency on the job. If relief funds were available to care for those who are not employed on the WPA, or who are cut off, the projects could be
The Setting

Thus, it appears to many observers, that availability of reasonably adequate relief to tide unemployed workers over until proper arrangements can be made for their employment would tend to safeguard, not threaten, a work program.¹

To say that there has been a vast amount of unmet need in the United States in recent years, that relief given to many who could qualify for it has been wholly inadequate, and that needed relief should be available to all who lack sufficient resources to procure the basic necessities of life is not, of course, to say that relief-giving is the best way to remedy these deficiencies. Obviously, it would be far better and more democratic if the need itself could be prevented through such provisions as higher wages (and possibly family allowances), steady employment, free lunches to school children, free or low-cost milk, extension of the stamp plan for the distribution of food and clothing (and, possibly, other manufactured goods), expansion of public housing, free or low-cost medical care, and a wide variety of other public services. However, until better ways are devised for the prevention of need or its alleviation, recourse to relief—undesirable though it may be—appears indispensable.

developed on a much more selective basis, and the residual relief group could be cared for through Federal and state funds. This would serve to strengthen the WPA or any Federal work program rather than weaken it.”—“General Relief: Another Category or a Basic Foundation for Public Welfare Administration?,” in Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work. Columbia University Press, New York, 1940, p. 181.

¹Further discussion of this issue is included in chap. 10. The need for an adequate general relief program to safeguard special assistance programs (such as aid to the aged, the blind, or to dependent children) has also been emphasized by many observers. Lack of such provision opens the way (a) to squeezing under the bars in one way or another needy persons who do not fully meet eligibility requirements, and (b) to “adjustments” in special assistance grants to cover needs that really should be met in some other way—if such only were available. The importance of this consideration is well illustrated by the inroads made from time to time upon the British Unemployment Insurance scheme. Only the establishment of the unemployment assistance program permitted the preservation of the essentials of an “insurance” program.
PART TWO

THE WPA AND ITS PROGRAM
CHAPTER IV
THE WPA: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

The Work Projects Administration (originally known as the Works Progress Administration, created in 1935 by executive order of President Roosevelt) has, since its establishment, been the administrative agency responsible for providing employment on socially useful projects for as many needy unemployed workers meeting prescribed eligibility requirements as can be given jobs with funds appropriated by Congress for this purpose from year to year. As such it has been one of the most highly praised and bitterly denounced agencies in the country. This wide variety of opinion regarding the WPA is attributable in part to differences in attitudes toward the way it has carried out the program it has had to administer and in part to sharp cleavages of thought about the nature of the program itself.

Just how varied opinion about the WPA has been was well illustrated by a poll made by the Institute of Public Opinion in 1939 when men and women in all walks of life, in every state in the nation, were asked to name “the greatest accomplishment” and the “worst thing” the Roosevelt administration had done. The federal experiment with relief was named as “the greatest accomplishment” by more people than was any other measure and was also cited as the “worst thing the Roosevelt administration has done” more frequently than any other aspect of the administration’s program.¹

Whether one thinks well or ill of the WPA or its program, there can be little question about its being a vast and complex organization and its program one of innumerable ramifications. So far-reaching have these been that it was no exaggeration to say, as did a high official, that in 1938 the WPA was:

... more than 3,000,000 workers earning ... wages and their 10,000-000 dependents, it is another 3,000,000 workers who have been on WPA rolls, but have gone to other work. It is also 125,000 engineers, social work-

¹As quoted in the New York Times, June 4, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ers, accountants, superintendents, foremen and timekeepers scattered in every state and community. It is in part all the public officials of all the sponsoring bodies in all the communities of the United States. It is in part 800,000 storekeepers who get most of the money paid to WPA workers. . . . It touches intimately the lives of more than fifty million people.¹

LEGAL BASIS OF THE WPA AND ITS PROGRAM

The WPA, like the program it administers, has been built upon a series of laws enacted by Congress. The first of these was the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935.² Several of these measures, like those enacted in 1936, 1937, and 1938, were not independent acts but only titles within more comprehensive laws. Most of them (particularly the earlier acts) applied not to the WPA alone but to other so-called emergency agencies as well.³

Though the various ERA acts have all carried appropriations for the WPA (and for other agencies, too) they are not regarded in Congress as appropriation measures. They are, therefore, not subject to the relatively strict procedures governing the handling of such measures.⁴ All have, nevertheless, originated in the House, the Senate frequently not receiving them until much too late to permit anything like appropriate consideration.⁵

¹ "Work Relief or the Dole?" WPA Release 4-1757, September 8, 1938. (Order of sentences changed.)
² Pub. Res. No. 11, 74th Congress, H. J. Res. 177. This is usually referred to as the ERA Act of 1935. The title of each ERA act passed prior to 1940 includes the year in which it was passed. This system of nomenclature was changed in 1940, however. The ERA acts passed since 1939 are known as "ERA Act, fiscal year 1941," "ERA Act, fiscal year 1942," and "ERA Act, fiscal year 1943," respectively. Citations of the successive ERA acts are as follows:
   - ERA Act of 1936—Pub. No. 739, 74th Congress (H. R. 12624), Title II
   - ERA Act, fiscal year 1943—Pub. Law 651, 77th Congress, 2d Session (H. J. Res. 324)
³ Under the ERA Act of 1935 was established "the Works Program" which was much broader in scope than that of the WPA, which was but one part of the larger whole.
⁴ See, for example, Congressional Record, June 12, 1941, p. 5217; June 22, 1940, p. 8927, and June 27, 1939, p. 7960.
⁵ These delays, complained Senator La Follette, frequently left the Senate in the unenviable position of having to yield to the House on important issues "lest it deprive hungry people of bread."—Congressional Record, June 22, 1940, p. 8927.
Provisions of the several ERA acts have usually become effective July 1 of the year in which they were enacted and continued through June 30 of the succeeding year. In addition to the several ERA acts, Congress has, in some years, enacted one or more supplementary measures. For the most part, these have been limited to providing additional funds for the operation of the WPA program. Nevertheless, several have required major changes of policy even before expiration of the current ERA act.

As a result of the piecemeal legislation on which it has had to depend throughout its entire course, the WPA has had a hand-to-mouth existence. WPA officials have never been in a position to plan with any degree of assurance for more than a year ahead. They have been unable to make long-term commitments to potential sponsors of worthwhile projects, and have never known stability in their own administrative organization. Even though they were morally certain further provision would be made to continue the program, they have always had to plan projects with a view to completing or abandoning them by the time the current law expired.

In view of the fact that the WPA, during its first six years, had to ask Congress nine times for money to continue its operations, it is little wonder that early in 1940, Howard Hunter, then deputy administrator of the WPA, in an address before the Pennsylvania Conference of Social Work, complained: "It is flatly absurd to approach the problem of unemployment on an emergency basis . . . The Federal Government should write into its permanent

1 This period is termed the fiscal year. Thus, the ERA Act of 1939 applied to the fiscal year 1940.

2 Supplementary measures of this kind enacted prior to 1940 were: Pub. No. 4 (H. R. 3587), 75th Congress, 1st Session, making additional appropriation for fiscal year 1937; Pub. Res. No. 80 (H. J. Res. 596), 75th Congress, 3rd Session, making an additional appropriation for fiscal year 1938; and Pub. Res. Nos. 1 (H. J. Res. 83) and 10 (H. J. Res. 246), 76th Congress, 1st Session, both making further appropriations for fiscal year 1939.

3 A dramatic example of what these year-to-year leases of life have meant to the WPA program was seen in 1939 when the ERA Act of 1939 was signed only at 11:30 p.m. on June 30, one-half hour before the current authorization for the WPA would have expired. Because of uncertainty concerning its passage, thousands of workers in various parts of the country had been laid off. An even worse situation prevailed in 1941 when the law for the ensuing year was approved only on July 7, after the WPA, legally speaking, had died. Rather than risk the recurrence of such a situation—or the occurrence of an even more serious one—Congress in 1942 included in the WPA bill a provision legalizing, retroactively, if necessary, obligations incurred between June 30 and the date of the enactment of the measure.—ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, sec. 34.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

statutory legislation a program for providing useful employment for the unemployed. Communities, States and the Federal Government could then plan years ahead."

Administrative Organization

When the WPA was created in 1935 it was expected that its chief role would be that of co-ordinating the work of other federal agencies such as the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Bureau of Public Roads, which, it was thought, would provide the bulk of the employment to be given under the federal Works Program. What was at first expected to be only a secondary function of the WPA was to employ on small useful projects the residue of the needy unemployed not given jobs by other agencies. But, when after considerable delay, the administration finally realized that the money in hand was insufficient to employ the needy unemployed on vast self-liquidating projects and public works as had been hoped, it was the WPA that emerged as the agency which had to supply the majority of jobs.

Established as an independent agency, the WPA in 1939 was incorporated within the Federal Works Agency, which was created in that year. During its first seven stormy years of life, the WPA had four chief executives: Harry L. Hopkins, who served as ad-

1 As quoted in the Record, Wilkes-Barre, February 1, 1940.
3 This was effected under Reorganization Plan No. 1 which was prepared by the President and transmitted to Congress April 25, 1939, pursuant to provisions of the Reorganization Act of 1939. Congress, by enactment of Public Resolution No. 20, 76th Congress, on June 7, 1939, made the plan effective July 1 of that year. Other federal units placed in the newly established Works Agency included the Bureau of Public Roads, formerly in the Department of Agriculture; the Public Buildings Branch of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department; the United States Housing Authority; and the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works.

Although the head of the Federal Works Agency, known as the Federal Works Administrator, is given the responsibility and power to supervise and direct the program of the WPA, this power had, prior to July, 1942, when the head of the Works Agency became head of the WPA also, been but sparingly used. General orders issued by the Commissioner of Work Projects, however, were normally discussed in advance with the Federal Works Administrator. Rates of pay on WPA projects, under law prevailing since 1939, have been subject to the approval of the Administrator. This official also exerted a powerful influence over the WPA program by virtue of his prerogative of submitting to the Bureau of the Budget an independent estimate of the appropriation that should be made available in any given year. For discussion of differences arising over recommendations made in 1942 see chap. 23.
The WPA and Its Program

ministrator from the creation of the organization until he was appointed Secretary of Commerce in December, 1939; Colonel F. C. Harrington, who served from that date until his death in October, 1940; Howard O. Hunter, who, upon Colonel Harrington's death served as head of the WPA until his resignation early in 1942; and finally, Brigadier General Philip B. Fleming, administrator of the Federal Works Agency, who was asked by the President (in July, 1942) to take over the duties of commissioner of the WPA in addition to his duties as head of the Works Agency. Prior to establishment of the Federal Works Agency the head of the WPA was known as the Administrator. Subsequent to that time he was known as the Commissioner of Work Projects.

Under the commissioner at the Washington headquarters there are, in addition to the deputy commissioner, a number of assistant commissioners, heading the several divisions.¹

Since its inception in 1935 the WPA has operated on a regional basis, each region being in charge of a regional director. The regional offices, in turn, direct and co-ordinate the various state administrations. Within the several states the WPA is, as a rule, organized on a district basis, the districts normally embracing several counties. Organization of state and district offices has followed roughly that of the Washington office, the typical arrangement being to have several operating divisions, each dealing with such functions as finance, operations, professional and service projects, and employment.²

State WPA organizations are regarded by WPA officials as the backbone of their program. When Francis H. Dryden, acting commissioner, appeared before a House Committee in June, 1942, he declared: "... I feel very strongly that where a program is operated it should be operated by a State office. ... State ad-

¹ As of October, 1941, there were six of these divisions: Administration; Employment; Professional and Service Projects; Engineering and Project Control; Research, Finance and Statistics; and finally the most recently organized Division of Training and Re-employment. Prior to July, 1939, officials serving under the administrator were termed the deputy and assistant administrators. A comprehensive analysis of the workings of the WPA as a centrally controlled agency is presented in The Administration of Federal Work Relief, by Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden. Public Administration Service, Chicago, 1941.

² For a description of the responsibilities of regional, state, and local WPA officials see WPA Manual of Rules and Regulations, vol. 1, Organization and Administration.
The WTA and Federal Relief Policy

ministrations are the best type of organization for a program such as we have." ¹

Moreover, it is maintained that, as Mr. Dryden once told a Senate Committee, the WPA was the federal agency that "really originated State administrations" and was "the pioneer in that field among the Federal agencies." ²

Fearful lest the sharp reduction in prospect for the WPA in 1941–1942 might lead to the merging of programs in several states and placing them under a single administrator, Congress wrote into law a provision intended to scotch this possibility.³ In support of this provision Senator Hughes, who introduced it, declared:

I have had some intimation that in the effort which will be made to administer this law by taking care of as many persons as possible, it may be that the administrative expenses will be reduced, and that one way in which it may be attempted to carry out that policy will be to group some States and do away with the administration of relief in one or two of them. In the case of a State such as my State of Delaware, for instance—which is a small State—there is always a temptation to place the administration of such laws in some one of the large adjoining States. . . . When the money to be administered is so drastically reduced as in this instance, there is a sore temptation to resort to some method of making it go as far as possible; and, in doing so, frequently an injustice is done to some one of the States.⁴

Since the law enacted in 1941 required only that a state administrator (the only state official whose appointment must be con-

² U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 324), Emergency Relief Appropriation Act Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 25.
³ ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 33.
⁴ This action was of a piece with the Senate's unsuccessful though closely contested move to prevent placing on a regional instead of on a state basis certain functions administered by the Treasury Department in connection with the WPA program. Senate opposition to regionalization disregarded assurances that this would not impair efficiency and would result in an annual saving of some $485,000.

Though several senators opposing the regionalization of certain accounting functions did so because they felt this was a threat to "State sovereignty," Senator Adams, who had the bill in charge, declared that he saw no great principle involved in the question "whether a bookkeeper should transcribe the records of the Wyoming W. P. A. in Cheyenne or in Omaha." By a vote of only 27 to 24 the Senate finally—less than six hours before the WPA, under existing legislation, would be officially dead—voted to recede from its position.—Congressional Record, June 30, 1941, pp. 5865-5866.
⁵ Congressional Record, June 20, 1941, pp. 5491-5492.

110
firmed by the Senate) be retained in each state, the WPA arranged for the operation of the WPA programs in both Delaware and the District of Columbia to be administered from Baltimore. The Nevada program—employing fewer than 1,000 workers—was administered in conjunction with the program in northern California. State administrators in both Delaware and Nevada were thus left with almost nothing to do. When to these arrangements, which a few senators regarded as outright sabotage of their 1941 move to retain a WPA setup in each state, was coupled the further proposal, made in 1942, to abolish state WPA organizations in 15 or 20 states, real trouble began to brew in the Senate. The proposal to abolish certain state programs had been put forward by the Bureau of the Budget as an economy measure designed to save no less than one million dollars. Although the House approved this step, the Senate adopted a provision to retain the state organizations and to liquidate instead the six regional offices, the maintenance of which was estimated to cost some $765,000 annually.¹

Differences between the House and Senate on this matter of organization were finally compromised by continuance of the 1941 provision that the WPA must “continue to maintain in each State an Office of State Administrator for such State,” and by limiting to $225,000 the amount that might be spent for the maintenance of not more than three regional offices.²

¹ In support of the Senate position it was urged that it was “humiliating” to a state to have a program administered from outside its own boundaries; that any regional organization was nothing but a fifth wheel; that state administration permitted more expeditious meeting of emergencies, the state WPA often getting into action before the Red Cross; and finally, as Senator McKellar put it, “Our forefathers were very wise; they established States. They did not establish regions. We never had them established until recently and they should not be.”—U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H.J. Res. 324), Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session, 1942, p. 25.

² In explanation of the Senate’s attitude toward regional offices certain observers have pointed out that although the appointment of regional directors of the WPA, like that of state administrators, is subject to confirmation of the Senate, the areas over which regional officials have jurisdiction include more than a single state. Thus, it is said, senators who are in a position to “make it hot for the WPA administrators in their own states have not the same opportunity to bring pressure to bear upon regional officials.”

ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, secs. 32, 33.

Because of the severe limitations placed upon funds that might be used for administration in 1942-1943, and because of the Senate’s opposition to regional offices, WPA officials during the summer of 1942 appeared to be on the verge of abandoning their entire regional setup.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Congressional Pressure for Reorganization

Dissatisfaction with the WPA program and its administration has frequently given rise to proposals in Congress for administrative changes. The Special Senate Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (the so-called Byrnes Committee), for example, which rendered its report in February, 1939, recommended, and submitted a bill to effectuate, the creation of a Department of Public Works headed by a secretary appointed by the President "by and with the advice and consent of the Senate." This proposed department was to have taken over all functions of the WPA, the PWA, the Public Buildings Branch of the Treasury Department, the Bureau of Public Roads, the CCC, and the NYA.

Other proposals have looked toward the establishment of national boards in administrative or advisory capacities. In 1939, for example, the House succeeded in writing into the pending WPA bill a provision taking responsibility for the administration of the WPA program out of the hands of a single administrator and vesting it in a "Work Projects Board" composed of three members appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Supporters of this proposal contended that administering an agency which "handled $1,500,000,000 of the taxpayers' money scattered in 48 States and the Territories, dealing with millions of citizens was a job just a little bit too big for one man"; and that "assistants should come not in the form of some persons selected by the Administrator to serve as his deputy, but some person selected by the President and approved by the Congress." The Senate, however, did not go along with this suggestion which was therefore not embodied in law.

1 Senator Byrnes was at that time the administration's leader in the Senate.
2 U. S. Senate, S. 1265. 76th Congress, 1st Session. February 23, 1939, pp. 4-5. (Committee print.)
3 Congressional Record, June 30, 1939, p. 8453.
4 In yielding on this issue, said Representative Woodrum of Virginia, who had been in charge of the bill, the House conferees did so in the hope that with establishment of Reorganization Plan No. I, then in prospect, and with the appointment of a new administrator "coming over the top of W. P. A." there might be "increased vigilance and increased attention to administrative details."—Ibid.

Although this proposal appeared to be critical of Colonel Harrington's administration, the House in 1939 included in the pending bill a clause qualifying him for retention as a member of the proposed board.
The WPA and Its Program

Personnel

Under law, "Any Administrator or other officer named to have general supervision at the seat of government" over the WPA program "and receiving a salary of $5,000 or more per annum . . . and any State or regional administrator receiving a salary of $5,000 or more per annum . . . (except persons now serving as such under other law) shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate." In practice this is interpreted to apply only to the federal commissioner (previously known as the administrator), to regional and to state administrators. The commissioner is responsible for appointments to the national and regional staffs, and for recommending to the President candidates for appointment as state administrators. State administrators, in turn, are responsible for appointment of their staffs subject to the approval of regional WPA officials.

Provision for Senate confirmation of certain WPA officials was written into the original WPA law and subsequent acts but was omitted (apparently inadvertently) from the 1938 act. In 1939, however, the Senate without discussion and despite vigorous House opposition remedied this little oversight.

Under the program of the FERA which preceded that of the WPA there was never any provision for Senate confirmation of

ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 32. This provision, though included in the several ERA acts, is in conflict with Reorganization Plan No. 1 (sec. 306) which prescribes that the Commissioner of the WPA shall be appointed by the Federal Works Administrator.

Qualifications and previous employment history of all state WPA administrators in office at the time were presented to the House Committee which held hearings on the WPA appropriation bill in 1940.

Representative Woodrum, who was in charge of the 1939 bill, opposed Senate confirmation on the ground that it would "throw the W.P.A. right square into the middle of local politics in every State in the Union. It would aggravate all the difficulties we now have where there is political interference with the W.P.A. program. Requiring these administrative officials of high rank to go to some Senator or to some political organization for their right to have an office under the W.P.A. would carry with it political subservience . . . There is considerable opinion to the effect that when we require State W.P.A. administrators to have political endorsements for appointment we aggravate the political interference with the program. I certainly think that."—Congressional Record, June 16, 1939, p. 7312.

More remarkable even than the House's opposition to Senate confirmation was its acceptance of an amendment prescribing that no consideration should be given to recommendations (except as to character or residence) given by Senators or Representatives to applicants for appointments under the pending measure. In support of this proposal (which the Senate later rejected) its sponsor declared, "I want to either have the authority or else let the public know we do not have that authority." Ibid., June 16, 1939, p. 7376.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

appointments. Officials who have served in both organizations have declared that requiring Senate confirmation of certain appointments marked the real beginning of political pressures upon the administration of federal relief. Impartial observers have also held that Senate confirmation has opened the door to forces that are inimical to sound administrative practice and that it has been primarily responsible for such “politics” as may have crept into the program.¹

In making appointments to positions not needing Senate confirmation, a common practice at least in the earlier stages of the WPA program, was to require political endorsements. A belief commonly held is that whereas state WPA officials are “Senators’ men,” district officials are “Congressmen’s men.”²

Even though Colonel Harrington opposed the principle of Senate confirmation he admitted in 1940 that he gave considerable weight to recommendations of legislators even when confirmation was not required.

Selection of “project supervisory employees,” as distinguished from administrative employes on the one hand and project workers on the other, is the responsibility of the divisions of employment in the local WPA offices. Wherever practicable these supervisors are selected from among workers who are in need.

Publicizing Names

The WPA commissioner was required by the ERA Act of 1939 (and by the two subsequent ERA acts) to submit to Congress a list showing for each state the names, addresses, positions, and compensation for all employes paid at the rate of $1,200 a year or more.

The number of such employes, including both administrative personnel and supervisory workers on projects, totaled 68,693 as of December 1, 1939. The total annual salaries of these workers was reported as $118,730,177. In New York City alone over 6,000 such employes were reported, Ohio ranking next with 5,475, and Pennsylvania and Illinois with 4,482 and 4,287, respectively.

¹ For extended discussion of the effect of Senate confirmation upon the quality of personnel and efficiency of operations see The Administration of Federal Work Relief, by Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, pp. 269-270.
² The House in 1937 defeated a proposal to require that WPA supervisors and engineers in any county should be appointed only with the consent of the sitting member of Congress.—Congressional Record, June 1, 1937, p. 5210.
The WPA and Its Program

The extreme step taken by Congress in demanding names of administrative and supervisory workers may be attributed to long-continued refusal on the part of WPA officials, especially during the Hopkins regime, to submit to congressmen and senators lists of WPA administrative and supervisory personnel in their bailiwicks. Refusals of this kind were sometimes regarded as evidence that the program was being kept out of politics, sometimes as evidence that it was so deeply involved in politics that the lists could not withstand scrutiny.

The administration defended its action on the ground that to divulge the names of workers was to invite solicitations by political organizations, and by salesmen of one type or another. The requirement to publicize the names of administrative and supervisory personnel was dropped in 1942. "Why," asked Representative Woodrum, "should we fool with this when the program has been whittled down to what it is now?"

Number of Administrative Employes

During the fiscal year 1938–1939 the average number of administrative employes in the headquarters, regional, state, and district WPA offices totaled 36,003 while the average for the first eight months of the next fiscal year fell sharply to 26,687. As of March 31, 1941, the total was 19,845 of which 1,338 were employed in the central office and 18,507 in the field or in regional, state, or local offices. In only three states (New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois) did the number of administrative employes exceed 1,000, whereas in March of the preceding year there had

---

^1 Senators Holt of West Virginia and Davis of Pennsylvania were among those who felt most aggrieved by being denied a list of administrative and supervisory employes in their own states. See, for example, the Congressional Record for June 27, 1939, p. 7947, and June 28, 1939, pp. 8039-8040, 8078-8084.

^2 Demanding the names of administrative employes of the WPA, Representative Joseph Martin, Republican leader of the House, in 1939, declared: "... it has been the American custom and certainly an American privilege to have the salaries of public officials a matter of public record ... certainly Members of Congress who are called upon to make appropriations, should be given this information. Above all, the people who pay the taxes are entitled to have the information. Only an unwhole-some spirit of bureaucratic dictatorship would seek to deny this information to the Congress and the people. I demand, in the public interest, that the secrecy be swept aside and the high salaries in W.P.A. be made public."—Congressional Record, May 9, 1939, p. 5308.

^3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 1942, p. 177.
been seven states in this category. The largest number of administrative personnel employed by the WPA during recent years was in February, 1939, when, owing to the temporary employment of nearly 10,000 workers to help review the eligibility of all project workers on the roll at that time, the total was no less than 45,423. For the year 1942−1943 it was estimated that the number of administrative employees would average only about 5,600.

Curbs on Political Activity

Legal restrictions designed to divorce the administration of WPA from political activity have been made increasingly stringent since 1936, when Congress prohibited use of WPA funds for the payment of “the salary or expenses of any person who is a candidate for any State, District, County or Municipal office (... requiring full time of such person and to which a salary attaches), in any primary, general or special election, or who is serving as a campaign manager or assistant thereto for any such candidate.” These provisions, obviously, left many loopholes inasmuch as they applied only to candidates for office (or their managers) and not to persons already holding office. Neither did they apply to officers of political clubs and organizations who were among the worst offenders in attempting to exert political pressure on WPA employees.

Because of many alleged abuses and charges of using the WPA for political purposes during primary and regular elections (particularly in the latter half of 1938) real teeth were put into prohibitions against political activity. A supplementary appropriation measure enacted in February, 1939, made it unlawful for any administrative or supervisory employee paid from WPA funds “to

1 The additional states being Massachusetts, Ohio, Michigan, and California. The number of employees in New York in March, 1940, was approximately 2,700.
2 First Deficiency Appropriation Act, fiscal year 1936, Title II.
3 Findings of the Senate Committee (the Sheppard Committee) established to investigate charges of politics were published in its report, Investigation of Senatorial Campaign Expenditures and Use of Government Funds. These are referred to in chap. 30. Among the most publicized complaints were those regarding a speech by Deputy WPA Administrator Aubrey Williams in which he was reported to have urged WPA workers “to keep our friends in power.”

Another frequently cited abuse of political power was Harry Hopkins’ active participation in the election and attempted “purges” of 1938 while he was still administrator of the WPA. Apparently repentant over the role he then played, Mr. Hopkins told the Senate Committee before whom he appeared prior to his confirmation as Secretary of Commerce that if he had it to do over again he would not have made “those speeches.”
The WTA and Its Program

use his official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with an election or affecting the results thereof. Summary dismissal was prescribed for persons violating this provision, and offenders were thereafter to be barred from receiving any compensation from funds appropriated by the ERA Act of 1938 or the supplementary measure. Political solicitations from persons receiving compensation under the ERA Act of 1938 or the supplementary act were also declared unlawful as was a promise of benefit (or a threat to deprive a person of benefit) under the act in return for any political activity or support. Knowing violation of the provision was punishable either by fine of not more than $1,000, imprisonment for not more than one year, or both. The substance of all these restrictions has been incorporated in subsequent ERA acts.

Restrictions upon the political exploitation of WPA employes have not been something forced upon an unwilling administration by Congress. The administration itself asked for them. In his relief message to Congress in 1939, for example, the President reminded that body that in an earlier message he had recommended restrictions upon political activities not only of federal employes but of all persons who might be in a position “to bring improper pressure to bear.” He did not stop, however, with this recommendation, and again urged—as he had done a number of times before—that WPA employes be placed under civil service. Since the so-called Hatch Act, which was enacted in 1939, extended to all federal employes even broader restrictions on political activities than had previously been applied to WPA employes by ERA acts, the President and WPA officials have requested Congress to eliminate from subsequent ERA acts the anti-politics provisions relating to the WPA alone. Congress, however, has not accepted these recommendations.

Because federal restrictions against political activity of WPA personnel are so much more stringent than those generally prevailing in state legislation, persons interested in non-political administration of the WPA have consistently opposed the transfer of greater control over the WPA program to state and local units of government. However, enactment of the second Hatch Act

2 As quoted in New York Times, April 28, 1939.
(in 1940) extended to state and local officials, exercising functions in connection with any state or local agency financed in part by federal loans or grants, the same bans previously placed on the political activity of federal employes. Thus, it would be possible to extend these restrictions to state and local authorities by arranging to pay from federal funds at least part of the cost of the services rendered.

Just how much "politics" there has ever been in the WPA and how effective the more stringent bans of later years have been would be most difficult to say. However, although questions as to how much political manipulation there has been on the WPA program are shrouded in considerable uncertainty, one thing at least is sure. The administration has tried again and again to convince project workers that they do not hold their jobs by virtue of their voting "right." Attempts have also been made to prevent fleecing. Notices posted on project bulletin boards periodically and letters sent directly to workers with their pay checks at the time of any important election have been designed to convey to workers a knowledge of safeguards established to prevent intimidation. How far these policies may have been vitiated by actual firings or by threats of ward-heelers or foremen is not, of course, known. Nevertheless, the official stand of the administration has been foursquare against such intimidation. Such information as is available to suggest the degree to which politics has influenced the program of the WPA is discussed elsewhere in this volume.\(^1\)

Preferences and Restrictions on Employment

Employment in administrative positions in the WPA has been affected by apportionment and veteran preference just as many other types of federal employment have been. For example, when it is necessary to release from service persons employed by the WPA in an administrative capacity within the District of

\(^{1}\) Typical of such letters was that sent to workers in 1940. This declared, in part, "The WPA is not supporting any candidates for any office. You are not under obligation to vote for or against any candidates. If you are qualified you can vote as you please. No one can threaten to have you fired for any political reason. No one can promise you a better WPA job in return for your support. No one can ask you for money for any political campaign. This is against the law. You do not owe your job to politics—you will not lose it because of your vote."—Quoted in WPA Release 4-2120, April 11, 1940, p. 15.

\(^{2}\) See especially chaps. 12, 22, and 30.
The WPA and Its Program

Columbia, preference for retention must be given first to veterans, veterans' widows and wives, and then, "as nearly as good administration will warrant," to appointees "from States that have not received their share of appointments according to population." Appointees to federal administrative or advisory positions with the WPA in any state "so far as not inconsistent with efficient administration" have been required to be "bona fide citizens" of that state. In several earlier laws comparable provisions applied also to supervisory positions and to districts as well as states.

Efforts of veterans' organizations to write into law provisions giving veterans more preferential treatment than they now receive have thus far proved unsuccessful.

Aliens have been barred from WPA administrative jobs ever since early in 1939 when Congress prescribed that no funds appropriated to the WPA could be paid to any alien.

No person failing to make an affidavit to the effect that he was neither a "Communist" nor "a member of any Nazi Bund Organization," that he did not advocate nor belong to an organization which advocated overthrow of the government of the United States could be paid from funds appropriated by the ERA acts passed in 1940, 1941 or 1942.

An extraordinary legal provision which Congress enacted in 1941 prescribed that no part of the appropriation included in the ERA Act, fiscal year 1942 "shall be used to pay the compensation

---

1 ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 17; ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 22; ERA Act of 1939, sec. 23; ERA Act of 1938, sec. 15; ERA Act of 1937, sec. 7. Earlier laws (notably those of 1937 and 1938) did not limit apportionment to reductions in staff, but included an additional provision that appointments to positions within the District of Columbia should "so far as not inconsistent with efficient administration," be apportioned among the states and the District on the basis of population.

2 ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 16 (c); ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 21 (c); ERA Act of 1939, sec. 22 (c); ERA Act of 1938, sec. 13; ERA Act of 1937, sec. 5; and ERA Act of 1936, Title II, par. 5.

3 For examples of suggested amendments see: U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 1941, pp. 383-384.

4 ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 15 (f); ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, secs. 10 (f) and 12 (b); ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, secs. 9 (f) and 11 (b). Unlike the ERA acts enacted in 1939, 1941, and 1942, which precluded payment to people who advocated (or were members of organizations which advocated) overthrow of the government by force or violence, that enacted in 1940 prohibited payments to individuals or members of organizations advocating "the overthrow of the Government of the United States," whether through force or violence or not.—ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 17 (b).
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

of David Lasser,\(^1\) one-time president of the Workers Alliance, an organization which in June, 1939, was said to embrace some 250,000 members, of whom a large proportion were WPA project employees.\(^2\) Because of what he termed the “Communistic” tendencies on the part of some of its most influential members, Mr. Lasser resigned as head of the Workers Alliance to organize the American Security Union which barred from its membership Communists, Nazis, and Fascists.

Soon after the Union was established, Mr. Lasser was offered and accepted a job on the WPA’s administrative staff. In this capacity he was said, by the commissioner himself, to have rendered valuable service. Although Mr. Lasser had frequently denied that he was a Communist, legislation against him was urged on the ground that he had “run with the wrong crowd” (which, it was admitted he subsequently forsook); had, on occasion, resorted to what were regarded as unwarranted tactics in his attempts to focus attention on relief needs; had, at times, been too outspoken in his criticism of Congress. Despite vigorous condemnation as special legislation, as a “travesty upon our Declaration of Independence,” as an “ex-parte Star Chamber proceeding,” and as “unconstitutional, being in the nature of a bill of attainder,” the provision was written into law.\(^3\) No comparable provision was included in the law enacted in 1942.

**Civil Service**

In accordance with the desires of the administration, the original ERA Act of 1935 specifically authorized the President to make appointment “without regard to the provisions of the civil-service laws.”\(^4\) By 1939, however, conditions had so changed that Colonel Harrington requested Congress to give WPA administrative employes opportunity to gain civil service status. This request went unheeded. It was repeated in 1940 with the recommendation that employes be permitted to take examinations prescribed by the Civil Service Commission for the positions they were then occupying. Despite presidential support of this recommendation, Congress again refused to act, and furthermore posi-

---

\(^1\) Sec. 1 (a).
\(^2\) See especially Congressional Record, June 12, 1941, pp. 5227-5229; June 19, 1941, Appendix, pp. 3186-3188; June 20, 1941, pp. 5492-5493.
\(^3\) ERA Act of 1935, sec. 3.
tively prohibited application to the WPA of other measures (such as Executive Order No. 7916 and the so-called Ramspeck Act, approved November 26, 1940) which otherwise would have brought WPA administrative employees under civil service. In 1941 Congress forbade use of WPA funds to pay “any person appointed in accordance with the civil-service laws.”

Although WPA administrative employees have not been placed under civil service those in regional and state offices as well as those in Washington have been classified in accordance with the federal classification act of 1923. Titles and grades for employees in the central office in Washington are established in cooperation with the federal Civil Service Commission even though this body has no control over the selection of those employed.

In view of Congress’ apparent interest in divorcing politics from the administration of the WPA program, repeated refusals to place under civil service employees responsible for that program have been difficult to understand and bitterly assailed as failing to take at least one positive step in the direction of assuring non-political administration.

**Administrative Costs**

Costs of administration, WPA officials declare, represented only about 4 per cent of all WPA funds expended for activities conducted by the WPA during its first five years of life. This percentage, however, includes only expenditures from federal funds appropriated to the WPA. It excludes, therefore, the cost

---

1 ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 16 (a).
2 See, for example, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, by Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, pp. 287-288.
3 The percentage ranged from 3.4 per cent in fiscal 1929 to 5.1 per cent in fiscal 1936, the year in which the program was launched, and administrative costs would necessarily be high. The next highest proportion, 4.5 per cent, was in fiscal 1938. Expenditures for administration prior to July, 1939, include expenses incurred for the administration of the NYA as well as the WPA. The term “administrative costs” as applied to the WPA is most difficult to define and is subject to a wide variety of interpretations. As used by the WPA, administrative costs include expenditures from WPA funds for only the salaries of administrative (as opposed to supervisory and project) employees in the national, regional, state, and district WPA offices; expenditures for staff travel, rent, light, heat, communications, printing, binding, equipment, and supplies used in WPA offices. Excluded from administrative costs are wages paid to workers or supervisors and expenditures for materials, supplies and equipment chargeable to individual work projects. For an extended statement on administrative costs, see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 150), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part II, pp. 1396-1405.
of services provided by other federal agencies and by state and local agencies which collaborate in many important particulars in connection with the operation of the WPA program.

Costs of services furnished by state and local relief agencies in the selection of workers to be employed on WPA projects have, within recent years, been estimated at from 10 to 15 million dollars a year, depending upon the level of project employment maintained by the WPA. Amounts spent for service afforded to the WPA by other federal agencies (such as the General Accounting Office, and by the Procurement Division, the Disbursement Division, and the Office of the Commissioner of Accounts and Deposits within the Treasury Department) are not separately reported, but usually include expenditures for services given to the CCC, PWA, agricultural relief, and similar agencies, as well as to the WPA. As an indication of what these added costs may amount to, the ERA Act of 1939 included, in addition to an administrative appropriation of 50 million dollars for WPA itself, a further appropriation of nearly 20 million dollars to the General Accounting Office and various Treasury agencies for administrative expenses “incidental to carrying out the purposes of the Act.” These expenses included the cost of services supplied not only to the WPA but to other emergency agencies as well. Nevertheless, a fair share of this amount must be added to the cost of “administering” the WPA program if understatement of what are widely regarded as the costs of “administration” is to be avoided.

Not infrequently these WPA “administrative costs” met from WPA funds are compared with costs of administering state and local relief programs. Such comparisons are often misleading, however, since expenses incurred by local and state relief agencies in making investigations of eligibility and referring workers for employment by the WPA are often included among the costs of “administering” the individual relief agencies. Since these expenses frequently are not offset by relief grants to the needy persons referred for WPA employment, they serve to increase the ratio of relief agencies’ expenditures for administrative costs as opposed to what they spend for relief. When it is recalled that some relief agencies report that services performed for the WPA consume as much as 30 to 40 per cent of staff time, and that the total cost of these services may approximate 10 or 15 million dollars a year, it may be seen that charging these expenditures
against the cost of "administering" relief and excluding them from WPA administrative costs is conducive to great misunderstanding.

Introducing at this point the complicated question of computing costs of administering the WPA program is not with any intent of suggesting what these should be. Much less is there any attempt to suggest that administrative costs should bear any given relationship to total expenditures for the WPA program or that, as congressional debate frequently suggests, such a ratio should be at least roughly comparable to some figure, mystically arrived at, representing the cost of administering "a business." Indeed, it is likely that even such expenditures as the WPA reports under "administration" include items that business accountants would charge as costs of some specific operation (such as accounting for funds, the recruitment of workers, the purchasing of materials, or the planning of project operations) rather than as administration, a category usually reserved for expenses which apply only to over-all services and general superintendence and cannot be allocated to any specific function. However, since the term "administrative costs," as applied to the WPA program, is not usually interpreted in this more restricted sense, anyone wanting a complete picture of these costs would have to take into account all expenditures, from whatever source, for such functions as are included among administrative costs when they are met from WPA funds.

Limitations Placed on WPA Administrative Costs

Congress has imposed two types of limitations upon amounts that may be spent by the WPA for "administration." The first (adopted in 1937 and re-enacted in 1938) limited WPA administrative expenditures to a specified percentage of the amount made directly available to it. The second imposition adopted in 1939, and in subsequent years, despite protests of WPA officials, limited to prescribed sums the amounts that might be spent by the WPA for salaries, communication service, travel, and other specified purposes.

No specific limits were imposed by the ERA Act of 1935, which gave the President full discretion; nor by the ERA Act of 1936, which gave control to the Director of the Bureau of the Budget over this item.
CHAPTER V
THE WPA: WORK AUTHORIZED AND UNDERTAKEN

Types of projects the WPA may or may not undertake from year to year have been specified by Congress. Projects which may be undertaken in one year may be forbidden in another. Conversely, projects which the WPA was not authorized or was thought by responsible officials not to be authorized to prosecute in one year have subsequently been approved.

Permissible Projects

Permissible projects prescribed by Congress have been defined only in broad categories, contrasting sharply with older "pork barrel" legislation, which normally listed individual projects in specified localities, and fairly bristled with local interests. The difference between the past and the present is vividly portrayed by comparing authorizations written into the ERA Act, fiscal year 1941,\(^1\) for example, with the detailed listing by state, county, and town of some 80 pages of individual projects incorporated in

\(^1\) Authorizations included in the ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, as amended, permitted prosecution of projects of the following types: "Highways, roads, and streets; public buildings; parks, and other recreational facilities, including buildings therein; public utilities; electric transmission and distribution lines or systems to serve persons in rural areas, including projects sponsored by and for the benefit of nonprofit and cooperative associations; sewer systems, water supply, and purification systems; airports and other transportation facilities; flood control; drainage; irrigation, including projects sponsored by community ditch organizations; water conservation; soil conservation, including projects sponsored by soil conservation districts and other bodies duly organized under State law for soil erosion control and soil conservation, preference being given to projects which will contribute to the rehabilitation of individuals and an increase in the national income; reforestation, and other improvements of forest areas, including the establishment of fire lanes; fish, game, and other wildlife conservation; eradication of insect, plant, and fungus pests; the production of lime and marl for fertilizing soil for distribution to farmers under such conditions as may be determined by the sponsors of such projects under the provisions of State law; educational, professional, clerical, cultural, recreational, production, and service projects, including training for manual occupations in industries engaged in production for national defense purposes, for nursing and for domestic service; aid to self-help and cooperative associations for the benefit of needy persons; and miscellaneous projects."—Sec. 1 (b).
The WPA and Its Program

the so-called Garner bill as passed by Congress in 1932 only to be vetoed by President Hoover.¹

Prior to 1939 Congress prescribed not only the types of projects that might be prosecuted by the WPA but also specified the maximum amounts that might be expended for projects of each type.

Establishing a new precedent for WPA legislation, at least, Congress in 1942 prescribed that during the fiscal year 1943 the WPA was to spend not less than six million dollars "for the operation of day nurseries and nursery schools for the children of employed mothers. . . ."²

Expenditures for nurseries for the care of children of unemployed women, widowers, or of mothers remaining at home could not, of course, be charged against the six million dollars the WPA was compelled to spend.

Project Accomplishments

Within limits prescribed by Congress, work done by the WPA resulted in material and social values to every state and to almost every community in the land. The works program, wrote Macmahon, Millett and Ogden in 1941, "left the nation better equipped, more richly endowed in the attributes that make for civilization, and better prepared to meet the requirements of building a strong and prosperous country. . . ."³ Even before the WPA was five years old, approximately a quarter of a million projects had been undertaken.

Discussion in terms of numbers of projects is almost meaningless, however, because projects range all the way from New

¹ WPA laws have not wholly escaped branding by the iron of local interests, however. Evidence of this is found, for example, in the ERA Act of 1938, which authorized "production of lime and marl in Wisconsin for fertilizing soil for distribution to farmers under such conditions as may be determined by the sponsors of such projects under provisions of State law."—Sec. 1 (1).

A similar instance appears in ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, where in its prohibition against establishment of industries producing commodities in competition with existing industries it excludes those products "derived from the first processing of sweet potatoes and naval stores products."—Sec. 33.

² ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, sec. 1(b). For statements made in support of this unique proposition suggested by Representative Mary Norton of New Jersey, see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943, 77th Congress, 2d Session, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1942, pp. 201-207; and Congressional Record, June 11, 1942, pp. 5335-5336.

York City's famous 40 million-dollar North Beach airport to small isolated jobs that involve only a few hundred dollars. Within a month after approval of a three million-dollar project for the reclamation of a site for a municipal airport in California, approval was also given to a project for repairing a school in the same state, to cost only $132. Projects vary, too, in the areas covered; from the improvement of Pennsylvania's entire state highway system down to tiny jobs in remote and sparsely settled areas.

An enumeration of all the projects undertaken and completed by the WPA during its lifetime would include almost every type of work imaginable. These projects have ranged from the construction of highways to the extermination of rats; from the building of stadiums to the stuffing of birds; from the improvement of airplane landing fields to the making of Braille books; from the building of over a million of the now famous privies to the playing of the world's great symphonies.

Projects have varied, too, from mosquito control to the serving of school lunches; from the beautification of cemeteries to beauty treatments to improve the morale of patients in hospitals for the mentally ill; from the repair of library books to the building of libraries; from the teaching of handicrafts to the teaching of Spanish to members of the country's armed forces; from the rendering of housekeeper service to needy families to mopping up the countryside after roaring, flooding rivers. One might further contrast sewing garments and rip-rapping levees; draining swamps and painting murals; repairing wharves and mending children's teeth; leadership in recreation and reconstruction of bridges; sealing abandoned mines and teaching illiterate adults to read and write; and planting trees and planting oysters.

So vast have the WPA's achievements been that attempts to present them in quantitative terms only stagger the imagination. During its first six years, ending with June, 1941, the WPA had completed, for example, the construction or improvement of over 600,000 miles of highways, roads, and streets—enough to encircle the world 24 times; the building or rebuilding of more than 116,000 bridges and viaducts which, end to end, would ex-
SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS ON WPA PROJECTS, JULY, 1935, THROUGH DECEMBER, 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>New Construction</th>
<th>Repaired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-type surface roads and streets</td>
<td>543,644</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-type surface roads and streets</td>
<td>51,836</td>
<td>21,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges and viaducts</td>
<td>75,266</td>
<td>45,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culverts</td>
<td>1,006,013</td>
<td>121,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation pipe and flume, miles</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>5,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage tanks and reservoirs</td>
<td>2,825</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm and sanitary sewers, miles</td>
<td>22,790</td>
<td>3,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewage treatment plants</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landing fields</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runways (thousand linear feet)</td>
<td>3,624</td>
<td>935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic fields and playgrounds</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td>11,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming pools</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks, fairgrounds and rodeo grounds</td>
<td>1,667</td>
<td>6,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational buildings</td>
<td>8,333</td>
<td>5,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational buildings</td>
<td>5,584</td>
<td>31,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative buildings</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>4,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lunches served</td>
<td>877,961,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

tend more than 700 miles. Public buildings constructed or reconstructed included more than 110,000 public libraries, schools, auditoriums, or other public buildings. If only the new buildings constructed were distributed evenly among the 3,000 counties in the United States, each could have had about ten. More than half a million water service connections were established. The number of sewerage service connections also exceeded half a million. Nearly 600 airplane landing fields were constructed or improved. Nearly 80 million books—more than three for every five persons in the United States—were renovated. Some 575,000,000 school lunches had been served through December, 1940—the equivalent of more than four meals for each of America's 130,000,000 men, women, and children. More than 300,000,000 garments had been completed for distribution to needy men and women, boys, girls, and infants.

In the educational field, during January, 1941, there were 1,460 nursery schools in operation serving over 36,000 children. Enrollment in adult education classes totaled nearly a million. Literacy classes, during a five-year period ended in 1941 were estimated to have helped more than 1.5 million adults to learn to read and write.

Among the most popular of WPA projects have been those established for the training of domestic servants. Through June, 1940, such training had been given to some 18,000 workers of whom nearly 13,000 were placed. This placement record is the more noteworthy in view of the fact that many women given such training would undoubtedly be able to qualify for WPA employment which would pay them considerably more than they could expect to earn in domestic service.

A second type of training project which has won wide acclaim has been that established to give vocational training to workers needed in defense industries.¹

So obvious have been these vast accomplishments that not even the most bitter critics of the WPA can close their eyes to them. Speaking of these achievements Representative Woodrum once declared:

. . . you do not have to look far to find very many fine things about this relief program. . . . Much of a notable character has been accomplished

¹ For further discussion of these training projects as a function of a work program see chaps. 9, 10, and 32.

128
that will remain all through the years. . . . We did not have to have an investigation of W.P.A. to . . . know of the fine school buildings that had been erected, the great stadiums, the fine airports, the monumental highways, the underpasses, and the tunnels. We knew that; every Congressman saw that as he went through his district. . . . Why, it sounds almost like the accomplishments of King Solomon. . . .

Relative Importance in Terms of Costs

Total expenditures on WPA projects during the first six years of the program, through June, 1941, totaled approximately $11.4 billion dollars. Of this total more than $4 billion dollars were spent on highway, road, and street projects; more than a billion on public buildings; more than a billion on publicly owned or operated utilities; and another billion on welfare projects including, among others, sewing projects for women, the distribution of surplus commodities and school lunch projects. In Table 6 is shown the amount of WPA and other funds expended for various types of projects operated by the WPA.

Relative Importance in Terms of Jobs Provided

In terms of numbers given employment, construction and engineering projects outstrip in importance all other types of projects prosecuted by the WPA. As of February 28, 1940, for example, such projects accounted for 75.2 per cent of all the employment provided. The remaining 24.8 per cent were engaged in sewing, research, recreation, public records, housekeeping-aid, school-lunch, education, library projects, and other activities of similar types. Of the construction and engineering projects the most important in terms of numbers of workers employed were highway, road, and street projects, which accounted for 44 per cent of all workers employed at the same time. Next in importance were water supply, sewage disposal, and other public utility projects, which accounted for 10.5 per cent of all employes; while public buildings provided employment for 7 per cent.

When, after America's entry into World War II, the nation's production program soared to unprecedented heights, WPA construction and engineering projects represented a much smaller
TABLE 6.—DISTRIBUTION BY CLASS OF PROJECT OF EXPENDITURES ON WPA PROJECTS, JULY, 1935, TO JUNE, 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of project</th>
<th>Amount (million dollars)</th>
<th>Per cent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division of Operations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways, roads, streets</td>
<td>4,418</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public buildings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational facilities</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public utilities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewage collection and disposal</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airports and airways</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land and water</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering surveys</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, Division of Operations</td>
<td>8,869</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Community Service Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public activities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and records:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and surveys</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public records</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical records survey</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health and hospital work</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production (excluding sewing)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping aides</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household workers' training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lunches</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of surplus commodities</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, Division of Community Service Programs</td>
<td>2,456</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National defense vocational training</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>11,365</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^Source of data: WPA, Report on Progress of the WPA Program, June, 1941, p. 112.

b Less than 0.05 per cent.
The WPA and Its Program

Proportion of the total WPA program than they had previously. The so-called service projects, on the other hand, became of increasing relative importance.

Has the WPA Left Any Work for the Future?

For those who, upon contemplating the vast achievements of the WPA, wonder whether there still is (or, after a short time will be) any further useful work to be undertaken under a federal work program, the administration offers ample assurance. Early in 1941, for example, Commissioner Howard Hunter declared he could find worth-while jobs for 8,000,000 unemployed workers, if need be. Transcontinental highways big enough for landing airplanes, thousands of public health laboratories, and hundreds of thousands of swimming pools were but a few of the proposed projects on his list. In the opinion of John Bauer, director of the American Public Utilities Bureau, it is not wholly fanciful to expect to be able to develop many important projects in the future. Among the kinds of projects which Mr. Bauer thinks can, if necessary, provide employment for unemployed workers in this country for years to come are the following: flood control, municipal water improvements, hydro-electric and multiple-purpose projects, land reclamation, resettlement, highways, elimination of railroad-crossings, educational advancement, promotion of health, recreational facilities, cultural activities, science and research, and housing.

If still more reassurance is needed there is, of course, the six-year post-war public work program recommended to Congress by the National Resources Planning Board.

Prohibited Projects

Although to the uninitiated the types of projects listed by Congress as eligible for prosecution by the WPA might appear to leave little outside its jurisdiction, this is not, in fact, the case. Not even that final catch-all “miscellaneous projects” is sufficient to permit undertaking all the kinds of work the WPA might do. In the first place certain types of projects are, as will be noted

This category has been authorized in each of the various ERA Acts despite vigorous opposition which has sometimes been directed against it on the ground that as one critic claimed, it covered “too many sins” and permitted the WPA to “travel all over hell’s half acre, installing all sorts of boondoggling projects.”—Congressional Record, May 22, 1940, pp. 6630, 6633.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

later, specifically prohibited. Secondly, even if not barred, various kinds of work are regarded as ineligible for prosecution unless specifically authorized. For example, Commissioner Hunter in 1941 complained that the WPA had been unable to undertake many irrigation projects since the current law authorized these only if they were “sponsored by community ditch organizations.” Since many organizations that might properly co-operate in the development of such projects were not known by the specific title “ditch organization” Mr. Hunter asked Congress to broaden this definition so as to permit a larger number of organizations to co-operate in promoting irrigation projects.1

Activities which the WPA has, from time to time, been forbidden by law to engage in are of five general types: production of war matériel; promotion of prison industries; production of goods in competition with private industry; construction of buildings costing the federal government more than a specified amount; and most recently, the conduct of theater projects.

First, in point of time, was the prohibition in 1935 against the expenditure of work-relief appropriations for “munitions, warships, or military or naval matériel.” 2 No comparable provisions were included in the next several ERA acts. The 1939 and subsequent acts, however, again forbade use of WPA funds for “the manufacture, purchase, or construction of any naval vessel, any armament, munitions, or implement of war, for military or naval forces.” 3 In 1940 determined efforts were made to have these prohibitions stricken out.4 Though these were not successful, congressional debate in both 1940 and 1941 clearly envisaged an increase in projects undertaken by the WPA to further the national defense.

Taking advantage of the evident concern over defense, WPA officials were quick to point out the amount of such work that had already been accomplished since the inauguration of the program. It was reported, for example, that during the fiscal year 1941

3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 14.
4 ERA Act of 1935, sec. 1 (h).
5 ERA Act of 1939, sec. 35; Pub. Res. No. 1 (H. J. Res. 83), 76th Congress, 1st Session, sec. 8; ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 34; ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 29.
6 See the Congressional Record, June 14, 1940, pp. 8248-8249, for debate on this point. This debate is also significant because of the wide diversity and sometimes conflicting arguments advanced in favor of prohibiting use of WPA funds for the production of war matériel.
The WPA and Its Program

over 300 million dollars had been expended for defense projects such as facilities for the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard, on publicly owned airports, and on armories, rifle ranges, camps, and other work for the National Guard. Defense work under way in October, 1941, was estimated to require another 300 million dollars. New projects undertaken since that date would require even more millions. One out of every three WPA workers employed in October, 1941, was engaged in defense work.¹

A second limitation on WPA projects, aimed directly against the encouragement or expansion of prison industries, has been written into successive ERA acts since 1937.² These provisions, as usually stated, forbid the use of WPA funds for any construction, reconstruction, repair, or replanning of penal or reformatory institutions unless the President finds that such projects “will not cause or promote competition of the products of convict labor with the products of free labor.”³

A further limitation, also designed to prevent competition with free enterprise, was first adopted early in 1939.⁴ As written into the ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, this prohibited the use of WPA funds for the purchase, establishment, relocation, or expansion of “mills, factories, stores, or plants which would manufacture, handle, process, or produce for sale articles, commodities, or products . . . in competition with existing industries.”⁵

Great pressure for prohibitions of this type arose early in 1939 when it appeared likely that relief funds allocated to the Resettlement Administration might be used to establish hosiery mills in conjunction with resettlement projects, and after the WPA in Mississippi had been drawn into the construction of facilities for vocational training only to find that after construction the sponsor of the project turned the newly established plant over to a private manufacturer.

Such prohibitions as have been enacted have been held not to

¹ For a detailed listing of various types of defense projects see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 33-39, 42-47.
² See, for example, ERA Act of 1937, sec. 15; of 1938, sec. 22; of 1939, sec. 36.
³ See, for example, ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 35.
⁵ ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 33. In 1940 the House voted to prohibit the production of articles or products by the WPA even though they were not produced “for sale.” The Senate, however, refused to go this far. See Congressional Record, June 22, 1940, pp. 8926, 8930.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

apply to the so-called "production projects" of the WPA which by 1941 had resulted in the making of over three hundred million garments and the canning of nearly 60,000,000 quarts of food, since these products were not sold, but given to needy individuals and families. Works of art including nearly 80,000 easel works and close to a million fine prints produced on federal projects, similarly have not been sold but given or lent to public agencies.

In other areas, however, the WPA has not fared so well. Opposition of building wreckers has frequently compelled the WPA to give up slum clearance and demolition projects. Similarly, pressure exerted by commercial exterminators has led to discontinuance of WPA efforts to promote public health through the extermination of rats. Such opposition was nothing new, of course, for under the work program of the FERA which antedated that of the WPA, opposition to the production of mattresses, bread, shoes, and other commodities finally became so violent that the federal administrator was compelled to give up the production of these articles almost entirely.\(^1\) Inability to undertake production projects not only precludes the possibility of producing things that are needed by people who cannot buy them but severely handicaps attempts to employ many types of workers at their usual skills.

Little of the fight against production projects, unfortunately, has been waged in the open and it is fair to say that the issue has never had its day before the bar of American public opinion. Nevertheless, conviction has been expressed from time to time that in production activity lay the key to the solution of many problems regarding a federal work program.\(^2\) After careful analysis of many problems involved in employing "relief clients" on projects producing consumption goods, Leverett S. Lyon,

\(^1\) See, for example, Childs, Marquis W., "The President's Best Friend," in the Saturday Evening Post, vol. 213, no. 42, April 19, 1941, p. 126.


Representative Faddis of Pennsylvania in 1940 introduced a bill to "solve unemployment" by what he termed "productive relief." Representative Jerry Voorhis of California recommended to a House Committee that Congress authorize employment of some 100 to 150 thousand older workers (forty-five years of age or over) on projects to produce "food, clothing, and other things required for normal consumption."—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, pp. 888-889. Suggested legislation is reproduced on p. 889.
The WPA and Its Program

Victor Abramson, and associates, in a report published by the Brookings Institution, conclude that with all due regard to the "limiting factors" noted "it appears quite possible that a more extensive use of relief labor to supply relief needs might prove desirable if plans were carefully drawn to produce a minimum disturbance to private employment." ¹

Within the administration itself there have been many ardent advocates of more productive jobs for WPA workers. Among these has been William H. Stead, who, while serving as acting director of the United States Employment Service, in 1939 suggested that:

Perhaps we should begin to think of government work as an essential supplement to private enterprise in rounding out the production of goods and services needed for the "fuller life." It may be that we have reached the point where the main question is not whether public work competes with private enterprise, but whether it adds to total over-all needed production—private and public combined.

Should we continue to plan employment exclusively or even largely in terms of public works, declared Mr. Stead, we confront two dangers: failure "to use the skills and capacities of the unemployed . . . and, more serious, the danger that we shall be supplying ourselves with some of the luxuries while a large part of our population lacks many of the necessities of decent living." He continues:

It so happens . . . that the provision of some of the basic necessities of life is not recognized as a proper activity of government; yet no attempt at rational planning can ignore the vast opportunities for employment in the expanded production of these necessities.²

Because of the administration's failure to solve the unemployment relief problem after eight years of experimenting, an increasing number of observers were gradually being brought to the belief that the government had tried long enough to adapt its relief program to the demands of private enterprise, and that production should be undertaken, even if this necessitated some adjustments on the part of private industry. It is not strange,


135
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

therefore, that Mr. Hunter in 1941 requested Congress to eliminate the proscription against production projects.\(^1\)

After being subjected to intensive pressure exerted primarily by Associated General Contractors of America, its subsidiary chapters, and individual contractors, Congress wrote into the ERA Act of 1939 a fourth type of limitation on WPA projects. This prohibited (with certain exceptions) use of WPA funds for the construction of (a) any federal building costing more than $50,000, or (b) any non-federal building costing more than $52,000 from federal funds.

Attempts to secure such a limitation had been carried on by contractors, aided by labor unions in the building trades, since 1935. Impetus was given their drive by the House Investigating Committee which, in 1939, reported that building costs of WPA were sometimes as much as double the costs under private enterprise. These allegations were combated by WPA officials, who charged many errors and inconsistencies in the methods used in arriving at WPA costs. Officials further pointed out that comparisons between WPA and private enterprise were unfair, since the WPA was by its nature compelled to continue operations "in fair or foul weather ... when a contractor, if possessed of good sense, would do no work at all." Furthermore, it was argued, WPA workers (at the time) were permitted to work only a relatively few hours a month, thus necessitating a number of shifts to do one man's work, with corresponding loss of efficiency; the WPA by law was compelled to keep equipment costs at a minimum, which affected the output per worker; the method in which appropriations had been voted by Congress made it impossible for the WPA to plan work for more than a few months in advance; and finally, the WPA was not, like private contractors, free to use the best labor available, but was compelled to select its workers from among those found to be in need. Finally, WPA officials countered with statements that contract jobs frequently failed to provide employment in seasons when it was most needed

\(^3\)Fully aware of the many complex problems involved, a committee of the American Association of Social Workers, early in 1941, urged "A work program sufficiently diversified to employ all persons not in private or other public employment in accordance with their skills and the degree of their employability" and that such public employment should be on socially useful projects "whether or not these compete with private industry or other public employment."—Report of the Committee on Government and Social Work to National Board, New York, March 12, 1941, No. 557, Appendix 3.

136
and were usually slow in getting jobs under way whereas the WPA could reach "any reasonable peak of employment within a few weeks" after receiving authorization to go ahead.\(^1\)

Flushed by their earlier success, contractors in 1940 asked Congress not only to lower the limitation so as to apply to buildings costing as little as $25,000 instead of $50,000, but also to extend the prohibition to apply to all construction instead of to buildings alone.\(^2\) When a member of a House Committee asked H. B. Zachry, president of Associated General Contractors of America, what he thought might happen to WPA workers who would be thrown out of jobs if the WPA were prohibited from doing construction work, he replied that he would "put them in the Army and give them military training so they would be of service to the country." Those who did not want to go into the Army might be granted a dole, Mr. Zachry declared.\(^3\)

While this cross-fire was going on, the National Guard Association advocated that the maximum amount allowed from federal funds for a building project be raised from $50,000 to $100,000 so as to permit construction of armories and camps. Since national defense measures were becoming one of its paramount considerations, Congress wrote this higher limit into the ERA Act, fiscal year 1941.

In both 1941 and 1942 Congress permitted the construction of buildings involving more than $100,000 in federal funds provided such projects were certified by the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy, respectively, as being important for military and naval purposes.\(^4\)

Although the WPA, in 1940 and 1941, appeared to win its

\(^1\) For further discussion of efficiency under the WPA program see chap. 10.

\(^2\) For statements of representatives of contractors and labor unions see especially U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 971-1043.

\(^3\) See, for example, ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, sec. 6. Exemptions of this type during the two fiscal years 1941 and 1942 numbered only 28 and 3 respectively.

\(^4\) In support of its demands, Associated General Contractors of America organized an intensive campaign of letter-writing, telegram-sending, and even prepared specimen letters that contractors might send to their employes, urging them in turn to help the cause along. One sample of a letter designed to be sent by a contractor to his employes began by saying that they might be thrown out of work because the WPA was getting practically all jobs built with federal funds. It closed by suggesting that workers join "the fight" by sending to their Congressmen postal cards (that would be furnished to them already addressed to the proper person) asking that the WPA be taken out of construction work.—Ibid., p. 988.
tussles with the contractors and certain labor unions, the latter won important concessions since the so-called Lanham Act permitting the federal government to contribute to the cost of expanding educational, health, and other community facilities needed because of the war, presupposes that such facilities as were provided under the act should be supplied on a contract basis. When it is recalled that the Lanham Act made available for a variety of purposes a total of $300,000,000—approximately the amount that was appropriated to the WPA for all purposes in 1942–1943—it may be seen why WPA officials look upon the Lanham Act as a severe blow not only to their own program, but to the policy of performing work on a force account rather than on a contract basis.

When to this fact is added the further fact that General Fleming strongly prefers the contract to the force-account method, it seems likely that construction work, in the future, will constitute a much less important part of the WPA program than it has in the past.1

Construction projects involving even less than $100,000 had a narrow escape in 1942 when the House, after the failure of a parliamentary maneuver by administration leaders, first adopted but later defeated an amendment prohibiting the WPA from prosecuting any construction project not already under way unless approved by the Secretary of War, Secretary of the Navy, or Chairman of the Maritime Commission. This provision was not, however, incorporated in the law as finally passed.

A fifth type of WPA activity, which was banned in 1939, was the theater projects. These projects had never been important in terms of numbers of people employed, but the contribution they made to the development of American drama was of great experimental value. Nevertheless, Congress decreed their death.2

1 General Fleming in August, 1942, estimated that nonconstruction work which was then providing about 35 per cent of the WPA's total employment would soon be providing 60 per cent of the total. When asked whether, if free to choose between doing a given job under the WPA (of which he was then the acting commissioner) or under the Lanham Act, the administration of which comes under his jurisdiction as administrator of the Federal Works Agency, he replied unhesitatingly that he would choose to do the job under the Lanham Act.

2 ERA Act of 1939, sec. 25(a). For a succinct statement of objections to these projects as presented by Representative Woodrum, their chief executioner, see the Congressional Record for June 30, 1939, p. 8456. See also Ibid., June 28, 1939, pp. 8084–8104.
Prominent among reasons frequently cited for this demise were the following: that some workers and supervisors were either "Communists" or were members of allegedly "subversive" organizations; that production costs were held to be excessive; and that privately produced attractions were said to have suffered adversely from competition with WPA productions. Finally, as appears from the record, there was objection to the fact that Negro and white actors sometimes appeared together in the same productions.¹

Bitterly attacked though they were, the theater projects have not been altogether friendless. They found warm supporters in the Senate, as well as among individuals and organizations in various sections of the country. Twelve New York dramatic critics, for example, in June, 1939, praised many of the projects as "distinguished contributions to the art of the theater" and others as "creditable in many respects." Endorsements of the projects poured in to Congress from representatives of many well-known and respected agencies including the Advertising Club of New York, the Business and Professional Women's Club, the Junior League, the National Arts Club, the Town Hall Club, a number of settlements, several foundations, colleges, schools, business concerns, private social agencies, governmental bodies, and civic and labor organizations in New York and elsewhere in the country.²

Despite this favorable support and regardless of repeated requests by administration leaders Congress not only sent to the execution block but has subsequently refused to resurrect what Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times termed "the best friend the theater as an institution has ever had in this country."³ When Mr. Hunter asked in 1941 that the theater projects be resuscitated he promised that if this were done they would be prosecuted with the co-operation of local public bodies and that to assure high-grade productions he would appoint a "review board com-

¹ See chap. ii.
² Congressional Record, June 28, 1939, pp. 8099-8102.
³ Ibid., p. 8100. Upon signing the ERA Act of 1939 which was in effect the Federal Theater's death warrant, President Roosevelt declared: "This singles out a special group of professional people for a denial of work in their own profession. It is discrimination of the worst type. . . . The House Conferees declined to yield to the Senate, and we have, as a result, an entering wedge of legislation against a special class in the community."—As quoted in the New York Times, July 1, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

posed of qualified theater, religious, educational, lay, and military representatives."

Positive Requirements Regarding Projects

Apart from limitations upon the types of projects the WPA may carry on, Congress has laid down two conditions that must be observed in undertaking work. Further criteria have been prescribed by the WPA itself.

Projects Must Be Sponsored

Closely connected with the ban upon theater projects was a further requirement by Congress in 1939 that all projects must be sponsored by some public body other than the WPA itself. This restriction was obviously aimed at the projects for writers, artists, and musicians, which were under fire on much the same counts as the theater projects; and which, with them, comprised practically all of the WPA’s self-sponsored projects. Those who wished to see the WPA eliminated from participation in the creative arts no doubt believed that insistence upon sponsors would achieve this result. However, local public bodies were found to be quite willing to sponsor art projects which (with the exception of theater projects) have continued on much the same scale as before. Even before Congress required that projects be sponsored by some public agency other than the WPA, sponsorship by other agencies had been the general though not universal practice adopted by the WPA itself.

Completion of Projects Must Be Assured

A continuing requirement (since 1936) has been that no federal project may be undertaken until funds sufficient for its completion have been irrevocably set aside. With respect to projects initiated by sponsors, the requirement has been that the sponsor must agree to complete any work undertaken by the WPA in case that agency should for any reason abandon the job before its completion. The obvious intent of this requirement is to prevent waste through abandonment of work already undertaken, to prevent marring the landscape with half-finished monuments to the

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 21-22.
2 See, for example, ERA Act of 1937, sec. 1; ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 6(c).
The WPA and Its Program

vagaries of federal policy, and to avoid placing Congress under pressure to appropriate funds to complete vast undertakings such as the Florida Ship Canal and the Passamaquoddy tidal power project which were prosecuted for a time with Works Program funds.¹

Criteria for Selection of Projects

Within limits established by law, the WPA has itself prescribed a number of criteria which must be met before projects can be undertaken.² (1) The type of work proposed by sponsors must come within fields of activity for which they are locally responsible and in which they are legally authorized "to carry out public work"; ³ (2) the work must have a general public usefulness. Projects are regarded as meeting this requirement if there is a public need for the services or facilities in question and if the proposed projects meet that need.⁴

The WPA further stipulates (3) that projects may not be undertaken if doing so would result in displacement of regular employees or prevent re-employment of previously employed workers. Obviously, this is a most difficult standard to apply as it

¹ Though congressional criticism necessitated the abandonment of both the ship canal and the "Quoddy" project, WPA officials in 1942 had the satisfaction of seeing Congress authorize a huge appropriation to hurry completion of the canal so as to facilitate the shipment of war material and oil.

² See, for example, WPA, Operating Procedure No. G-1, secs. 6-23, February 28, 1939.

³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part II, p. 1360.

⁴ Of the usefulness of WPA projects Colonel Harrington, in an address before the American Municipal Association in 1939 declared: "... when WPA projects are open to criticism, it is sometimes we of the WPA who are to blame. But not always. Not by a long shot.

"Among the applications for WPA projects which come to us in Washington, there are many that we must reject. And it is often with great reluctance and regret that we reject them. They may be of outstanding social use and value, and yet fail to meet some necessary requirement. But I don't mind telling you that there are some project applications which it is a pleasure as well as a duty for us to reject. Gentlemen, the things that some people can think up for us to spend our money on stagger the imagination.

"And unquestionably, among the projects that we have no reason to disapprove there are certainly many which do not do justice to the communities that ask for them and get them. They could have had something much better for their money, something more useful, something they would long be proud of having, and that we ourselves would be proud of cooperating upon.

"But, on the other hand, there are a great many projects that we are proud to point to as examples of WPA work."—WPA Release 4-2057, November 2, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

is almost impossible to prove whether or not given tasks would or would not be done if not performed by the WPA.¹

Further criteria for projects require (4) that they be of such a nature that they can be executed by the available supply of workers that meet eligibility requirements for WPA employment; and (5) that costs of material be not excessive in relation to expenditures for labor. Not infrequently it has also been prescribed (6) that a job might be undertaken only if the project itself or a useful unit could be completed by a specified date—usually the end of the fiscal year beyond which no plans could be made because of the shaky legal foundation upon which the whole program was built.

Still another requirement has been (7) that work undertaken by the WPA, except under unusual conditions, must be on public property. Prohibitions against use of public funds to enhance the value of private property were among the earliest criteria established for FERA and later on for WPA projects. As a result, work on privately owned hospitals, churches, schools, and institutions which once was carried on with work relief funds, could no longer be undertaken. During the drought of 1936 the WPA was unwilling to drill wells on private property or for private use despite appeals from areas where there was acute water shortage. Similarly, it will not undertake the demolition of buildings on private property antecedent to prosecution of a private housing development.

Because adherence to this policy prevented the WPA from doing work which various sponsors wanted done subterfuge has often been resorted to in order to win WPA approval of certain projects. In a warning against some of these a one-time chief engineer of the WPA has declared:

Even though future public acquisition of the sites may be contemplated, or even assured, the expenditure of Federal funds is not permissible unless the property has actually been acquired by a public agency and evidence is given that that public agency expects to utilize the property for public benefit, without any intention of selling, leasing, or otherwise disposing of the property to private interests.²

Previously, this same official had stated:

Private property is sometimes turned into public property temporarily and for the purpose of getting improvements made on it at public expense—

¹ For a comprehensive statement with regard to what should be considered current maintenance work, see WPA General Letter No. 167, December 7, 1937.
² WPA Release 4-1788, September 28, 1939.
after which it is returned to private hands. Thus public ownership may serve as a cloak to hide a selfish mulcting of relief funds for purposes which have little or no thought of public benefit.  

Approximately one-fourth of the investigations made by the WPA Division of Investigation from July, 1938, to April, 1940, were upon complaints that WPA projects had benefited private property.

Because of continued violation of WPA regulations by agencies interested in hoodwinking the WPA into doing work on ostensibly public (but in reality private) property, Congress in 1940 enacted legislation to penalize such practices. This made the sponsor of the project and the person or organization to whom the property was later turned over "liable, jointly and severally, . . . to pay over to the United States an amount equal to the amount of Federal funds expended. . . ."  

Alleged infractions of this policy investigated by the WPA during the fifteen months ending with March, 1942, totaled approximately 535.

During the eleven months ending with March, 1942, 382 cases required decisions as to whether restitution of federal funds would be demanded or whether sponsors would be required to recover to the public purpose for which they were intended facilities constructed by the WPA. The total amount of funds involved in these cases was approximately $780,000.

In spite of holding so strongly to its position with respect to benefiting individual property owners, the WPA has found it necessary and expedient occasionally, as when floods endangered health or life, to relax the prohibition against work on private property. Construction of sewers and water mains, mosquito control, mine sealing, construction of sanitary facilities and of fencing along highways—all projects affected with a public interest—have involved work done on privately owned property. Upon Colonel Harrington's recommendation Congress in 1939 wrote into law a provision permitting prosecution of "conservation" projects on private property.

1 WPA Release 4-1557, June 29, 1937. See also U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 454.

2 ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 1(f).
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Initiation and Approval of Projects

Sponsors are expected not only to suggest jobs that might be done by the WPA, but to work out plans and procedures, guarantee to meet part of the cost, and be prepared to furnish some part of the supervision.

Project plans, after being worked out by prospective sponsors in co-operation with local WPA officials, are forwarded to the state WPA office for approval and then to the Washington office, where every project is again scrutinized to make sure that it meets legal and administrative requirements.

Upon approval, project plans are returned to the state WPA office and may be put in operation at the discretion of the state administrator, who must plan his program in such a way that, within the limits of funds and employment quotas allotted to him, the various classes of needy workers in his area are kept regularly employed. State administrators have used various devices of conference and advisory groups to help solve the knotty problem as to which approved projects shall be given priority as opportunity presents itself.

Frequently, however, the problem is not so much to choose among approved projects, as to find a sponsor to initiate a project needed to give employment. Failure of sponsors to initiate sufficient projects or those which will utilize special skills of white-collar or other workers, seriously hampers the WPA's effectiveness.

Difficult problems have been raised from time to time when sponsors have insisted on the employment of certain supervisors, when there have been clashes over plans or methods of work, or when sponsors have refused to permit employment on their projects of certain locally unpopular minorities such as Negroes or non-residents.

In terms of total project expenditures, about half of the WPA's work early in 1940 was sponsored by municipal and about one-fourth by county governmental agencies. In “many” states, especially in the West, counties were reported to be the most important sponsors. Subsequent to 1937, WPA officials report, there has been a “tendency toward increased participation by State
The WPA and Its Program

agencies” as sponsors of projects. However, specific data supporting this belief have not been made available.¹

Of the total number of projects sponsored by municipal, township, county, state, or federal agencies through August, 1937, the proportion sponsored by agencies at each level of government is presented in Table 7.

At the local level, sponsoring units included city councils, commissioners, boards of aldermen, boards of education, school boards, park departments, and street departments. At the state level, projects were frequently sponsored by highway departments, industrial commissions, hospitals, universities and colleges, and departments of health.

**Sponsors’ Contributions**

Distribution of project costs varies widely from the proportionate number of projects sponsored by various agencies. Although large-city agencies sponsored only 2 per cent of the projects placed in operation through August, 1937, they accounted for nearly 22 per cent of total costs, while small cities and townships, sponsoring 25 per cent of the projects, accounted for only about 12 per cent of total costs.

Costs of projects of the various types prosecuted represented widely different proportions of the total cost of projects sponsored

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 419, 645.

---

**TABLE 7.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY CLASS OF SPONSORING GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY OF TOTAL NUMBER OF WPA PROJECTS, JULY, 1935, TO AUGUST, 1937 a**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of sponsoring agency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

by agencies at the several levels of government. This is shown in Table 8, which presents the relative importance of white-collar and street and highway projects among those sponsored by different types of agencies.

Among projects sponsored by municipalities of different sizes the proportion of total project costs going to highway and street jobs increased more or less steadily as the size of the municipality decreased, constituting only 23 per cent of the cost of projects in cities of half a million and over, but amounting to some 36 per cent of total project costs in cities of less than 2,500 population.

Purposes for which sponsors' contributions are spent differ markedly from those for which WPA funds are used. During

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of project</th>
<th>Class of sponsoring agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Municipal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-collar</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street and highway</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


the fiscal year 1940, for example, sponsors' contributions accounted for only about 6 per cent of all expenditures for personal services but for nearly 73 per cent of expenditures for the purchase of materials, supplies, and equipment, and for more than 85 per cent of the cost of equipment rental.

Sponsors' contributions may be made either in cash or kind—such as labor, materials, office or warehouse space, or use of equipment and tools.1 Criticism has frequently been made that contributions in kind, particularly rental values of space and

1 Since the beginning of the WPA program and through June 30, 1939, sponsors had deposited with the Treasury Department for use on WPA projects a total of $35,777,531. For the fiscal year 1939 expenditure of sponsors' funds on WPA projects totaled over $493,000,000, of which $76,643,180 was for labor, $227,563,176 for materials, supplies and equipment, and $149,289,607 for rentals of equipment. The balance was for "other" purposes.
The WPA and Its Program

equipment, have been "written up," and sponsors credited with far more than reasonable cash values for such contributions.

One of the most important factors affecting the amount a sponsor must contribute is the legal limitation upon the amount of federal funds that may be used for non-labor costs which, for the fiscal years 1941 and 1942 were limited by law to an average of $6.00 (or, in the discretion of the WPA commissioner, to $7.00) per worker per month. This limitation directly affected amounts contributed by sponsors inasmuch as it precluded the prosecution of projects involving comparatively high non-labor costs unless a sponsor made a relatively large contribution.

During the fiscal year 1939 non-labor expenditures (for materials, equipment, and so forth) from federal funds averaged $5.87 per worker per month on construction, and $3.23 on non-construction projects, the average for all projects being $5.34. Non-labor expenditures from sponsors' funds averaged $11.91 per worker per month ($12.93 on construction and $7.73 on non-construction projects).

From the inauguration of the WPA program through June, 1940, sponsors had contributed approximately 19 per cent of the cost of all projects. The average for professional and service projects, however, was only about 12 per cent. The proportion of project costs borne by sponsors shows wide variations between and within states.¹

Prior to January 1, 1940, there were no specific requirements as to proportionate amounts of project costs to be contributed by sponsors. However, because of widespread conviction that many states and communities were evading their fair share of costs and "unloading" on Uncle Sam, there began to be agitation in 1939 and 1940 for defining sponsors' responsibility more strictly. Notable among these proposals was one that sponsors be required to pay one-third of the costs of projects. This proposition was advanced in 1939 by Senator Byrnes. In states where per capita income fell below the national average, contributions were to be proportionately reduced.

¹ Up to July, 1938, for example, while sponsors in New York State, outside of New York City, had contributed approximately 21 per cent of project costs, sponsoring agencies in New York City had contributed only about 10 per cent. Other states varied from a "high" of 34 per cent in Tennessee and more than 28 per cent in Wyoming, Idaho, and Nevada to a "low" of less than 12 per cent in Pennsylvania and Delaware.
Opposition to proposals to require sponsors to bear a specified proportion of WPA project costs has been registered from time to time by administration leaders and WPA officials who have contended that state and local governments were unable to contribute sums sufficient to permit prosecution of a worth-while program. Nevertheless, the ERA Act of 1939 contained a provision that contributions from sponsors within a given state must aggregate 25 per cent of the cost of all projects approved after January 1, 1940.

Exemptions from this provision were authorized in the case of temporary projects necessary to avert danger to life, property, or health in the event of an emergency caused by flood, storm, fire, earthquake, drought, or similar cause including—since 1942—war.

In 1940 and 1941 Congress ruled that projects certified by specified authorities as being important to the defense program might be exempted from application of the 25 per cent requirement. Despite this exemption sponsors, during the first nine months of the fiscal year 1942, contributed 23 per cent of the cost of certified defense projects.

Whereas sponsors bore only about 10 per cent of the cost of all WPA projects in the fiscal year 1936, they bore approximately 31 per cent of project costs in the fiscal year 1941. The amounts and proportionate share of all costs contributed by sponsors each year is shown in Table 9.

During the twenty-seven-month period from January, 1940, through March, 1942, sponsors bore approximately 32 per cent of the cost of all projects exclusive of those sponsored by federal agencies. The range was from approximately 27 per cent in both Delaware and Maine to nearly 38 per cent in Arizona.

In opposing the 25 per cent requirement in 1940 Colonel Harrington declared that the problem might be better met through the legal restriction already placed upon the amount that might

1 See, for example, "Condition of Sponsors' Finances," in U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session, 1940, pp. 827 ff.
2 This provision has been continued in the three subsequent ERA acts.
3 This amendment was designed to make it clear that the WPA was to be free to render what help it could in case of air raids regardless of what contributions sponsors might be able to make.
**The WPA and Its Program**

be spent from federal funds for non-labor costs. "Thus," explained the Colonel,

in areas having financial difficulties the W.P.A. can operate a sufficient number of projects to provide needed employment, but the projects will be of a character having a relatively low total nonlabor cost. In other areas, where the sponsors can afford it, more expensive types of projects can be operated, with the sponsor putting in the additional funds. In both instances, however, the amount of Federal funds used would be restricted to $6 per man per month, but the amount of sponsors' funds used would vary according to the ability of sponsors to finance projects.\(^1\)

Most tragic among effects of the requirement that sponsors must contribute at least 25 per cent of project costs has been the denial of jobs to workers in areas where such contributions were not forthcoming. This has been true at one time or another in many states and in a number of areas, including up-state New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Missouri, as well as many parts of the South. In New Orleans, for example, late in 1940, the WPA, with a quota of 2,000 jobs which it was authorized to fill, and 10,000 persons certified as in need of employment, was unable to employ even its quota on account of the lack of sponsorship for projects.

Officials of the WPA have frequently pointed out that insist-

---

\(^1\) U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1942, pp. 420-421.

---

**TABLE 9.—EXPENDITURES ON WPA PROJECTS FROM WPA AND FROM SPONSORS’ FUNDS, JULY, 1935, TO JUNE, 1941, BY FISCAL YEAR a**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year ending June 30</th>
<th>WPA funds</th>
<th>Sponsors' funds</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>Per cent of total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1,194</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>2,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>1,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>2,068</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>2,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>1,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>1,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,025</td>
<td>2,342</td>
<td>11,365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) Source of data: U.S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 22.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ence upon sponsors’ contributing a specific proportion of the cost of WPA jobs is responsible not only for failure to employ eligible and needy workers but also makes it necessary to prosecute sub-standard projects.

While Congress in 1941 was considering new legislation for the WPA, the administration again pleaded for abolition of the fixed 25 per cent limitation. Though assuring a House Committee that he favored contributions from sponsors Mr. Hunter urged elimination of the flat percentage provision. He declared:

Regardless of the amount of need in a given community, or of the desirability of a particular project, we cannot undertake it if it will reduce the average of all sponsors’ participation below 25 percent. In actual practice, State administrations must provide a margin of safety above the 25 percent to guard against a drop in the average through interruptions in operations because of weather or other conditions.

The effect of this is to give preference in scheduling projects to communities that can afford relatively high contributions. In fact, projects cannot be operated at all in some communities unless the wealthier ones put in sufficient funds in excess of the required 25 percent to build up a satisfactory cushion.¹

Removal of the limit was more important than ever, said Mr. Hunter, because of three reasons:

1. Many of the communities whose excess contributions are now used to offset the poorer ones will benefit most directly from the defense program, and therefore will need relatively less W. P. A. employment. This will increase the pressure for larger contributions from the poor communities.

2. We are completing more and more projects approved prior to January 1, 1940, and an increasing proportion of our employment is on new projects subject to the requirement. In September 1940, 29 percent of the State-program expenditures were on projects subject to the requirement; . . . by March 1941, it has reached 56 percent. By the end of this fiscal year practically all of our program will be subject to this requirement.

3. Sponsors are tending more and more to regard the 25-percent requirement as a maximum rather than a minimum.²

Methods of Operation

WPA projects are operated almost wholly by the “force-account” method, which means that the WPA itself is responsible for hiring and paying workers, securing the necessary materials, supplies, and equipment, and supervising the work done. Long

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942, 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 14-15.
² Ibid., p. 15.
before the WPA program began, contractors attacked this method as inappropriate to a federal work program, and requested Congress to write into law requirements that work be performed under contract. Labor unions have given some support to these proposals in the expectation that wage rates and methods of selecting workers under a contract system would be more favorable to their members than under the force-account system.

When legislation establishing the Works Program was first under consideration in 1935, the so-called "master-plumber" amendment and other provisions designed to require that at least part if not all the jobs undertaken be prosecuted under private contract gained wide support both inside and outside Congress. Since these were opposed by President Roosevelt and the administration the only requirement written into law was the relatively innocuous provision requiring that "wherever practicable ... full advantage shall be taken of the facilities of private enterprise." ¹

As the Works Program developed a variety of practices were followed. Some agencies, notably the PWA, operated almost exclusively on a contract basis, while at the other extreme, the WPA program has continued to be carried on almost exclusively under the force-account method.

Resistance by the WPA to the use of private contractors has been due primarily to the difficulty of assuring employment to needy unemployed workers as opposed to contractors' own labor forces. That the administration's skepticism on this point is not without foundation is well illustrated by the fact that, in conjunction with Works Program projects operated under contract, it has been found necessary repeatedly to waive established policies (such as those requiring that at least a given proportion of project employes be taken from among workers found to be in need ²) because contractors wanted to use their own crews and to be free to select any workers they chose.

Attacking allegations that greater efficiency could be achieved under a contract system than under the WPA, Perry A. Fellows, assistant chief engineer of the WPA in 1937, declared that the

¹ ERA Act of 1935, sec. 8.
² See, for example, WPA, Handbook of Procedures, chap. 17, sec. 2, rev. April 15, 1937.
case in favor of the contract method was "based on complete disregard of the prime objectives of the works program." Thus, he explained:

If the street is paved by contract for a cost less by ten cents a yard than it could be paved by force account and the contractor does not use the relief labor, then the gain is zero—the principal job, that of employing the needy man, still remains to be done and much of the money is spent, without accomplishing the purpose for which it was appropriated. If the contractor is not exempted from hiring the certified man, then his complaint is he cannot stick to the price and make a profit. The contractor's desire to make a profit is no doubt a worthy motive, but the assurance of such private profits is not the primary purpose of the work relief planner.¹

Three years later, Colonel Harrington in an address before the National Association of County Officials replied to critics who advocated the contract as opposed to the WPA method of operation, declaring:

... in so far as public work is concerned, contractors during the past few years have had a larger volume of work financed directly or indirectly by the Federal government than at any time in history. It is also true that in connection with the WPA program very large expenditures have been made to contractors in connection with the rental of their equipment for use on WPA projects.

I feel that this attack upon WPA is unfair and unwarranted. In effect it amounts to demanding that able-bodied persons on the relief rolls should not be given jobs at which they can work and retain their self-respect. The matter was stated very bluntly in a resolution which was recently passed by a State chapter of the organization which has taken the lead in this matter. This resolution stated that the WPA should be retained as a relief agency but that its operation should be confined "to work of a non-permanent character." In other words, WPA workers were to fiddle around on "leaf raking" jobs. You cannot fool these workers, and I think it would be better, and certainly more honest, to let them sit in idleness on a dole rather than to make a pretense that they are employed in useful activities.²

WPA policy on this question has been supported by the New York City Advisory Council which included a number of nationally known leaders in business and finance. Early in 1939 this Council recommended: "Work relief should not be provided through private contractors because of complications inherent in this method, and because employment would be limited only to regular construction workers."³

¹ WPA Release 4-1557, June 29, 1937.
² WPA Release 4-2120, April 11, 1940.
³ Recommendations. March 14, 1939, sec. 7.
The WPA and Its Program

Although WPA operations are conducted on the force-account system, it is possible for sponsors to arrange with contractors for the performance of specified operations and arrange with the WPA to perform, under force-account methods, other operations in conjunction with the same job.

Appraisal of Projects

Reasoned appraisal of the vast number of projects undertaken by the WPA is virtually impossible because of their extent, diversity, and the many points of view—such as usefulness, efficiency, ability to provide needed employment, and cost—from which they might be appraised. Unfortunately, even the far-flung investigation of the WPA undertaken in 1939 by a House Committee pursuant to House Resolution 130, has not provided a basis for such an appraisal.

Although the House Committee's investigators had an unusual opportunity fairly to appraise a great national undertaking, not a few observers felt it had been diverted from this high purpose and had focused undue attention on a few minor defects. Despite the smoke and fury attending the House investigation, the chief discoveries triumphantly produced included allegations of subversive activity on the part of a handful of workers, some of whom were not even employed by the WPA; suspicion of waste on a few scattered projects; criticism of theater, art, music, and writers' projects which employed only a minute fraction of WPA labor; and the recounting of a number of derelictions which the WPA had already uncovered by means of its own investigating arm.¹

Neither was a wholly unbiased and comprehensive basis for appraising the WPA program provided by the U.S. Community Improvement Appraisal of 1938, though for quite opposite reasons. Whereas the House Committee findings seem to be somewhat biased against the WPA, those of the National Appraisal Committee appear to have a bias in its favor.

Although the national appraisal was, as widely advertised, conducted under the auspices of a group made up of representatives

¹ Of this Colonel Harrington once said to the Committee: "... many cases concerning which testimony has been given ... are cases in which the investigation had been initiated by the Works Progress Administration ... and had been handled through to a proper conclusion ... During the course of the investigation there have been certain glaring misstatements of facts."—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, p. 1264.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

of the WPA and 10 well and honorably known national agencies, the widespread network of WPA projects was not appraised at first hand by this Committee. Instead, it studied some 8,000 reports, most of which were from local and state officials who were themselves sponsors of WPA projects and some of which were submitted by WPA officials. Obviously, public administrators who were profiting from federally operated projects in their own bailiwicks, and who were in a measure responsible for them to their own electorates were not the most disinterested appraisers imaginable; and any evaluation they might make could not be wholly objective. It is not surprising therefore that the National Appraisal Committee found that some “93 percent of all the specific answers from communities large and small stated that the work performed . . . was urgently needed and . . . of benefit to the community”; or that “90 percent also expressed the opinion that health, recreation, education, and other non-construction activities of the program have been worth while.”

Essentially the same objections as those raised against the national appraisal can be leveled at a similar evaluation of projects made by the United States Conference of Mayors in 1936. From city after city, the official reports emphasized the value of the projects conducted under the auspices of city authorities. Obviously, reporting officials would only have invited criticism of themselves and of the administrations of which they were a part had they declared that the projects they sponsored and helped to finance were of questionable value.

Some insight as to what the public thought of WPA projects in 1936 is afforded by a Fortune survey. This indicated that 54.2 per cent of the persons canvassed believed that “the WPA had not been boondoggling” but was doing “useful work.” Only 13.5 per cent of opinions reported were decidedly unfavorable; 10.1 per cent of those responding had no opinion; 22.2 per cent expressed qualified approval of the usefulness of the projects.

Whatever may have been the weaknesses of the WPA, popular

---

1 The agencies co-operating with the WPA in making this appraisal were the American Engineering Council, American Institute of Architects, American Municipal Association, American Public Welfare Association, American Society of Planning Officials, National Aeronautics Association, National Education Association, National Recreation Association, United States Bureau of Public Roads, United States Conference of Mayors.—Ibid., p. 1263.

2 Ibid., pp. 1263-1264.

criticism of its program frequently falls into stereotypes—the “leaning-on-a-shovel” type of remark—or is based upon hearsay and often wildly inaccurate statements. Harry Hopkins once said, with some justification, that much of the criticism directed against the WPA was “mythological.” Take, for example, the widely publicized charge that WPA funds for the control of malaria were being spent in New England states instead of in the South where they were really needed. This met with vigorous denial from the WPA, which stated categorically that not a single penny had been spent on malaria control in New England.

Or take the freely circulated report that a “rat extermination project” had cost $2.97 for each rat that bit the dust! WPA officials at once pointed out that the project was set up to promote public health in a variety of ways, the killing of rats being only a minor phase. Thus, appraising the costs of the entire project in terms of the number of rats destroyed would be like analyzing the costs of building a highway in terms of some specified amount per tree cut down in the process.

Vicious criticisms being launched against WPA projects during the presidential campaign of 1936 led Mr. Hopkins to point out that most of the charges had been “long range attacks, by newspapers in New York or Chicago, or politicians in Washington, on local projects in Colorado or New Mexico or Florida. And in virtually every instance,” he continued, these attacks “resulted in heated local defense and endorsement of the projects in the localities where they were being carried on.” Mr. Hopkins urged would-be critics to judge the WPA as critically as they chose but to judge it on the basis of projects they could see with their own eyes. “Go and see the improvements in your own community,” he urged. “We will rest our case on what you find.” ¹ And President Roosevelt, while admitting that he did not need to be told because he already knew “that 5 percent of the projects are of questionable value,” declared in 1939 that he was proud of the fact that 95 per cent of the projects were good. “I know,” he added, “that the American people cannot be fooled into believing that the few exceptions actually constitute the general practice.” ²

Even Charles P. Taft who, prior to his appointment as assistant director of Defense Health and Welfare Services, was a none too

¹ WPA Release 4-1334, October 9, 1936.
² As quoted in the Congressional Record, May 23, 1939, Appendix, p. 2146.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

friendly observer of the federal relief program, declared before a Senate Committee in 1938, "I think, generally, it [criticism of WPA projects] is not justified."  

Despite the lack of objective appraisals of the whole gamut of projects prosecuted by the WPA, there can be no denying that the employment provided on these projects has done untold good in saving millions of men, women, and children from unspeakable miseries of the kind reflected in Chapter III.

Furthermore, whatever may be said about efficiency, relative costs, or better possible ways of doing things, it is no overstatement to say that WPA projects have improved every nook and corner of the United States and enriched life in practically every cranny. While WPA-provided playgrounds, school buildings, swimming pools, or adult education classes in some communities represented merely additions to existing facilities, in other areas they have been the only such resources available. This was particularly true in many disadvantaged areas and among especially underprivileged groups. This evening-up of social opportunities available in various sections of the country has been one of the WPA's most outstanding achievements.

Almost every community, no doubt, could echo what Mayor La Guardia in 1938 said of the WPA program in New York City. "It would be difficult," he declared, "to overestimate the importance of the Federal work program to New York City." Continuing, he added:

Transportation, health, education, safety, and general municipal services were the objectives. Every city and county department, commission, or bureau had a part in the program. Through it we have been able to preserve, improve, and to expand our municipal plant. We have supplemented the personal services rendered by the several city departments. We have given work to men and women at a time when they could not get it elsewhere, thereby conserving . . . aptitudes and skills. . . . Finally, this work relief program has been of inestimable value to the community as a going concern, keeping open channels of business and trade that would otherwise have closed, maintaining property values, and guarding home life.

1 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 1, p. 438.

2 For a description of what WPA projects have meant to Negroes, for example, see Federal Works Agency, Way of Progress: Negro Participation in the Federal Works Agency Program. Government Printing Office, Washington, July 1, 1940.

The tremendous accomplishments of the WPA, achieved against overwhelming odds and despite bitter opposition, go far toward justifying Colonel Harrington’s claim (made in 1939) that the WPA program was "not only the largest and most successful achievement in peacetime cooperation in the history of our Nation, but one of the greatest in the history of the world." Nevertheless, many questions about the WPA program still remain unsettled. To the plumbing of some of these, further chapters of this volume are devoted.

1 Congressional Record, Appendix, May 27, 1939, p. 2258.
CHAPTER VI
WPA WAGE POLICIES

Wages paid WPA project workers (as opposed to administrative and supervisory employes) in any one month are determined by how long they work, the kind of work they do, and where they do it. The WPA, however, exercises no control over wages paid to workers employed on WPA projects by sponsors.¹

Basis on Which Payment Is Made

Monthly rates payable (in places of varying degrees of urbanization) in the several states² to workers doing different types of work³ and putting in the prescribed number of hours⁴ have been set forth, from time to time, in what have been termed “schedules of monthly earnings.”⁵ The first of these was prescribed by the President. Later schedules were prescribed by the administrator of the WPA. In 1939 Congress required that wage schedules should be established by the commissioner of work projects subject to approval by the head of the Federal Works Agency.

Schedules of Monthly Earnings

Schedules announced at various times have incorporated important modifications apart from changes in prescribed rates. States included in one wage region at one time have, by subsequent

¹ This anomaly is one about which organized labor has frequently complained. See, for example, testimony presented to a House Committee by Joseph A. McInerney, President of the Building and Construction Trades Department, American Federation of Labor.—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1938 and Public Works Administration Appropriation Act of 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938, pp. 756-757.
² States have been grouped in “wage regions.” Originally there were four of these. Since July 1, 1936, however, there have been only three.
³ Separate rates are prescribed for professional and technical, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled work.
⁴ Since 1939 these normally have been $130 a month. See chap. 8 for discussion of hours of work.
⁵ Though wage rates are established on a monthly basis, workers since early in 1941 have been paid not semi-monthly, as previously, but every two weeks on the basis of 13 four-week fiscal periods instead of 12 calendar months a year. The amount paid a worker for a four-week fiscal period is twelve-thirteenths of his scheduled monthly rate.

This system, adopted in New York City early in the WPA's history, is held greatly to simplify operating, fiscal, and accounting procedures.
The WPA and Its Program

schedules, been included in some other region. Whereas earlier schedules classified counties in five groups (depending upon whether the largest city in the county had a population of more than 100,000, of 50,000 to 100,000, of 25,000 to 50,000, of 5,000 to 25,000, or of less than 5,000); later schedules have reduced these classes to four, combining into one category counties in which the largest city has a population of 25,000 to 100,000. The number of different monthly rates scheduled has, since elimination of the fourth wage region, remained at 60, whereas it had previously been 80. The elimination of one of the urbanization areas in 1939 did not result in reducing the number of different rates scheduled since this step was offset by establishment of an additional wage class, “unskilled B,” for work that involved relatively less training and responsibility than most unskilled work.¹

Scheduled rates for work on WPA projects—popularly termed “security wages”—prescribed for certain types of areas at various stages of the WPA program are presented, by state, in Table 10. As may be noted there, prescribed rates in southern states have been increased markedly since 1935. These changes were due in large part (though not entirely ²) to the action of Congress, which in 1939 required that differences in wage rates paid for similar work in various sections of the country should not be greater than could be justified by differences in the cost of living. However, Congress also prescribed that existing discrepancies in rates were to be corrected without materially changing the monthly average wage for the country as a whole.³ This require-

¹ The complete schedules of monthly earnings, prescribed in May, 1935, June, 1938, and August, 1939, are reproduced in Appendix Table 3.
² The administration in July, 1936, and June, 1938, for example, increased southern rates materially without any direction from Capitol Hill. For examples of explanations given in justification of these increases see WPA Release 4-1714, June 27, 1938.
³ For a discussion of difficulties encountered in effectuating this mandate see "Recent Changes in Work-Relief Wage Policy," by Arthur E. Burns and Peyton Kerr, in the American Economic Review, vol. 31, no. 1, March, 1941, pp. 62-63. Summarizing these difficulties, these writers declared: "It would be rash to insist that the present WPA wage differentials are a completely accurate reflection of differences in cost of living in different parts of the country. To a considerable extent the differentials still reflect differences in cost at the existing standards. There is a basic reason why the revised WPA wage schedule accepted a qualified cost-of-living concept. Regional differentials in the private wage structure rest less on differences in costs of living than on differences in standards or levels of living. If work-relief wage payments are intended to vary with private wage payments, remaining somewhat below private wage payments but somewhat above direct-relief payments, WPA differentials in general must follow private differentials by reflecting primarily differences in levels of living."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>Minimum rate</th>
<th>Maximum rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May, 1935</td>
<td>June, 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May, 1935</td>
<td>June, 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>44b</td>
<td>44b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>44b</td>
<td>44b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 10.—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>Minimum rate</th>
<th>Maximum rate</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May, 1935</td>
<td>June, 1938</td>
<td>August, 1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Except for two states and the District of Columbia, minimum rates prescribed in May, 1935, and June, 1938, are those for unskilled workers in counties in which the largest center of population had less than 5,000 population in 1930. The minimum rates prescribed in August, 1939, are for “unskilled labor B” in these counties. The minimum rates for 1939 are not actually comparable with those for the other dates, since they relate to unskilled work involving least skill and responsibility. Rates for “unskilled labor A” in the same counties were approximately 70 per cent higher than the June, 1938, unskilled rates in 11 states (Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas) ; 34 per cent higher in 5 states (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, West Virginia, and Missouri) ; 23 per cent higher in 11 states (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and California) ; and between 5 and 10 per cent higher in the remaining 22 states.

The maximum rates are those for professional and technical workers in counties having a municipality of at least 100,000 except as otherwise indicated in footnotes below. Population ranges specified in these footnotes are those appearing on the wage schedules.


b Rate for county whose largest municipality had between 5,000 and 24,999 population.

c Rate for county whose largest municipality had between 50,000 and 99,999 population.

d Rate for county whose largest municipality had between 25,000 and 99,999 population.

e Rate for county whose largest municipality had between 25,000 and 49,999 population.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ment, much to the surprise of Congress, necessitated lowering some northern rates so that increases in the South could be effected without changing the national average materially.

The fight for higher WPA wages in the South was inseparably linked with controversies over a number of broader economic issues such as the Labor Standards Act (which required essentially equal treatment for northern and southern workers) and attempts to abolish freight differentials which were regarded as a handicap to the South.2

While many an administration stalwart favored the liquidation of regional wage differences, Colonel Harrington was skeptical. He told a House Committee that he did not believe the WPA “should be made the guinea pig in this experiment. I think,” the Colonel continued, “that if wage differentials are to be wiped out in this country . . . it [the practice] should apply to everybody and WPA should not be the first one to be operated on in that respect.”3

Epoch-making as it has been, the long fight to raise economic standards in the South has had almost no carry-over into the general relief field of those economic, social, and political considerations which were working toward greater uniformity between northern and southern states. In matters affecting needy people,

1 When it appeared that it might be necessary to lower certain northern rates in order not to change materially the national average, Senator Byrnes, administration leader in the Senate, wrote to the WPA administrator: “. . . it was my thought that the language [written into law by Congress] gave you sufficient discretion to enable you to administer the law without reducing the security wage in any one of the several areas.” Senator Byrnes also served notice that he intended to “offer an amendment changing this substantial national average, so as to make certain that there shall be no reduction in the security wage in any area.”—Congressional Record, July 28, 1939, pp. 10312-10313.

2 Even though scheduled rates for various types of work in the North were not lowered in 1939, actual rates paid in a number of northern cities (including New York, Cleveland, and Detroit) were lowered because in these cities WPA officials had increased wage rates by as much as 10 per cent as they had been permitted to do prior to the establishment of the new schedule in 1939.

3 See, for example, the remarks of Senator Pepper of Florida in support of reducing regional differentials in WPA wage rates, in the Congressional Record, July 16, 1939, p. 10305. One of the most striking aspects of Congress' debate over the need to reduce existing discrepancies between northern and southern WPA wage rates was that differences referred to time and again were differences in hourly rather than monthly rates. See, for example, Ibid., June 16, 1939, pp. 7353 ff.

4 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 22.

Colonel Harrington's position on this issue differed from that of his predecessors who, according to the United States News, in 1938, expected further increases in the southern wage rates even to wiping out all sectional differences as soon as public opinion would "stand for it."—July 5, 1938.
The WPA and Its Program

the South, it appears, was particularly interested in the abolition of regional differences at the expense of the federal government. Elimination of differences in general relief programs financed from state and local funds was another—and a totally neglected—matter. Congress and the administration, though eager to minimize regional differences in WPA earnings, also appeared content to continue a laissez-faire policy toward the even greater regional differences in state and local programs of general relief.

Generally speaking, scheduled rates apply to the county in which work is done. In certain metropolitan areas, however, rates apply to the entire district as defined by the Bureau of the Census.1 Early in the WPA’s history the wage scale was based, not upon the county in which the project lay, but upon the residence of the worker. Since this policy resulted in paying different wage rates to workers from different counties, even though they worked shoulder to shoulder and were doing the same kind of work, it was soon abandoned. An even shorter-lived experiment was that of making wage rates applicable not to counties but to townships.

Considerable criticism has been voiced, both within and outside of Congress, against varying monthly earnings in accordance with the population of the largest city in a county. Critics frequently point out that workers doing exactly the same kind of work on different sides of a street, creek, or river constituting a county boundary are paid appreciably different wages.2 Dissatisfaction over this policy led the Senate in 1939 to adopt (though the House refused to agree to it) an amendment designed to eliminate “differentials between cities, counties, or other areas upon the basis of degree of urbanization or any other factor that will tend to discriminate against the less urbanized areas.” 3

Exceptions to Schedules of Monthly Earnings

Certain exemptions from the requirement that WPA project employees be paid in accordance with prescribed monthly earnings

1 The metropolitan districts to which this provision applied in 1941 were: Boston; Providence; Hartford-New Britain; New York City-Northeastern New Jersey; Buffalo-Niagara; Philadelphia; Scranton-Wilkes-Barre; Pittsburgh; Cleveland; Cincinnati; Chicago; Detroit; Milwaukee; Minneapolis-St. Paul; St. Louis; Kansas City, Kansas-Kansas City, Missouri; Baltimore; Washington, D. C.; New Orleans; Houston; San Francisco-Oakland; Los Angeles.—WPA General Order No. 4, July 1, 1941.

2 For a typical example of these criticisms see Congressional Record, May 23, 1940, pp. 6742, 6744.

3 Ibid., June 28, 1939, pp. 8115-8116.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

schedules have been permitted from time to time. In 1940, for example, the federal WPA commissioner was authorized by law to exempt from the established schedule of monthly earnings workers engaged on projects certified as “being important for military or naval purposes; to protect work already done on a project; to permit making up lost time; in the case of an emergency involving the public welfare; and in the case of supervisory personnel employed on work projects.”

Under this grant of authority, the WPA in April, 1941, was permitting some 236,000 workers on certified defense projects to work on the average 174 instead of 130 hours a month and thus to increase their monthly wages proportionately. This, it was estimated, brought average earnings of these workers in May and June, 1941, to approximately $74.50 as opposed to $56 a month for workers on other types of projects. In May and June, 1942, labor on certified defense projects averaged $76.70 a month as opposed to $61.60 on projects of other types. The average for all projects was $65.65.

Supervisory workers constitute the second largest group of employes to which exceptions have applied. According to official reports, the number of supervisory employes on the rolls at any one time since the WPA program really got under way has usually comprised somewhat less than 5 per cent of the total number employed on WPA projects. The number of project supervisory employes in April, 1941, was some 66,000. A year later it was only about 41,000.

Further exceptions to the schedule of monthly earnings may legally be made in the case of (a) workers having no dependents, and (b) veterans, veterans’ widows, and wives of unemployable veterans. The WPA, however, had not, prior to July, 1942, elected to reduce the hours (and therefore the earnings) of workers in either of these categories.

A further exception to the schedule of monthly earnings is that applicable to trainees given training as household workers.

\[1\] ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 14(b). The ERA Act of 1939 also permitted exempting from the schedule of earnings the last four of these classes of workers but made no reference to those employed on specified military or naval projects.

\[2\] See Table 14 in chap. 7.

\[3\] Both of these provisions are further discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.
The WPA and Its Program

These are paid 50 per cent of the lower unskilled rate paid in their localities. The most recent modification of WPA wage policies has been to give a slight increase in pay to project workers who were not already being paid in excess of security rates by virtue of employment on defense projects. These increases (which amounted to $5.20 a month for all classes of labor except professional and technical workers for whom the increase was only $3.90) were not interpreted as modifying the prescribed rates of pay but were rather in the nature of extra payments to offset, at least partially, rising costs of living. These wage increases represented from 4 to 7 per cent of the professional and technical rates paid in various sections of the country and from nearly 6 to more than 16 per cent of the rates paid other types of workers.

Prior to 1939 state WPA administrators were empowered to modify prescribed rates by not more than 10 per cent. The extent to which administrators took advantage of this power to amend monthly wage rates varied from place to place. In a number of cities (such as New York City, Cleveland, and Detroit) rates were raised the full 10 per cent. In other cities (such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) no such increases were authorized. Prior to 1939 administrators were permitted to pay sometimes 5 and sometimes 10 per cent of the workers on each project in excess of security rates. Even when this type of exemption might have applied to 10 per cent of all workers, exceptions almost never exceeded 4 per cent.

Relationship of Security Wages to Wages Paid in Private Employment

The WPA wage payable to any given worker is, as already noted, affected by only three considerations: the length of time he works, the kind of work he does, and where he does it. From the beginning it was planned that WPA pay should be lower than wages in private employment, but more liberal than the relief grants then being paid. The purpose of keeping security wages lower than wages paid in private employment has, of course, been to spur workers to re-

1 See chap. 9.
2 Discussion of the relationship between WPA earnings and relief grants is incorporated in the succeeding chapter.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

turn to private jobs as quickly as possible. However, even high officials within the WPA frankly admit that so long as there were insufficient private jobs into which workers could be goaded this policy was wholly unwarranted.

While the WPA has made much of keeping wages low so as to encourage workers to take private employment, no pretense was ever made that this policy was intended to be applied to any or every kind of private job. Instead of being defensive about the fact that WPA wages were higher than those paid by certain substandard employers, the administration justified it roundly. For example, in a sharp retort to the National Economy League's charges that WPA pay was luring workers from private jobs, Howard Hunter observed caustically, "If any industry is paying less, somebody should investigate that industry." Again, Nels Anderson, director of the Section on Labor Relations of the WPA, boasted that the $21 paid unskilled workers for 140 hours of work in rural areas of the South was "about double the wage for the same amount of labor on a farm." Far from apologizing for this, Mr. Anderson defended it as "good public policy in areas of extremely low living standards."

While WPA policy, in the large, has been to refuse to permit unduly low private wage rates to pull down wages on WPA

1 Of this President Roosevelt declared in his address in January, 1935: "Compensation on emergency public projects should be in the form of security payments, which should be larger than the amount now received as a relief dole, but at the same time not so large as to encourage the rejection of opportunities for private employment or the leaving of private employment to engage in Government work." —As quoted in the New York Times, January 5, 1935.

This principle of keeping work-relief wage rates below wages paid in private employment is as old as work relief itself and even in seventeenth century England was the cornerstone on which various propositions for "setting-the-poor-on-work" were based. For an incisive analysis of recent British unemployment insurance and unemployment assistance experience with the "wages stop" and what has been termed the overlap of benefit (or allowances) on wages, see The Unemployment Services, by Polly Hill. Routledge and Sons, London, 1940, pp. 40-49.

For a discussion of the use of prevailing wage data in establishing the security rates, see "Work Relief Wage Policies, 1930-1936," by Arthur E. Burns, in FERA Monthly Report, June 1 through June 30, 1936, p. 47.

2 As quoted in WPA Release 4-2214, March 4, 1941.


Of the effect of this policy Arthur E. Burns and Peyton Kerr report that "in general" it has "strengthened the reluctance of WPA workers to accept private employment that is either temporary or pays lower wages. However, no appreciable amount of friction has developed on this account, probably because of the large non-WPA labor supply that has been more than sufficient to meet the demand for labor."—"Recent Changes in Work-Relief Wage Policy," in the American Economic Review, vol. 31, no. 1, March, 1941, p. 63.
projects, somewhat different policies have been applied to individual cases and under various circumstances. For example, workers employed by the WPA, as shown in more detail in Chapter XX, have been compelled, upon threat of discharge, to accept private employment regardless of how far the rate of pay falls below the WPA wage, provided the pay is the “accustomed” or “prevailing” rate in the community for the kind of work offered. Again, there have been many occasions when not individuals, but whole classes of workers have been dismissed to take jobs harvesting crops, chopping or picking cotton, hoeing sugar beets, or similar tasks, regardless of the relation of their potential earnings to security wage rates.

Comparative monthly or weekly wage rates are not, of course, the only factor governing the relative desirability of jobs. For example, even though WPA pay rates were kept lower than those for private employment, differences in conditions of work often meant that a worker employed by the WPA could earn a higher annual income than a worker in private employment. In fact, this possibility has frequently been advanced by WPA officials in justification of the low WPA wage scales. Early in the WPA’s history, a high WPA official stated that he saw no reason to change the WPA rate of pay for skilled workers, amounting to $900 a year, since “the average carpenter never made more than that in his life.” Similarly, when WPA rates in New York City were under fire by organized labor in 1935, General Hugh S. Johnson made the point that WPA wages for skilled workers were “much more” than had been earned for the past five years in private employment. “Skilled building workers,” he said, “never had a better deal. . . . Except for short stretches and never over any five-year period did these trades ever average $93.50 a month.”

Possibilities of realizing these long-term advantages obviously depended upon the degree to which the WPA rate was indeed a security wage. As one after another of the elements of security employment was thrown overboard, the defense of low monthly wage rates on the ground that, over a period of time, such rates assured workers “more than they ever had in their lives” was, of course, vitiated.²

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, August 9, 1935.
² Important steps in this direction were the conditioning of employment upon continued need, the principle of “rotating” employment, and abolition of the earlier WPA policy of paying workers for time lost through no fault of their own.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Relationship of Actual Earnings to Scheduled Rates

Since WPA workers are paid only for time worked, those who lose time and are unable to make it up are docked a proportionate amount of their month's pay. Something of the extent of these losses was shown in a memorandum submitted to a House Committee in 1941. This revealed that project employes, by and large, lost an average of approximately 5 per cent of their potential earnings each month as a result of sickness, inclement weather, interruptions to project operations, or other cause.

Neatly spread over an entire year and evenly apportioned among all workers, these losses—the equivalent of nearly three weeks' pay in a year—would be serious enough in view of the nature of WPA pay. Unfortunately, however, wage losses are not evenly distributed and frequently fall with staggering force upon a relatively few families which are hardest hit by sickness or are deprived of earnings because of inclement weather. Concentrated as they are in winter months and in times of sickness when family needs for doctors and medicines, or for warm clothing, food, and fuel are greater rather than less, wage losses averaging an apparently inconsequential 5 per cent a year may swell in any given period—or periods—to an all-important 100 per cent. This was made clear during the hard winter of 1939-1940 when newspaper headlines from every section of the country reflected wage losses visited upon thousands of WPA workers. Even in Birmingham, Alabama, the wintry weather was reported at one time to have kept 8,000 workers idle. Worst of all, perhaps, was the plight of workers in St. Louis, where 11,000 went without WPA pay checks for over a month. Relief was restricted to limited rations, and great suffering resulted.

Testifying of the suffering experienced by workers during this winter, David Lasser, then president of the Workers Alliance of America, told a House Committee:

... during the cold spell 500,000 W. P. A. workers were out of work for a week to a month. Workers got monthly pay of $5 to $10 in many cases; in other cases they got nothing. These workers are presumed under the work relief idea to be penniless; they are presumed to work on so little wages when they are employed that they cannot keep body and soul together. Yet when
The WPA and Its Program

these spells of bad weather come, when their needs for clothing, fuel, food, and so forth, increase, their pay checks suddenly stop.\(^1\)

To alleviate distress arising from losses of this kind, Mr. Lasser recommended that the WPA return to its earlier policy of paying workers for time lost through no fault of their own; allow workers to “accumulate time against some future emergency meanwhile drawing full pay”; and finally, to permit workers to draw full pay even though they are unable to work, on condition that they make up the time later.\(^2\)

Docking workers for time lost through no fault of their own began only in 1936. During the first year of the WPA program workers were paid even though they were unable to work because project operations were suspended on account of weather, shortage of materials, or other factors beyond their control. Workers were not paid for time lost on account of sickness or for reasons for which they were held responsible. They were, however, given opportunity to make up time lost for such reasons and were required, if possible, to make up time for which they were paid but had not worked.

Early Studies of Lost Time

Some idea of the margin by which actual monthly earnings have fallen below prescribed rates is revealed in an early study of the wage losses of WPA workers who had been “under continuous assignment to a single work project” during February or March, 1936, the period to which the study applied. Of these workers approximately one-third were reported to have lost earnings. Whereas 37.2 per cent of the unskilled workers lost part of their assigned rates of pay, only 19.4 per cent of intermediate and skilled and 11.2 per cent of professional and technical workers earned less than their full assigned rates.

The workers studied lost on the average 4.5 per cent of their potential earnings. Among the lowest paid workers the loss was 9.8 per cent, while workers whose potential earnings exceeded $80 a month lost only about 2 per cent.

Losses of working time are unevenly spread geographically; they are also likely to be concentrated in relatively short periods

\(^1\) U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 925.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 925-926.
of time. In Pennsylvania, during the fiscal year 1936, for example, the number of hours for which workers were paid but did not work represented some 17 per cent of the number of hours paid for. In February, however, hours credited but not worked amounted to about 45 per cent of the total for which payment was made. In June, on the other hand, the proportion was less than 1 per cent.

Abandonment of the policy of paying workers for time lost through no fault of their own meant scuttling a policy upon which (as noted already) administration leaders relied heavily to justify establishing WPA wage rates at the low levels finally agreed upon.

When President Roosevelt first announced to the nation his plan for a federal work program, he emphasized the fact that though the wages were to be low, they were to be "in the form of security payments." 1 Frequently it was reiterated that the pay was to be "in the nature of a salary." All this was in keeping with recommendations of the President's Committee on Economic Security, which urged establishment of an "employment assurance" program to provide jobs for unemployed workers. 2 Typical emphases frequently placed on the security aspect of WPA employment was that given by Harry Hopkins in 1935 when, in attempting to defend the low level of security wages as a whole, he declared: "You must remember that we are guaranteeing this wage—that is, the men and women will be paid whenever they show up for work, in spite of weather or other things that may hold up a project." 3 More emphatic still was Colonel Lawrence Westbrook, assistant administrator of the WPA, who explained (in 1936) that the WPA did not "hold the workers responsible for the weather." Therefore the WPA "of course" paid workers full wages for time lost through no fault of their own. "That," he added, "is a basic principle of the whole security-wage system. . . . Regardless of weather, they have to eat." 4

---

1 As quoted in the New York Times, January 5, 1935.
4 WPA Release 4-1036, February 10, 1936. Though there have always been those who applauded the principle of wage assurance there have also been skeptics to question whether this assurance was worth the loss of wages resulting from the low rates prescribed under a security wage system. Among these was the Nation, which declared editorially (before the original security wage rates were announced) that although there was something to be said for "an insured income" there was danger
The WPA and Its Program

Though the alleged security of the security wage gradually vanished into thin air, the low rates of pay, which the administration had sought to make more palatable by garnishing with promises of steady income, continued.

A second inroad upon the security afforded by WPA jobs has been the policy of rotating employment through arbitrary release of workers continuously employed for specified periods of time.\(^1\) According to studies made in 1939 and 1940, workers automatically discharged because they had been employed on WPA jobs for eighteen months had to wait, on the average, two or three months before they were again reassigned. Thus, WPA’s alleged “security” wages are not only reduced by sickness, weather, and interruptions to operations but often cease completely after eighteen months’ employment.

If, instead of considering wage losses resulting from the rotation principle alone, one were to take into account all the time lost on the job and between jobs, it would be seen that there is but little security in a security wage. One of the very few studies available to show what these larger losses amount to revealed that 102 WPA workers who (in 1940) had been eligible for WPA employment for an average of approximately thirty-nine months had actually worked, on the average, only about twenty-two months—or but 57 per cent of the time.

Obviously, wages, which even on a month-to-month basis fall far short of enough to provide a family of four an emergency standard of living,\(^2\) fall even farther short of enough to provide such a standard over a period during which wages may be stopped completely.

Although the “security” aspect of WPA employment had been pretty well liquidated by 1940, the hope of again returning to the principle of a security wage was not completely dead. Among those who have urged the revival of the principle is Ralph Hetzel, Jr., unemployment director of the CIO, who even during the height of the furor over the administration’s abandonment (in that the reduction in wages on work relief would be more than what could properly be justified as an “insurance premium.” Furthermore, the Nation feared that “Private employers, particularly those in steadier branches, would quickly seize upon the theme, and the safer a man’s job the greater the ‘insurance premium’ that would be deducted from his wages.”—Vol. 140, no. 3628, January 16, 1935, p. 60.

\(^1\) These are discussed in some detail in chap. 21.

\(^2\) As shown in a succeeding section of this chapter.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

1939) of the principle of paying prevailing hourly rates declared “the central importance of the monthly security wage must not be forgotten in the outcry about the prevailing wage rate.”

Serious as wage losses are in themselves, the plight of workers who suffer them is further aggravated by relief policies in effect in many sections of the country. Most important, of course, is the denial of relief to families of employable workers. Equally serious, however, is the practice of refusing aid to WPA workers as has been done in certain areas (such as Newark, Pittsburgh, and Chicago) even though relief is not categorically denied to employable persons. This denial of relief to workers who lose time because of interruptions to project operations due to weather, shortage of materials, or other reasons is frequently justified on the ground that this is necessary to keep the pressure on the WPA to arrange its own affairs so as to reduce to a minimum interruptions likely to throw workers into need. Using needy families as the fulcrum in exerting this leverage upon the WPA has resulted in untold hardship especially in winter when family needs are high and outdoor project operations most difficult.

Relationship of Scheduled Rates to Family Needs

Neither the size of a worker’s family nor the number dependent upon him has anything to do with his wage. In this matter WPA wages differ markedly from relief grants and from wages paid under the work-relief program which was in operation when the WPA was established.

In defense of WPA wage policy Mr. Hopkins said in 1935: “I believe that all families should receive the same wages regardless of their size. That is my idea of pay.” Private employment, he further declared, is not run on the basis of extra pay for every child in the family “and there is no reason why government work should be. It does not make for justice in the long run. . . . I believe that a man, and a woman, should be paid for what they do.” Aubrey Williams has expressed essentially the same view,

See chap. 8.


The WPA and Its Program

declaring: "In private industry no account is taken of the number in the family. I think that's the American way." 

Colonel Harrington, at a much later period, was no less positive, when he told a congressional committee that:

... if you are going to run a work program I think you should offer a man a job as nearly under the conditions of a private job as you can. I realize that some departure from that conception is necessary in the light of reality, but I do not think that you could have two people doing the same work, side by side, and paying one person a different amount than another, because his family condition is different; because he has more children. That, to me, violates the fundamental concept of a work program.

A further advantage claimed for abandonment of the budgetary deficiency basis of pay under the FERA program was that it made possible the elimination of estimates of need by relief investigators and social workers. There was to be no more "pantry snooping," as one high official once called investigation.

Because security wages have been so meager, considerable dissatisfaction has been expressed at the unwillingness of the WPA to relate earnings to needs. Among those who have criticized

1 Skeptics were quick, of course, to question whether payment of the low monthly wages, which in some areas of the South sank to as little as $19 a month, came any nearer to the "American way" than adjusting wages to family needs would have done. That the family allowance principle is in practice acceptable to the American people is clearly evidenced by the popularity of allowances paid to families of members of this country's armed forces.

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 551.

3 That is, allowing workers to earn only enough to make up the difference between their income, if any, and their needs as determined in accordance with prescribed budget standards.

4 The hope of making the WPA a "real work program" divorced from any tinge of social work was destined, however, to be short-lived. Although social workers and investigators were bowed out of the picture so far as determining the amount of benefits to be paid workers was concerned, they were soon invited back to decide whether or not a given applicant should have any employment at all, and if so, for how long. Furthermore, it may be noted that the WPA's decision not to adapt earnings to family needs has made it necessary for at least a small proportion of WPA workers to seek supplementary relief. These families, obviously, have been unable to escape dealings with social workers which officials sought to spare WPA workers. What is equally important is that elimination of the budget basis of pay did not eliminate the exercise of discretion with respect to a worker's pay. There was merely a transfer of discretion in this matter from social workers to classification officers and assignment officials who decided at what kind of work, and therefore at what wage, workers should be employed and who were responsible for selecting from a vast reservoir (of from two to three times as many workers as could be employed) the lucky few who were to be paid security wages while the many were compelled to go without any help at the hand of the federal government. WPA officials exert over the lives and fortunes of workers in search of jobs, however, no more control than any employer exercises over those who apply to him for work.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA policy on this score are Allen T. Burns, executive vice-president of Community Chests and Councils, who has declared that under a program of work relief, assistance should have "some relation to need"; and Marie Dresden Lane, formerly a regional social worker of the FERA and more recently a member of the national WPA staff, who has advocated that workers be paid on a "family wage" basis, thereby adapting wages in a rough way to family needs.

A slight departure from the principle of keeping wages unrelated to family need is found in a provision first included in the ERA Act of 1939 permitting the WPA commissioner to limit the hours and earnings of people having no dependents. However, no regulations had been issued under this new policy up to August, 1942. In 1941 the WPA commissioner told a House Committee that he had not exercised his authority in this matter since even under established rates "earnings of those workers are too small even to justify that." Moreover, he requested elimination of the provision from the bill then under consideration. Congress, however, did not choose to accept this course and continued in effect the unwanted and unused authority.

3 E. Wight Bakke of the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University has also suggested this as a possibility and declares: "... in view of the fact that in certain industrial nations a supplementary 'family wage' has been paid even in private employment, it may not be beyond the realm of possibility that some such device will prove worthy of further study in connection with work relief."—Citizens Without Work. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, p. 290.
4 Nevertheless, the WPA administrator in New York State (exclusive of New York City) authorized the employment of workers having no dependents at less than the prescribed monthly rates of pay.
5 In 1940 an attempt was made to require the WPA commissioner to establish a lower wage for workers with no dependents. This was defeated, however.

A proposal to adapt federal work-relief earnings even more definitely to family needs was introduced in Congress in 1940 by Representative Louis Ludlow of Indiana. According to his plan, single workers would be paid $25 a month; workers with one dependent, $40, with further increments of $5.00 a month for each additional dependent up to a maximum of $60 a month for five or more dependents. Speaking for his bill, Representative Ludlow declared: "At first blush...single persons—and...[others in relatively less need] might object to a lower salary than is provided in the existing scale, but they should bear in mind that...they would, at least, have a chance to secure employment, though at the reduced rate, while under the employment-quota limitations now imposed on W. P. A., and likely to be imposed at all times in the future, they probably will be unable to secure employment at all, because there will always be enough persons in...[relatively greater need] to consume the entire quota. After all, a single person has to live and a wage of $25 a
Congress in 1941 wrote into law a second provision which opened the door to a modification of WPA pay rates. Unlike the first provision, which called for reducing the pay of workers who were assumed to need relatively little, the second authorized reduction in the pay of certain workers who had other resources. Specifically, Congress prescribed that veterans, veterans’ widows, and the wives of unemployable veterans (whose income is less than the wage they might earn on a WPA job) “shall be employed for such period as will permit the total monthly income of such veteran or unmarried widow, or the total combined monthly income of such unemployable veteran and his wife, to be approximately equal to the amount which would be obtainable by full-time employment on any such project.”\(^1\) This mandatory requirement that veterans and others entitled to preferential treatment were to be given sufficient employment to bring their total income to approximately what they could earn on WPA jobs, gave the WPA considerable latitude.\(^2\) The WPA, prior to July, 1942, chose to take full advantage of this leeway rather than revert to the earlier practice of employing some workers fewer hours than others. In his ruling on the matter, Mr. Hunter prescribed that no reductions were to be made in the number of hours veterans, veterans’ widows, and wives of unemployable veterans might work.

**Relationship of Scheduled Rates to Costs of Defined Standards of Living**

Since so many families have been dependent upon WPA wages for their entire (and others for partial) support, it is significant to compare scheduled monthly rates with the cost of what have been termed “emergency” and “maintenance” standards of living. Neither of these levels, according to the WPA, which defined

---

\(^1\) ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 10(a). A provision similar to this had been adopted by the House in 1940 but was defeated in the Senate after it was pointed out that veterans with some income, under such a policy, might receive less in WPA wages than non-veterans with equal outside income.

\(^2\) In an attempt to liberalize existing provisions veterans’ organizations in 1942 asked Congress to write into law an amendment requiring the WPA to give veterans and others entitled to preferential treatment enough employment to bring their total income, not to approximately but to at least the amount they might earn on a WPA job. See chap. 13.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

these standards and used them as a basis for studying living costs in various sections of the country, "represents a desirable living standard." Neither, it is said,

... will permit families to enjoy the full fruits of what we have come to call the American standard of living. Indeed, those forced to exist at the emergency level for an extended period would be subjected to serious health hazards. From the point of view of the long-time wellbeing of workers' families, a desirable standard of living would be one in which the concepts of maintenance and emergency have no place. Moreover, as a basis for a national volume of consumption sufficient to keep pace with the increasing output of industry, the two levels are inadequate. ...1

For the entire 59 cities included in the WPA study, the emergency level of living for a family of four, in March, 1935, was found to average $75.27 a month, the range being from approximately $84.50 in Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., to $67.47 in Wichita, Kansas. Cost of the maintenance standard which ranged from $117.88 a month in Washington, D.C., to $94.15 in Mobile, Alabama, averaged $105.05 a month for the entire 59 cities.

When the maintenance standard was again priced in 31 of the original 59 cities in 1939, its cost was found to be higher than it had been in 1935, ranging from $123.17 a month in Washington, D.C., to $98.22 in Mobile.

If for comparative purposes it is assumed that the cost of the maintenance standard in each of the 31 cities in 1939 exceeded that of the emergency standard by the same percentage as was true in March, 1935, it is found that the security wage rate for unskilled labor (group A, the higher of the two unskilled rates) in August, 1939, was not sufficient to provide even 65 per cent

1 Stecker, Margaret Loomis, Intercity Differences in Costs of Living in March 1935, 59 Cities: Preliminary Report. WPA, Washington, 1937, p. 7. In further definition of these standards, the report states: "The basic maintenance level represents normal or average minimum requirements for industrial, service, and other manual workers; the emergency level takes into account certain economies which may be made under depression conditions. The maintenance level provides not only for physical needs but also gives some consideration to psychological values. The emergency level allows more exclusively, though not entirely, for material wants, but it might be questioned on the grounds of health hazards if families had to live at this level for a considerable period of time.

"Both budgets embody the needs of unskilled rather than skilled wage earners. Complete selfsupport in all respects is provided for, but only on a current cost basis, since there is no allowance for carrying or liquidating debts, or for necessary future expenditures, except small life insurance policies."—Ibid., p. 5.
The WPA and Its Program

of the estimated monthly cost of the emergency standard in Portland (Maine), Washington, D. C., Richmond (Virginia), Norfolk, and Atlanta. In the most favored cities (Buffalo, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Denver) the WPA rate for unskilled labor was enough to provide only about three-fourths of the cost of the emergency standard.

Although the unskilled rate in 1939 was enough to provide at least 65 per cent (approximately) of the monthly cost of the emergency standard in all 31 cities for which data are available, unskilled rates in 13 of these cities were insufficient to cover even this proportion of this standard in May, 1935. Worst off in this regard were Atlanta and Mobile where unskilled rates established in 1935 were only about 40 per cent of the estimated monthly cost of the emergency standard. Comparative data for the 31 cities are presented in Table 11.

When family needs are measured, not in accordance with an emergency or maintenance standard of living but by what WPA officials themselves admit is needed by families of various sizes, it is found that WPA wages frequently fall far short of enough to provide even necessities. Striking evidence of this is furnished by the fact that under WPA regulations in effect in Mississippi in 1941 a family of four was regarded as in need if it had less than approximately $73 a month for food, shelter, clothing, fuel, electricity, medical care, household supplies (including limited debts for household necessities), church, recreation, education, and personal incidentals, but not including costs of school attendance, transportation of working members, or charges—if any—for water supplied to the household. Though WPA officials in Mississippi admitted that families of four having an income or resources of less than approximately $73 a month should be regarded as in need, monthly WPA wages for the higher grade of unskilled labor in this state ranged from only $35.10 in rural areas to $48.10 in cities of 25,000 to 100,000. Only skilled and professional and technical workers in counties including cities having a population of 25,000 or more normally earn as much as $74 a month in Mississippi.

Despite the fact that many WPA wage rates fall far below an amount sufficient to provide an adequate standard of living and that there is little good that WPA officials can say of them, vari-
## The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>May, 1935</th>
<th>August, 1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacksonville</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City, Mo.</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, Maine</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scranton</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, Ore.</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ous observers have contended that the very inadequacy of WPA earnings means that they will be immediately spent rather than saved. Thus, it is claimed, the WPA's low wage scale enhances the usefulness of the WPA program as a means of stimulating economic recovery in time of depression.
The WPA and Its Program

WPA Earnings Not Assignable

Ever since the inauguration of the WPA program, federal statutes and rules and regulations have prescribed that assignments of WPA wages are null and void.¹ In explanation of this policy the federal WPA has declared: “The Work Projects Administration was established for the purpose of giving employment to persons in need, in order that they might be able to maintain themselves and their families.”²

Though this reasoning has been almost universally accepted there was in the House in 1941 a passing flurry of interest in what one speaker described as the anomaly of permitting workers to receive federal funds in wages and then, possibly, to allow them to refuse to pay their taxes and other obligations. To overcome at least part of this difficulty it was suggested that WPA employment should be denied to workers who failed to use their WPA earnings to pay their taxes. The move was dropped, however, after Representative Woodrum of Virginia declared he could not see how Congress “could force a man to take money that he has said he needs to support his family and give it to the tax collector.”³

WPA Pay: Wages for Work Done?

WPA pay is normally regarded as wages earned for work done. As such, a WPA worker is usually permitted to spend his money as he chooses. In fact, the assurance to a worker of this control over his own affairs rather than to be accountable to a social worker for how he might spend a direct relief grant was one of the primary benefits administration leaders expected to realize through a federal work program. Nevertheless, there have sprung up, in various sections of the country, a number of practices intended to limit this discretion somewhat. In the first place, WPA workers (as shown in Chapter XIII) may be dismissed if

¹ Of this federal regulations prescribe that “The Work Projects Administration shall not act as agent for or take any part, directly or indirectly, in the collection of private debts contracted by project wage employees. In accordance with Federal statutes, assignments of wages or salaries made by any employees are null and void; also, in accordance with a well-established principle of law, wages of employees may not be subject to attachment, garnishment, or like process.”—WPA, Rules and Regulations, p. 37.009 [January, 1942].
² Ibid.
³ Congressional Record, June 15, 1941, p. 5262.
they refuse or fail to use their pay for the support of their families. Then, there have been attempts made by state and local authorities to prevent workers from using WPA pay for purposes frowned upon by public opinion. Efforts have been made, for example, to forbid liquor dealers to cash WPA pay checks or to sell liquor to workers known to be employed by the WPA. Various attempts have also been made to discourage WPA workers from owning and operating automobiles. Lengths to which public opinion sometimes goes in setting limits upon what is or is not regarded as an appropriate use of WPA earnings were illustrated when a WPA worker in Indiana recently won a radio prize of a considerable amount of money. To be awarded this sum it was necessary for the prize winner to be at home and to answer his telephone when he was called. Instead of rejoicing over the fact that a WPA worker with a family of three children should have won the money, some 80 persons in New York City alone telephoned the radio station protesting the fact that a WPA worker should have had a telephone at all!

Despite such relatively inconsequential exceptions as might be cited WPA earnings have, as a general rule, been thought of as wages paid for work done and as money WPA employes like other wage-earners were entitled to spend as they saw fit.

When one recalls how much WPA rates fall below private wages, how inadequate they are to provide average families even an emergency—to say nothing of a maintenance-standard of living—how first one and then another of the security aspects of WPA employment has been thrown overboard, one can readily understand what Representative Woodrum meant when he said that security wages reminded one of what Billy Sunday used to say about the guinea pig—"it was neither guinea nor pig." Similarly, said Mr. Woodrum, "'Security wages' is a misnomer, because a man on a W.P.A. job could not possibly be in a more insecure position, and I do not believe we can seriously dignify the amount of money that is paid him as wages." ²

¹ As shown in chap. 15.
² Congressional Record, May 16, 1940, p. 6250.
CHAPTER VII
EARNINGS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INCOME
OF WPA WORKERS

Scheduled rates of WPA pay described in the foregoing chapter are one thing. Actual earnings are something else. In many instances, workers actually receive less than their scheduled rates. In other instances, however, they are paid more. In either case they sometimes receive income from other sources to augment their WPA earnings.

Actual Monthly Earnings

Earnings of WPA project workers throughout the United States during 1941 averaged $58.79 per worker per month. This was higher than the monthly average for any year since the WPA was established. Monthly average earnings for the years 1936 through 1941 are shown in Table 12.

TABLE 12.—AVERAGE MONTHLY EARNINGS OF WORKERS EMPLOYED
BY WPA, 1936 TO 1941, BY YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average earnings</th>
<th>Per cent of 1936 average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>$52.14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>55.15</td>
<td>105.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>52.85</td>
<td>101.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>54.19</td>
<td>103.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>55.32</td>
<td>106.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>58.79</td>
<td>112.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source of data: Social Security Bulletin, February, 1942, pp. 26-29. Data include earnings on projects operated by other federal agencies but financed from WPA funds.

Although monthly average earnings during 1941 show a sizable increase over the average for 1936, it must be recalled that this gain was largely offset by increases in the cost of living which was some 5 or 6 per cent higher in 1941 than it had been in 1936.

Even the relatively high monthly average WPA earnings of
TABLE 13.—AVERAGE MONTHLY EARNINGS OF WORKERS EMPLOYED BY WPA, WINTERS OF ALTERNATE YEARS, 1936 TO 1942, BY STATE a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>Per cent increase from 1936 to 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$45.92</td>
<td>$52.38</td>
<td>$50.81</td>
<td>$62.46</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>44.17</td>
<td>45.94</td>
<td>49.90</td>
<td>64.20</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>39.95</td>
<td>50.48</td>
<td>54.19</td>
<td>62.31</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>38.41</td>
<td>45.21</td>
<td>48.60</td>
<td>60.62</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>50.35</td>
<td>66.26</td>
<td>60.05</td>
<td>75.40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>50.83</td>
<td>58.08</td>
<td>56.83</td>
<td>73.43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>57.67</td>
<td>64.32</td>
<td>60.26</td>
<td>82.89</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>64.63</td>
<td>72.98</td>
<td>64.05</td>
<td>74.08</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>54.63</td>
<td>64.48</td>
<td>57.51</td>
<td>73.35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>55.14</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>56.81</td>
<td>68.43</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>51.39</td>
<td>58.04</td>
<td>50.61</td>
<td>61.47</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>49.32</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>48.94</td>
<td>60.15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>49.37</td>
<td>52.72</td>
<td>53.60</td>
<td>64.14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>51.40</td>
<td>53.06</td>
<td>57.83</td>
<td>65.83</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>53.96</td>
<td>56.50</td>
<td>55.11</td>
<td>65.31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>55.40</td>
<td>58.99</td>
<td>55.93</td>
<td>64.18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>45.27</td>
<td>50.34</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>60.85</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>41.04</td>
<td>44.53</td>
<td>45.47</td>
<td>58.83</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>42.90</td>
<td>46.35</td>
<td>49.31</td>
<td>52.01</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>39.42</td>
<td>47.42</td>
<td>47.93</td>
<td>55.87</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>39.90</td>
<td>49.03</td>
<td>48.75</td>
<td>61.26</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>36.08</td>
<td>41.79</td>
<td>45.72</td>
<td>58.76</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>45.08</td>
<td>48.59</td>
<td>50.94</td>
<td>68.65</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>42.13</td>
<td>47.35</td>
<td>51.36</td>
<td>67.79</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>40.26</td>
<td>53.31</td>
<td>61.96</td>
<td>84.25</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>25.40</td>
<td>32.16</td>
<td>39.12</td>
<td>50.56</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>37.42</td>
<td>42.76</td>
<td>45.98</td>
<td>57.74</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>24.23</td>
<td>30.14</td>
<td>39.02</td>
<td>51.06</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>24.43</td>
<td>30.48</td>
<td>41.60</td>
<td>54.06</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>26.06</td>
<td>32.16</td>
<td>38.92</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>25.49</td>
<td>37.22</td>
<td>46.82</td>
<td>59.93</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>22.32</td>
<td>30.36</td>
<td>38.96</td>
<td>53.05</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>30.46</td>
<td>38.50</td>
<td>48.42</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>26.25</td>
<td>33.42</td>
<td>37.32</td>
<td>55.62</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>22.28</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>37.82</td>
<td>49.00</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>23.69</td>
<td>30.12</td>
<td>38.71</td>
<td>47.78</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>34.23</td>
<td>41.63</td>
<td>42.82</td>
<td>54.33</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>24.82</td>
<td>29.32</td>
<td>36.54</td>
<td>48.59</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>26.99</td>
<td>29.63</td>
<td>38.10</td>
<td>52.12</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

182
The figures are averages of earnings in three months, December of the previous year, and January and February of the year shown. Average earnings for a single month are not used because of differences in the number of pay-roll periods ending in the same month in different years.


1940 and 1941 were materially lower than the monthly average earnings on regular federal construction projects, amounting to only 46 per cent of such earnings in 1940 and to but 37 per cent during 1941.

Changes in monthly average earnings occur not only from year to year but from month to month within a year, depending upon the wage schedule in effect, the amount of working time lost during a month, shifts in the volume of employment in regions having high as opposed to low wage rates, and changes in the proportion of workers employed at higher wage rates.

Far more striking than these month-to-month variations, however, are the differences to be found in any one month between rates paid in one state as opposed to another. In January, 1939, for example, when the WPA program was at its peak average monthly earnings ranged from as much as $71.19 in New York and $66.28 in Connecticut to as little as $33.03 in Mississippi and $32.65 in Tennessee. In Table 13 are presented, by state,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>Per cent increase from 1936 to 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>$47.72</td>
<td>$53.99</td>
<td>$56.84</td>
<td>$68.61</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>40.26</td>
<td>45.89</td>
<td>54.57</td>
<td>64.87</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>44.76</td>
<td>48.72</td>
<td>52.68</td>
<td>62.36</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>45.86</td>
<td>50.96</td>
<td>53.23</td>
<td>67.14</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>44.52</td>
<td>48.56</td>
<td>53.31</td>
<td>65.56</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>43.48</td>
<td>52.87</td>
<td>58.17</td>
<td>70.82</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>49.08</td>
<td>56.12</td>
<td>58.21</td>
<td>70.39</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>39.85</td>
<td>51.91</td>
<td>55.15</td>
<td>61.55</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>49.92</td>
<td>54.29</td>
<td>59.51</td>
<td>77.22</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>48.46</td>
<td>56.54</td>
<td>61.11</td>
<td>78.38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>53.36</td>
<td>63.75</td>
<td>62.40</td>
<td>81.46</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Averages for the several states have been computed by dividing total earnings for the three months December, January, and February by the monthly average number employed during these three months. This has been done to wash out differences that would otherwise result because of the fact that some months include more pay days than others.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

the monthly average earnings of workers employed on WPA projects during the winter of 1935—1936, and in the winter of each alternate year through 1942. This table, it will be noted, reveals important changes in state averages for one year as opposed to another, and shows that increases for the winter of 1941—1942 over that of 1935—1936 varied widely, amounting to 20 per cent or less in New York, Ohio, and Minnesota, but to at least 93 per cent in 12 southern states and the District of Columbia. In Florida and Kentucky the gain was no less than 135 and 138 per cent, respectively. The relationship between the absolute gains in the several states, between the winter of 1936 and that of 1942, is shown graphically in Diagram 2.

Distribution of Actual Earnings

Although much is known about average earnings in the various states few data are available to show how many individual workers receive any given amount. Among the few available reports on individual earnings is that relating to December, 1935, which indicates that in this month, when earnings of security wage workers averaged $41.57, nearly a third (32.4 per cent) of the workers received less than $30. About the same proportion (32.7 per cent) received between $30 and $50, while the remaining third (34.9 per cent) received $50 or more. Only 2.7 per cent received $90 or more. At the opposite extreme were 4.9 per cent who received from $10 to $15, and 5.7 per cent who received less than $10.

Less comprehensive, though somewhat more recent, information on the distribution of Works Program earnings (not earnings on WPA alone) is available for a sample of approximately 4,400 cases in 13 cities. In March, 1936, the month to which this report applies, the median Works Program earnings for these families was $57.40. Earnings ranged, however, from $100 and over, earned by 2 per cent, to less than $15, earned by another 2 per cent. More than a third (36 per cent) of all families received Works Program earnings of less than $55 a month; slightly less than a third (30 per cent) between $55 and $60;

1 The 12 states were: Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

184
DIAGRAM 2.—CHANGE IN AVERAGE WPA EARNINGS IN INDIVIDUAL STATES FROM WINTER, 1936, TO WINTER, 1942

Figures plotted for each period are average monthly earnings to nearest dollar. States are identified in the margins.
while approximately a third (33 per cent) earned $60 or more.¹

Although relatively little is known about the distribution of individual WPA earnings, a number of official reports show the proportion of workers employed from time to time in the various wage classes which is, after all, what determines how much they may earn.

**Distribution of Workers According to Skill**

The percentage of WPA workers employed, in selected months, in each of the several wage classes established on the basis of skill is presented in Table 14. As may be noted, the number employed as unskilled workers usually has ranged from 60 to 70 per cent of the total. The proportion employed as intermediate and skilled workers, respectively, has been more or less comparable as of the earlier dates specified while on the later dates skilled workers represented a somewhat smaller proportion. Professional and technical workers have comprised from 2 to 5 per cent of the total, and supervisory employes from 3 to 5 per cent of the whole except in the initial stages of the program, when the ratio of these workers was, of necessity, relatively high.

**Relationship of Average Earnings to Other Relief and Assistance Benefits**

Comparisons of average benefits paid under various relief programs are fraught with no little danger and must take account of a number of important considerations. In the first place, there are significant differences in the number of persons to be provided for out of the several types of benefit.

Even if it were possible accurately to adjust various types of relief grants to make allowance for differences in the size of families usually dependent upon them, comparisons still would be more or less hazardous because of (a) differences in the amount of income and resources that beneficiaries under different programs might have, (b) differences in the number of days or weeks for which the various relief benefits are supposed to pro-


The cities included in this study were: Manchester, Bridgeport, Paterson, Wilkes-Barre, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Omaha, Baltimore, Atlanta, Houston, Butte, and San Francisco.
## TABLE 14.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS EMPLOYED BY WPA, BY CLASS OF WORKER, SELECTED MONTHS, 1936 TO 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of worker</th>
<th>June, 1936</th>
<th>June, 1937</th>
<th>June, 1938</th>
<th>December, 1938</th>
<th>June, 1939</th>
<th>December, 1939</th>
<th>June, 1940</th>
<th>December, 1940</th>
<th>June, 1941</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project supervisory employes</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage employes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and technical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, A</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, B</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, all</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total wage employes</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>95.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source of data: WPA, Report on Progress of the WPA Program, June, 1941, p. 49.*
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

vide, and (c) differences in social services (such as medical care and help in the most efficient expenditure of a family’s meager resources) available to one group but not to another.¹

Despite these limitations it is significant to compare differences in the average benefits provided under the WPA as opposed to other relief and assistance programs. Such comparisons make it clear that average monthly earnings of WPA workers are markedly higher than benefits paid to recipients of general relief or aid to dependent children—two forms of assistance which, like WPA employment, normally aid families rather than single individuals as in the case of old-age assistance.

During 1940 and 1941 monthly average WPA earnings exceeded by 73 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively, the average grant to families given aid to dependent children. WPA earnings exceeded average general relief benefits by no less than 131 per cent in 1940 and by 153 per cent in 1941. Among the several states the margin by which WPA earnings have exceeded other relief benefits has varied markedly. During January, 1940, for example, general relief grants throughout the United States averaged but little more than half the average WPA earnings for the month. However, there were 13 states (West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona) in which the average general relief grant was less than one-fourth the state’s average WPA earnings. In two of these states (Georgia and Arkansas) average general relief grants amounted to only about one-eighth of the average WPA earnings paid in the state.² Comparisons between average WPA earnings, general relief grants, and grants to families receiving

¹ Thus, disparities between WPA earnings and relief grants do not, unfortunately, tell the whole tale about differences in standards of living under these two programs. In addition to differences in social or health services, federal surplus commodities, or other resources that might be available to relief recipients but not to employees of the WPA, there are also subtler differences. Employed children or other relatives who feel some responsibility to contribute to the support of parents or other members of a family who may be receiving relief sometimes feel absolved from further responsibility for making such contributions once the former relief recipient becomes a wage-earner under the WPA program. See, for example, Current Family Income of WPA Workers, May, 1938, by the Department of Public Assistance of the Philadelphia County Board, p. 12.

² Though the CCC program was not exclusively a relief measure, it is noteworthy that official reports of benefits given under that program show these to have been in excess of average WPA earnings. In August, 1941, for example, WPA earnings for the country as a whole averaged approximately $60. On the other hand, CCC bene-
aid to dependent children are presented by state for January, 1938, and January, 1942, in Table 15. Essentially the same discrepancies that may be noted in this table also appear in similar comparisons of data relating to other months.

Reduced to a per capita basis, WPA earnings in January, 1940, for example, averaged only about $13.50 per person per month, whereas old-age assistance averaged approximately $20 per individual aided. Individuals having to subsist on general relief fared worst of all, the $25.78 average allowing only about $8.00 per person per month—or less than $2.00 a person a week.

Relatively detailed data available from Illinois indicate that during the fiscal year 1940 old-age assistance averaged approximately $20 a month for each person aided; WPA earnings, approximately $16.50 for each member of a worker’s family; aid to dependent children, approximately $10 per person aided; and general relief, about $9.00.

Comparisons Between WPA Earnings and Relief Previously Granted to the Same Families

Risky though comparisons are, further light is thrown on differences between WPA earnings and relief grants by analysis of amounts of relief formerly granted to families subsequently given WPA employment. Data on the basis of which such comparisons might safely be made are, unfortunately, very limited. Among the most important sources of information on this question is the report of a WPA study of relief conditions in 13 cities in 1935. This report shows that of the relief cases studied “the majority” who were transferred to the Works Program, not merely that of the WPA, “benefited considerably from the transfer,” the Works Program wage rate exceeding the relief grant of the last thirty days on relief in at least 85 per cent of the cases.\(^1\)

fits (including cash allowances for enrollees, clothing, shelter, subsistence, and medical care) averaged approximately $67. CCC allotments have not varied in accordance with the state from which enrollees came. Average WPA earnings in the several states, however, vary widely. Thus, it may be seen that the federal government, through the CCC program, made more generous provision for youths (who may or may not have sent to their families allotments ranging from $22 to $25 a month) than was made under the WPA program, in many states, for family heads.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Although this study is to be distinguished from that mentioned earlier in this chapter, the cities covered were the same.

\(^2\) In this study, it will be noted, reference is to wage rates, not to actual earnings. However, it was reported that discrepancies between rates and earnings were not

(Note continued on p. 192)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WPA earnings</th>
<th>General relief benefits</th>
<th>ADC benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under $5.00</td>
<td>$5.00 to 9.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.00 to 74.99</td>
<td>Mass. N. Y.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.00 to 84.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source of data: WPA and Social Security Board reports.*
INGS OF WPA EMPLOYEES, BY AVERAGE MONTHLY GENERAL RELIEF FAMILIES RECEIVING AID TO DEPENDENT CHILDREN, JANUARY, 1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WPA earnings</th>
<th>General relief benefits</th>
<th>ADC benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under $5.00 to 9.99</td>
<td>$5.00 to 19.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $35.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35.00 to 44.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b Unemployment relief only.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In only about 7 per cent of the cases was the Works Program wage rate lower than the relief grant. In 4 per cent of the cases relief grants were the larger by $20 a month or more. "In some cities," it was reported, these deficiencies were "offset in part by supplementing the Works Program wage with relief; in other cities wage rates were increased by as much as 10 per cent." In still other cities, it might have been added, nothing was done about it.

Intensive analysis of the assigned wage rates and the amounts of relief previously granted to 1,630 families in Philadelphia in 1935 disclosed that the WPA rate (less expenses for carfare and lunches necessarily incident to work but not to direct relief) exceeded the former relief grants in 79 per cent of the cases but fell below the relief grants formerly made to 20 per cent of the families studied. In the remaining 18 cases (representing approximately 1 per cent of the total) the net WPA wage was higher than the previous relief grants but lower than the amount of the grant plus income formerly available to the family but which, it was thought, would be relinquished upon acceptance of WPA employment.

The proportion of cases in which WPA employment was expected to result in lower income increased with the size of family; the proportion rising from 25 per cent of all families of four to 76 per cent of families of eight or more.

Further scattered data gathered from various sources show that although WPA earnings usually exceed, they not infrequently fall below the amount of relief for which families were eligible. Late in 1935 it was reported by the Baltimore Department of Public Welfare that the relief budgets of some 6,000 or 7,000 families, at the time they were transferred to WPA jobs, exceeded the $45 WPA rate at which they were assigned. To mitigate difficulties arising from this situation, WPA wages were increased 10 per cent. Even this increase was held to be inade-

appreciable, since at that time workers were being recompensed for time lost because of inclement weather or other interruptions to projects.

"Works Program wage rates," it was reported, "exceeded former relief grants by at least $20 a month in about three-fourths of the cases studied and by at least $40 a month in about one-third of the cases. Two-thirds of the family cases and 98 percent of the nonfamily cases had Works Program wage rates that exceeded their relief grants by $20 a month or more."—Carmichael, F. L., and Nassimbene, R., Changing Aspects of Urban Relief. WPA, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939, p. 37.
The WPA and Its Program

quate for many families, some of whom had become “almost migratory within the city” because they could not “pay rent and feed a large family on $49.40 a month.”

Early in 1936 a comparison made in Akron, Ohio, of WPA wages for unskilled workers and relief standards for families of five showed that if such a family had to pay what was allowed in relief budgets for fuel, light, clothing, and rent there would remain only $4.41 a week for food, whereas the relief budget allowed $5.90. An adequate diet, according to estimates, would have cost $8.08.

In other areas, too, notably in Pennsylvania and Illinois, certain families have found their WPA wages not infrequently falling below what they had previously received in relief—even though “on the average,” workers received more under the WPA than they had previously been granted. Writing about an area where for two out of ten families the security wage early in 1936 “spelled hardship greater than relief . . . had ever visited on them,” and where two families out of ten ran up to a good many families, “Miss Bailey” (formerly associate editor of the Survey Midmonthly) concluded: “Statistically speaking, I suppose, that eight out of ten makes the whole business a howling success, and if you happen to be the two out of ten it’s just your hard luck.”

Because of the many difficulties involved, not even these comparisons of a family’s WPA earnings with the relief formerly granted to it escape some of the pitfalls encountered in relating WPA wages and relief grants in general. Therefore, to clarify further the relationship between these two types of benefit resort is sometimes made to comparing relief standards (rather than actual grants) with WPA wage rates.

Comparisons Between Relief Standards and WPA Wage Rates

Even this offers no foolproof solution of the basic difficulties of drawing comparisons, however, because (as noted in Chapter III) relief is frequently not granted in accordance with prescribed

---

1 Baltimore Department of Public Welfare, Fourth Annual Report, 1938, p. 22. Baltimore has been one of many cities of the United States which have consistently refused to use relief funds to supplement WPA wages.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

standards and because actual WPA earnings frequently fall below scheduled rates.

Despite these limitations, comparisons of this kind are sometimes made. For example, a memorandum presented to a House Committee by WPA officials in 1939 compared WPA wage rates with relief standards in 28 selected cities having relatively decent relief programs. This report declared: "In those States where the better relief organizations and standards are maintained, there is not a great deal of difference between standard relief budgets for a family of average size and the monthly wage rate for unskilled W. P. A. workers." ¹

This contention was supported by comparisons drawn between monthly WPA wage rates for unskilled workers and monthly relief budgets for families of "average size" (which are not further defined) in the 28 cities in March, 1938. The data presented are reproduced in Table 16. As is evident from this table, WPA rates (not actual earnings) for unskilled workers were less than the monthly relief budget for an "average family" in Camden, Denver, Newark, Seattle, Spokane, Springfield (Mass.), Tacoma, Utica, Wilmington, and Worcester. In the remaining cities the WPA rates were higher than relief standards for so-called average families. It is significant, however, that in some of the cities in which WPA standards were higher than relief standards the latter made no regular provision for such elementary necessities as clothing, milk, and fuel. ² Had these important items been included in the budget standard in cities where they were omitted, this might have resulted in an excess over the WPA rate for unskilled work.

Since actual relief grants frequently fall below prescribed standards, comparisons suggested in Table 16 undoubtedly exaggerate by a considerable margin the extent to which relief actually granted in the listed cities approximated security wage rates for unskilled workers. Nevertheless, this does not alter the facts (a) that in cities maintaining relatively decent relief programs, families of more than average size or those having special

² At the time this comparison was submitted, the WPA was not, as was so often the case during its earlier years, boasting how much higher than relief standards its wage rates were. Rather, the WPA was on the defensive, attempting to justify its wage levels as not out of line with locally prescribed relief standards.
The WPA and Its Program

TABLE 16.—WPA WAGE FOR UNSKILLED WORKERS COMPARED WITH GENERAL RELIEF BUDGET, 28 CITIES, MARCH, 1938

(Cities in order of WPA wage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Monthly WPA wage for unskilled workers</th>
<th>Monthly relief budget for average family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>$49.20</td>
<td>$34.17b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmington</td>
<td>49.50</td>
<td>55.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>79.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Beach</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>50.30e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>50.30e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>48.17d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>50.30e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>65.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokane</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>65.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacoma</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>65.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>44.22d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>46.75e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>60.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>50.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erie</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>48.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>61.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>54.10e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>56.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>50.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>48.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>50.91f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>59.20f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scranton</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>48.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield, Mass.</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>60.42-66.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>52.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>50.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utica</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>63.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>62.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: U.S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Further Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 243.

Rent, fuel and clothing not in budget, but said to be provided as needed.

Clothing not in budget, but said to be provided as needed.

Milk, fuel and clothing not in budget, but said to be provided as needed.

Higher rent said to be provided as needed.

Milk and clothing, not in budget, but said to be provided as needed.

needs may frequently receive less in WPA earnings than might be granted in relief, or (b) that in many areas WPA workers, particularly those with large families, are actually granted relief in addition to their WPA earnings.1

1 This practice is further discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA Policy Regarding Relationship of Wages to Relief Grants

That WPA benefits, by and large, have exceeded relief grants is no mere coincidence. In fact, as shown in Chapters XXXI and XXXIII, one reason why the administration has favored federal as opposed to state and local control and has supported a program of work as contrasted with direct relief has been to permit payment of larger benefits than were thought possible under a direct relief program.

Even before its inception, President Roosevelt announced that earnings on the proposed federal work program were to be higher than amounts then being "received as a relief dole." It was expected that monthly earnings would average $50 a worker. Relief, including both "dole relief" and emergency work relief, at the time (January, 1935), averaged but $30.43 per family, ranging from approximately or more than $48 in Massachusetts, New York, and Nevada, to less than $12 in South Carolina, Kentucky, and Oklahoma.¹

While wages, under the proposed program, were expected on the average to exceed the general relief allowances then being granted, it was early recognized that some families would be unable to earn as much as they had previously received in relief.² Despite hardships which it was known would be entailed, the security wage principle was defended on the ground that, on the whole, it would result in higher average payments. Obviously, if this advantage was to be realized it was important that those assigned to WPA jobs actually represented a fair cross-section of the entire relief population. As subsequent experience was soon to show, however, selection for WPA jobs was often made on the basis of greatest need. In the distribution of available jobs preference was frequently given to family persons as opposed to unattached workers. This, of course, tended to vitiate the "essential justice" which, despite failure to pay some workers

¹ The schedule of WPA earnings, wrote Arthur E. Burns, a member of the WPA staff, averaged "nearly twice the earnings obtained on the Emergency Work Relief Program, slightly more than the monthly average on the Civil Works program, and nearly four times the average monthly earnings paid on work relief during the latter half of 1933."—"Work Relief Wage Policies, 1930-1936," in FERA Monthly Report, June, 1936, p. 53.

² That this did in fact occur has already been shown.
The WPA and Its Program

enough to meet their needs, was expected to result from payment of relatively liberal benefits to others.

Though the administration has taken great pride in the relatively greater adequacy of WPA wages as compared with other relief benefits, this has not been universally applauded. Instead, existing discrepancies have been attacked on two grounds: (1) that they have made it difficult to transfer to other relief programs persons who were not thought good candidates for employment on a work program; and (2) that the relatively more liberal benefits provided under the WPA program create an unjustifiable "hierarchy of relief clients." This inequality, it is said, ought to be abolished both by lowering the higher WPA wage rates and by raising the lower relief benefits.

To many experienced social workers and students of social progress, talk of eliminating "hierarchies" among needy persons simply because the relatively few are better provided for than the many is anathema. It is the very negation, they say, of the best means of achieving social gains which must be purchased piecemeal as public sentiment can be marshaled to support first one and then another progressive step. Labor legislation regulating hours and conditions of work was not all won at once. First came legislation protecting children in dangerous occupations, then that protecting children in other occupations. Then, as public interest was further stirred, there came laws safeguarding women's employment, and finally that of men.

It is seldom seriously proposed to eliminate the "hierarchy" of beneficiaries of social legislation through abolishing child-labor laws, for example, simply because public opinion is not ready to demand for adult males all the protection it is willing to give

1 Difficulties of this kind have been experienced in rural areas, for example, in transferring farmers from WPA jobs to farm relief measures designed specifically to aid them. Difficulties have also been encountered in releasing "unemployable" workers who, upon discharge by the WPA, might be granted wholly inadequate relief if, indeed, relief was available in any amount.

2 In an address before the National Conference of Social Work C. M. Bookman declared: "If we admit all the virtues claimed for the WPA by its warmest friends, we cannot overlook the fact that Bill Smith, living on the north side of Bank Street, who was fortunate enough to secure employment through the WPA, had a fairly ample income to care for his family; while Sam Jones, living on the south side of the same street, who was just as employable and just as needy, was forced to live on a very much lower and very much more inadequate relief budget, often no more than one-third of what his neighbor received." "The Essentials of an Adequate Relief Program," in Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work. Columbia University Press, New York, 1940, p. 173.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

children. Neither is it proposed to leave all prisoners in filthy, obsolete prisons merely because new, adequate and modern prisons cannot immediately be provided for all. Had it not been for establishing first one hierarchy and then another—the mentally ill, the children, the sick, the able-bodied, and the aged—and each hierarchy in its turn taken out of the country’s almshouses, they might all be there yet.

The fact that comparatively decent provision has been made for a relatively few employable persons does not mean that they constitute an indefensible hierarchy that should be disposed of. It represents, rather, a challenge to hasten the day when decent provision can be made for those unknown numbers of needy persons for whom assistance measures are wholly inadequate—if indeed they exist at all.

Supplementation of WPA Earnings

Fortunately for those compelled to subsist on them, the meager wages paid by the WPA are not always the only income available to them. Unfortunately, however, for those who might be interested in the extent to which WPA earnings are supplemented from other sources (such as relief, federal surplus commodities, and wages from private employment), there are but few data to guide them. Nevertheless, it seems likely that supplementation from other earnings, at least, has been of relatively less importance during the later years of the WPA program (especially since 1939) than was previously the case. For this there are two reasons: (a) the lengthening of hours which has left workers with less time to engage in outside employment, and (b) the increasing insistence of Congress that WPA employment be given only to needy workers, thereby excluding from jobs those having any considerable amount of outside income. An additional factor has been the gradual rise of the WPA wage scale with the result that some needs, at least, were more adequately met.

As a result of congressional action, first taken in 1939, families having any other income have been placed in a deferred category, preference in employment being given to families having no income whatever.¹ Since, in some areas, families were included in the deferred class even when their only income was what they

¹ This policy is further discussed in chap. 16.
received from a relief agency,¹ it appears likely that WPA earnings during the later years of the WPA’s history have been supplemented from other sources less frequently than they had been previously.

Following a study made soon after the WPA program got under way and before so much emphasis was placed upon eliminating workers whose income from other sources was thought to be sufficient for their needs, it was reported that of 4,370 cases (in 13 cities) which in March, 1936, received Works Program earnings about 25 per cent had supplementary income.² Of the total number having Works Program earnings some 12 per cent also received earnings from private employment. Approximately 7 per cent also received relief; while the remaining 6 per cent had income from a variety of other sources. The median unsupplemented Works Program income was $58.10; that of families with relief supplementation was $64.30; and that for families having supplementary earnings from private employment, $79.50.

Supplementation from other employment varied widely from city to city, the median ranging from $13.50 in Atlanta and $14.70 in Houston to at least $40 in Bridgeport, Paterson, and Baltimore. Relief supplementation also showed wide disparities in the various cities. Although 7 per cent of the sample families which had Works Program employment in March of that year also received relief, this proportion ranged from 2 per cent or less in Omaha, Baltimore, Atlanta, Houston, Butte, and San Francisco to 11 per cent in St. Louis and 18 per cent in Manchester.

Commenting upon these variations, the report declared:

Policies with regard to giving relief to cases with Works Program employment differed from city to city and changed with fluctuations in the amount of State and city funds available for relief. . . . Only in six [cities]—Bridgeport, Chicago, Detroit, Manchester, Paterson, and St. Louis—was there a definite policy of supplementing WPA wages that were below budgetary needs. In . . . four cities—Baltimore, Omaha, San Francisco, and Wilkes-Barre—practically none of the cases working on the Program were given relief assistance. . . .³

¹ Federal officials make it clear that they have never given their approval to practices of this kind.
² Supplementary earnings in these cases may have been those of the worker employed by the WPA or of another worker who was a member of the same family.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

A second early report of Works Program employes in 13 cities (covering from 1,182 workers in one month to 3,414 in another) reveals that between October, 1935, and July, 1936, the proportion of these workers who received supplementary income from other sources decreased steadily from 79.6 per cent in October, 1935, to 24.5 per cent in March, 1936, then remained fairly constant with but slight variations. As the Works Program gradually got under way, the proportion of workers who received supplementary income in the form of relief declined steadily from 61.8 per cent in October, 1935, to 3.8 per cent in June and July, 1936. Workers having income from relief and from both Works Program and private employment fell from approximately 11 per cent in October and November, 1935, to only about 1 per cent in the ensuing April, May, June, and July. The proportion which had some income from private employment also fell—from between 17 and 18 per cent in October and November, 1935—to approximately 15 per cent in each of the next three months, then rose to more than 20 per cent in April, May, June, and July.

Although these early studies are the only available sources of comprehensive information about the degree to which slim WPA earnings have been pieced out with income from other sources, there is further scattered information from various sections of the country to show the extent to which WPA earnings have been augmented by relief grants and by other earnings.

Relief Granted in Supplementation of WPA Earnings

In view of two facts to which attention has already been directed—namely, (a) the extent to which relief standards frequently prescribe for relatively large families and even for those of moderate size a higher level of living than can be provided through WPA wages, and (b) the fact that ever since 1935 there has been an increasing tendency to place in WPA employment those who are in greatest need—it is remarkable that there has not been more supplementation of WPA wages from relief

—Data regarding relief granted in supplementation of WPA earnings usually relate only to relief granted to a family in the same month as that in which WPA earnings are received. They do not usually permit distinguishing between relief given in supplementation of full monthly WPA earnings and that granted for some part of a month when a worker had no job or was temporarily absent from work on account of illness, inclement weather, or some other reason.

200
funds than is apparent from the scattered information which is available.

However, the apparently small amount of supplementation of WPA earnings which appears to be granted from relief funds is not, unfortunately, a fair indication of the extent to which these wages fail to meet family needs. For this fact there are two explanations: (a) failure on the part of relief agencies which do supplement WPA earnings to report the extent of such supplementation, and (b) refusal or financial inability of relief authorities to effectuate their own ideas as to what needy families should have.¹ In certain sections of the South, for example, WPA wage rates prior to 1939 were regarded as insufficient for the proper support of families of even two or three persons. Yet there was almost no supplementation of this meager pay because there was in these areas almost no relief even for those employable persons who were utterly resourceless—to say nothing of those who held WPA jobs, however poorly paid. A further consideration which cannot be overlooked by those attempting to understand relief policies with respect to supplementation is that the weight of the federal government's example was early thrown against it. So long as the FERA remained alive it frowned upon use of federal funds for supplementation of WPA earnings after any worker had had opportunity to earn a full month's pay.

Some two years after completion of the WPA studies already alluded to as disclosing a wide variety of practice with respect to the granting of supplementary relief, the Social Security Board reported as follows on the nation's largest cities:

The greatest variations in policy occur with respect to supplementing other forms of assistance with general relief. In Milwaukee general relief is available to supplement WPA earnings, NYA earnings and the special types of assistance. Other types of assistance, except WPA earnings, are supplemented with general relief in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. In Newark only WPA earnings are supplemented and in the District of Columbia, NYA earnings are supplemented but WPA earnings are supplemented only with surplus commodities.²

¹ Refusal of supplementary relief, like denial of assistance to employable persons not given WPA employment, is sometimes justified on the ground that this is necessary to compel the federal government to make its program of aid to jobless workers more adequate.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

When the Citizens' Committee for the Study and Survey of Welfare and Relief in Westchester County (New York) attempted to compare policies in effect in different cities it was found that among those studied only Baltimore refused to supplement WPA earnings.¹

The public relief agencies in Hamden, Connecticut; Essex and Monroe counties, New York; Montgomery and Philadelphia counties, Pennsylvania; Wayne County, Michigan; Milwaukee and New York City supplemented WPA earnings if family income fell below budgeted needs. Three agencies were reported as granting supplementation only if needs exceeded income by a specified margin, of $1.00 in Chicago, of $5.00 in Westchester, and of $10 in Nassau County (New York).

In some areas supplementation is denied to workers earning a full-time WPA wage.² Relief in these jurisdictions, therefore, is allowed only when this is necessitated by earnings lost on account of weather, illness, or temporary interruptions to projects. Diametrically opposed to this policy is that in effect in other areas where supplementation is permitted only if full-time earn-

¹ Something of what the policy of no supplementary relief (adopted in 1936) meant in Baltimore has been revealed in a study undertaken by the Citizens Alliance for Social Security which comprised a number of labor, professional, and civic organizations. Most of the families previously granted supplementary relief, it was reported, had at least five children and many of them had seven or eight. The sudden withdrawal of the supplementary income has left parents distraught and helpless in the face of children who do not have enough to eat. One mother told the investigator 'When they ask you for bread, then it hurts.' Another said, 'It's hard to see them suffer, because they don't understand like I do.' A father goes to work on a laboring project hungry and without lunch, because there is not enough to enable everyone to eat. One man walks to work, about five miles away, because he must choose between carfare and milk money. Furthermore, what does it mean in terms of the health of the community, when there is no milk in the house for a family of eight children, when another family with six children has been forced to substitute canned milk for fresh, and when another family divides one quart of milk among six children under nine. These are samples of what the investigators heard and not atypical instances. And while conditions of this kind exist, the debate about whose responsibility these people are, goes on and on and on."—The Relief "Purge." August, 1937, p. 4.

² Notable among other cities which have refused supplementation within the past few years are Philadelphia, Columbus, and during the earlier stages of the WPA program, Chicago. This rigorous policy, it is sometimes argued, is necessary to impress upon the WPA the importance of raising its wage levels. In the meantime, workers whose full WPA wages are insufficient for their needs are caught in the middle, although those whose earnings in private industry are insufficient for their needs may be granted assistance.
ings are insufficient for family needs. In still other areas relief is granted to WPA workers only when there is special need, as for winter clothing, fuel, or medical care which WPA wages are insufficient to cover though they may be regarded as sufficient for "normal" needs.

Large families (including even families of four) are sometimes granted supplementary relief as a matter of course. Official estimates made early in the WPA's history indicated that the average family receiving both Works Program earnings and relief averaged about six members. In some states the average was said to be as high as seven. In Pennsylvania, during July, 1938, the average family receiving relief to supplement security wages averaged no less than eight. In New Jersey, in July, 1940, the average family receiving relief to supplement WPA wages consisted of six persons, the grants for the month averaging about $24. The average family receiving relief to supplement WPA income in Illinois has frequently included six or seven persons.

Study of 225 Chicago families which received relief in supplementation of WPA earnings during the summer of 1936 revealed that in nearly two-thirds of the cases (64 per cent) this was granted because of the size of the worker's family. In more than a fifth of the families supplementary aid was necessitated by illness and in approximately 10 per cent by a combination of illness and size of family. Supplementation to the remaining 6 per cent of the families was made necessary by a variety of factors including failure to use wages for the support of the family, loss of time, and various combinations of factors.

Of the WPA families which received supplementary relief in Iowa in 1936, 75 per cent had at least five members. Illness, too,

1 In defense of this policy it is frequently urged that it is necessary thus (a) to stimulate workers to put in full time and (b) to keep the pressure on the WPA to schedule its operations efficiently, so as to avoid as much lost time as possible and to permit making up time once it has been lost. That needy families constitute the fulcrum against which this leverage on the WPA is exerted appears not to count too heavily against it. Thus, the fact that no workers, or but a few, are given relief in supplementation of WPA earnings may not mean that there is no need or even that resources are inadequate to meet what need there is. It may show only how far some local and state officials are willing to go in using human need as a club with which to compel modifications in federal relief policy.

2 Exceptionally high transportation costs involved in getting to WPA jobs and need for special work clothes, shoes or boots not infrequently entitle WPA workers to relief.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

appeared to be a primary factor giving rise to need for supplementation, since 42 per cent of all expenditures for these supplementary cases was for medical care.

Reluctance to grant relief in supplementation of WPA earnings has sometimes led to bizarre practices. For example, in some jurisdictions workers with large families or special needs, though refused supplementary aid, are freely permitted to give up or refuse WPA jobs altogether and to receive full relief. In at least one area supplementary relief was frowned upon, because the relatively small grants given to piece out insufficient earnings had a tendency to increase the relative proportion of expenditures going for "administration" as opposed to relief, since the work involved in making even small supplementary grants was no less than that required for much larger allowances. To reduce the ratio of administrative costs to relief expenditures, therefore, families whose needs exceeded their WPA wages were continued on direct relief while the available WPA jobs went to families with lesser needs. To avoid causing hardship, emphasis has sometimes been laid upon assigning to WPA jobs only those workers having relatively small families.

Because of unwillingness to grant relief to cover transportation costs to WPA projects in outlying areas Newark (New Jersey) officials in 1938 requested that the WPA assign to suburban projects only those whose families did not comprise more than three persons.

Concerning the amount of supplementation provided as well as the amount of income which is thus supplemented in the various states, but little is known. In addition to sources of information already described, there are, however, periodic reports from a few areas. In Illinois, for example, the average amount of supplementation granted WPA families from month to month is regularly reported. This has frequently averaged from $15 to $20 a family.

Among additional official reports which tell much about the extent of relief supplementation of WPA wages are those issued by such states as Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin, and California. As these reports make clear, the number of cases which receive both WPA earnings and general relief is relatively small in comparison with the total employed by the WPA. 204
The WPA and Its Program

In Massachusetts, in December, 1938, for example, the number of general relief cases having WPA income also was only about 6 per cent of the total employed by the WPA. In December, 1940, the proportion was approximately 12 per cent. In Connecticut supplementation has been comparatively common. The number of WPA workers and those employed on other federal work projects who also received general relief has frequently amounted to from 15 to 20 per cent of the total number thus employed. The number of cases granted relief in supplementation of WPA earnings in New York in September, 1938, represented approximately 8 per cent of all WPA workers. In December, 1940, the proportion was approximately 13.5 per cent. In New Jersey this proportion has been relatively low, amounting to only about 3 per cent in both January and July, 1940. In each of the same two months the proportion in Pennsylvania was approximately 6 per cent.

In Illinois the extent of supplementation of WPA income shows marked seasonal differences, the number of WPA families receiving general relief amounting to about 4 per cent of total WPA employment in July of 1938, 1939, and 1940 and to about 7 per cent of WPA employment in January in each of these years.

Data reported from Wisconsin indicate that relatively large proportions of WPA workers have received supplementary relief. The number of general relief cases having WPA income amounted to nearly 15 per cent of the WPA's total employment in March, 1939. So varied were practices of supplementing WPA earnings in various counties in Iowa¹ that the state relief administration in 1938 forbade use of state relief funds for this purpose.

The extent of supplementation of WPA wages in California has varied considerably not only from season to season but also from year to year. In January, 1940, the number of relief cases also receiving WPA earnings was nearly 10 per cent of the total employed by the WPA. During the previous January the proportion was only about 3 per cent. In July, 1940, the proportion was approximately 7 per cent, whereas in July, 1939, it had been slightly less.

In addition to data relating to entire states, additional information is available from a number of cities which regularly report

¹ In one county in April, 1938, for example, 45 per cent and in another only 2 per cent of all WPA employes were reported as receiving supplementary relief.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

to the Social Security Board. These reports show the proportion of general relief cases in which there is also WPA income.\(^1\) Reports covering 1938 and the first half of 1939, for example, indicate that (among 14 reporting cities) the largest proportions of relief cases also receiving WPA earnings were found in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis, where between 10 and 30 per cent of the cases granted general relief fell in this category. Cities reporting the smallest proportion of their general relief caseloads as receiving WPA wages also were Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

According to an official report of New York City's Department of Welfare the number of cases granted relief in supplementation of WPA earnings averaged 9,139 a month during the fiscal year 1940. This represented about 6 per cent of the city's average relief load and approximately 8.5 per cent of the average number employed by the WPA.

Supplementation of WPA earnings, it will be recalled, may be necessitated (a) by temporary loss, because of sickness, weather, or other cause, of WPA earnings which normally might be sufficient for a family's need; (b) by special needs such as clothing, fuel, or medical care which WPA wages are insufficient to cover though they may be adequate to normal needs; or (c) by the general inadequacy of the wage regardless of lost time or special, temporary needs. In Cleveland it was reported early in 1941 that need for fuel during cold weather rendered many a family of three eligible for relief to supplement WPA wages. In Pittsburgh it was said that so small an item as relatively high costs of transportation to a worker's job might make it necessary to grant relief to supplement WPA benefits for even a small family. Families having five or more members and no resources other than WPA earnings were "almost automatically" eligible for supplementary relief, according to a high relief official.

In at least one southern city, before the 1939 increase in southern WPA wage rates, even families of two were said to be unable (on the lowest WPA wage rates) to provide a standard of living which relief authorities considered adequate to their need. Despite this fact there was no thought of supplementing earnings,

\(^1\) This base, it will be noted, differs from that used in the foregoing analysis of state data. Because of differences in methods of reporting, relief and WPA employment data from the same local political subdivision frequently are not comparable.
of course, inasmuch as there was no relief for needy employable persons even if they had no WPA employment.

Supplementation from CCC and NYA Earnings

Families having one member employed by the WPA may have other members employed by the NYA. While NYA benefits are not intended to do more than cover part of a youth's own needs and are not expected to help other members of a family they do mean that WPA earnings of a family head do not need to be spread quite as thin as they otherwise would.

Here again, unfortunately, data are not available to show the extent to which supplementary income of this sort is available to ease the strain in households primarily dependent upon WPA earnings.

A second type of supplementary aid which, prior to 1942, was available to WPA workers' families was the allotment that a CCC enrollee might have sent home each month during the relatively short period of his enrollment.

Although no comprehensive reports are available to show what proportion of those enrolled in the CCC in any one month were members of, or sent allotments to, families having WPA employment, quarterly reports of youths enrolled during specified periods do show the number of junior enrollees who made allotments to "federal work-relief families." For the period of July 1 to 20, 1939, for example, this number was approximately 12,200, or 19.3 per cent of the total number enrolled during this period. During subsequent enrollment periods in 1940 and 1941 this proportion ranged from 15.7 per cent in July, 1940, to 19.3 per cent in May, 1941.1

If the CCC allotments to any of these families enabled them to get along without WPA employment, benefits earned under the CCC program would not, of course, be in supplementation of WPA earnings.

Supplementary Income from Private Employment

During the early stages of the WPA program workers and members of their families were not only permitted but encour-
aged to supplement their WPA earnings if possible through other employment. WPA wages were wholly insufficient for family support, said officials in many areas, unless they could somehow be augmented. Furthermore, it was held that if workers could be encouraged to maintain contacts with private employers, this would enhance their opportunities for employment and hasten the day when they might be able to get along on their own. It has also been maintained that permitting WPA employes to hold outside jobs was a valuable means of getting employers to see that these workers, far from being shovel-leaners, really wanted to and could "work for what they got."

The practice of permitting outside employment soon drew fire from several quarters, however. Watchful taxpayers complained that WPA jobs were being held by workers who were not in need. Organized labor objected that WPA employes, given a back-log of security, were undercutting established wage rates through acceptance during their off-time of substandard wages. These objections, said WPA officials, showed how very difficult it was for WPA workers to please everybody. First they were criticized because they would not work enough. Now they were attacked because they worked too much.

Considerable interest in this issue of supplementing WPA earnings was generated by the admission of the state WPA administrator for Illinois, in testimony before the Senate (Byrnes) Committee investigating relief, that about 9 per cent of some 150,000 WPA workers studied in Illinois also had private employment.1

Another glimmer of light is thrown on this question by an early Pennsylvania survey which disclosed that only about 10 per cent of the families selected for study and having Works Program employment (not that provided by the WPA alone) had one member in private employment, 1.7 per cent had two, while less than 1 per cent had more than two privately employed.

Having had its interest whetted by testimony of this kind and by complaints that WPA workers were "two-timing"—holding per cent in Georgia, 2 per cent in New York, and 3 per cent in Wyoming, to 35 per cent in South Dakota, 45 per cent in Kentucky, and more than 63 per cent in Texas! See, for example, CCC, Selection Report (Intermediate Enrollment), May, 1941, p. 1. 2

1 In only about 3,500 cases, however, were earnings sufficient to provide as much as 90 per cent of the amount of relief to which they were entitled under state regulations.

208
other jobs concurrently with their WPA employment—the Committee in November and December, 1937, investigated the matter in five cities. The studies were restricted to skilled workers, who, because of receiving relatively high rates of pay and working relatively short hours on WPA, and also because of the superior marketability of their labor, might have been expected to be the principal transgressors. Interviews were held with 7,982 skilled workers. Of these 5,049 (about 63 per cent) admitted they had other employment. More than four-fifths (85 per cent) of those admitting outside earnings reported receiving these for the same month for which they had been paid by the WPA.

When, as a result of findings of this type, Congress in 1938 required that each worker on WPA submit a quarterly statement of his outside earnings, the WPA made an analysis of reports submitted. This disclosed that over three-fourths (76.5 per cent) of the workers reporting stated that they had received no earnings whatever from outside jobs held concurrently with WPA employment. About 6 per cent reported quarterly earnings of less than $5.00; approximately 5 per cent, earnings of $5.00 to $10; approximately 5 per cent, earnings of $10 to $20; 2.3 per cent, earnings of $20 to $30; 1.2 per cent, earnings of $30 to $40; and 2.2 per cent quarterly earnings of more than $40. For all workers reporting earnings, the average for the three-month period was only $10.47.

When Congress substituted for the requirement regarding quarterly statements the provision that periodic reviews of workers' needs should be made by the WPA, submission of the reports of outside earnings was discontinued.

---

1 Atlanta, Baltimore, New York, Omaha, and Pittsburgh.
2 Skilled workers constituted only about 14.5 per cent of WPA rolls in September, 1937.
3 A relief survey made in Washington, D. C., revealed that in May, 1938, 4.7 per cent of those employed by the WPA also received wages from private employment. In some instances, it was reported, these exceeded the WPA wages.
4 In defense of workers' interest in finding other jobs to augment their earnings, Mr. Hopkins once declared: "The new charge this year is that W.P.A. workers are working too much—that they are getting out and finding extra work on the side. These stories grew out of a limited survey of several thousand skilled workers in five cities, where about 60 per cent of this small group were found to be getting a day or two of extra work each month. I don't think this is important, in spite of the play it got in the papers, and I do think it is the perfectly natural thing for a good American workman to try to do."—WPA Release 4-1676, May 8, 1938.
5 Since no verification was sought from employers, it is probable that these reports may have understated the actual facts.
6 Effects of the periodic reviews are discussed in chap. 17.
Surplus Commodities, a Form of Supplementation

Federal surplus commodities, as well as relief and other earnings, have been available to WPA families in many parts of the country to supplement their work-relief income. Almost no comprehensive data are available, however, to show the number of such families, the value of commodities given them, or the amount of other income thus supplemented.

Commodities distributed in kind from time to time by the Surplus Marketing Administration, and previously by the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, are not selected with a view to meeting most pressing family needs, but rather to stabilize agricultural prices and improve the farm market. This obviously narrows the range of items made available. Families receiving these commodities have no foreknowledge as to what to expect and therefore are frequently unable to plan for their effective use.\footnote{Description of the kinds and quantities of commodities made available to families from time to time is included in chap. 3.} The so-called "stamp plan" which, in March, 1942, was in effect in some 1,400 cities and counties, has helped to overcome this difficulty inasmuch as it places somewhat more control of his dietary in the hands of the recipient.

Policies with respect to giving surplus commodities to families benefiting from WPA employment have varied widely from place to place and from time to time. At one extreme has been the practice of giving commodities almost automatically to any WPA family. In some instances they have been given to families listed by the WPA as needing them. At the opposite extreme has been the policy (usually found in the South where, ironically enough, WPA wages are lowest and other relief provisions least nearly adequate) of refusing commodities even to large families receiving WPA wages. Less extreme policies in effect in many areas have permitted the distribution of surplus foods only to relatively large families, to those "with several children" or to families of six or more. These general rules are sometimes qualified by requirements that even large families may not be given commodities if there is more than one wage-earner in the family or unless it is wholly or largely dependent upon its WPA income. Even in states in which commodities have been denied to WPA families in general (or to small families having WPA income) these limi-
The WPA and Its Program

tations are frequently relaxed when a worker loses earnings because of illness, inclement weather, or other interruptions to project operations.

While comprehensive reports of the extent to which WPA workers are benefited from surplus commodities are lacking, information from a few areas is available. In New York City, for example, the Welfare Council reports periodically the number of WPA workers participating in the stamp plan, the value of stamps (orange in color) purchased by them, and the value of the additional blue stamps given to them.\(^1\) In both June and July, 1941, over 30,000 WPA workers participated in the stamp plan in New York City. These workers (representing approximately 46 per cent of all WPA workers in June and about 52 per cent of those employed in July) purchased approximately $950,000 worth of orange stamps in each of the months and received, in addition, about $475,000 worth of blue stamps.

In Illinois, during the fiscal year 1940, some 14,000 WPA workers each month were reported to have received surplus foods. During the previous year the monthly average had been approximately 25,000. In 1937 and 1938 the monthly averages were only about 6,000 and 8,000 respectively.

In Tennessee in June, 1941, when WPA employment totaled 28,719, nearly 7,000 WPA families (or 24 per cent of the total) were given commodities. In Minnesota in September, 1941, for example, when WPA employment in the state totaled approximately 27,500, there were 14,873 WPA families (including a total of 60,153 persons) that purchased $321,723 worth of stamps and received an additional $160,862 worth of blue stamps. In Montana in May, 1941, 3,140 WPA families received commodities. These represented approximately 34 per cent of those (9,172) given WPA employment during that month.

When WPA employment in California in October, 1936, amounted to approximately 108,000, some 15,000 families (or about 14 per cent of the total) were given surplus commodities.

What is perhaps most striking about use of commodities to sup-

\(^1\) The former may be used to purchase any foods, while the latter may be used only for the purchase of such foods as are officially listed from time to time as "surplus foods." For a description of the operation of the stamp plan see Economic Analysis of the Food Stamp Plan, by Norman L. Gold, and others, Special Report of the United States Department of Agriculture, October, 1940. Government Printing Office, Washington.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

plement WPA earnings is that policies regarding their distribution are likely to be most stringent in the very areas where wages are lowest and where other relief provisions are least nearly adequate. These restrictive policies are frequently justified on the ground that WPA workers already enjoy so much more liberal benefits than any other class of relief recipients particularly those receiving general relief that further additions to their wages are indefensible. Thus, the very breakdown of general relief programs which the federal government has done nothing to prevent, has militated against the use of commodities which have been purchased and made available by the federal government for the purpose of providing for WPA workers (among others) additional food which is necessary to piece out their admittedly inadequate resources.

Among the several aspects of the WPA wage policy which command attention—notably, the inadequacy of many wage rates to provide even an emergency standard of living, the fact that relief standards frequently assume families to need more than workers can earn on WPA jobs, and the fact that, low as they are, they average more than other types of benefits—none is more striking than the lack of integration of the nation's various relief programs as evidenced by the unavailability of information about how much these several programs contribute to the supplementation of WPA earnings.
CHAPTER VIII
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

HOURS OF WORK AND HOURLY RATES OF PAY

WPA workers, to receive the monthly earnings payable for the type of work performed in the locality where they are employed, must as a general rule put in 130 hours a month, or 30 a week.1 Hours of work may not, normally, exceed 8 a day or 40 a week.

Exemptions from 130-Hour Provision

Exceptions to this policy may be authorized by the WPA commissioner, who is empowered by law to permit more than 130 hours a month if necessary: (a) to protect work already done on a project; (b) to permit making up lost time; (c) in case of an emergency involving the public welfare; or (d) to facilitate the prosecution of projects which are important to the national defense program. Under this last exemption weekly hours by the end of April, 1941, had been increased to 40 for nearly 1,500 workers; to 48 for some 130,000 workers; to 50 for approximately 8,000.

Further exemptions, permitting the commissioner to employ certain workers fewer rather than more than 130 hours a month have, as already noted,2 been authorized by Congress so as to limit the earnings of workers having no dependents and to permit the employment of veterans (veterans' widows, and the wives of unemployable veterans) to work only enough hours during a month to bring their total income to approximately the amount they might earn if employed by the WPA full time. The commis-

---

1 Under policies prescribed in 1941, it became mandatory to pay workers on the basis of four-week fiscal periods rather than on the basis of calendar months. Workers have therefore been required to put in 120 hours for each fiscal four-week period of which there are, of course, 13 in a year. Monthly earnings for the fiscal period are twelve-thirteenth of the rate scheduled for the calendar month.—WPA Rules and Regulations Governing Employment, Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 28, pp. 1-2, rev. February 5, 1941.

2 See chap. 6.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

sioner, however, had not (by July, 1942) authorized either of these practices.¹

Earlier Policies Regarding Hours

The 130-hour provision, first written into law in 1939 upon recommendation of Colonel Harrington, was the first control to be exercised by Congress over WPA hours. Previously these had been determined by administrative action. The new policy marked a sharp reversal of the WPA's earlier policy, which required different classes of workers to put in only enough hours during a month to earn their monthly wage at hourly rates established by state administrators as the rates “prevailing” in their respective counties for the various types of work done. Thus, even those workers who earned the same monthly wage, under the earlier policy, frequently worked a different number of hours because of differences in their hourly rates of pay. When confusions arising from these differences were added to further complexities arising from variations in monthly earnings, the result was a maze of operating schedules that became the bane of WPA officials. In New York City alone there were over 125 different working schedules. Throughout the nation as a whole hours varied from 50 to 140 a month, depending on workers' monthly and hourly rates. The result was said to have been a complex tangle of some 4,000 different working schedules.²

The almost innumerable difficulties encountered in operating projects on the basis of requiring different classes of workers to work a different number of hours during a month were believed seriously to reduce the WPA’s efficiency and were a major consideration contributing to the reversal of policy effected in 1939. Expectations that increased efficiency would result from requiring all workers to work 130 hours a month seemed within a year to have been fully justified. When Colonel Harrington appeared before a House Committee in April, 1940, he was enthusiastic about how well the new policy had worked and declared it “the

¹ Nevertheless, the WPA administrator for up-state New York, as noted earlier, instituted the policy of employing for less than the normal number of hours workers having no dependents.

² For specific illustrations of rates paid to various types of workers in different counties of the several states see Congressional Record, June 16, 1939, pp. 7353 ff., and July 28, 1939, pp. 10311 ff. As already noted, congressional disaffection over disparities among these rates figured largely in debates on the question of reducing existing differences in monthly rates paid in different sections of the country.
The WPA and Its Program

greatest single improvement in the operation and administration of the program . . . since its inception." Efficiency, he said, had been increased, administration simplified, and the former practice of skilled workers’ supplementing their WPA wages by outside earnings “very notably reduced.” The change of policy was also thought to have removed a source of no little hostility toward the WPA. “People who work regular hours,” Colonel Harrington once declared, “could hardly be expected to understand or approve an arrangement which apparently put WPA workers in a privileged position so far as hours of work were concerned. And, since these shorter hours were the privilege of only a minority of WPA workers, the arrangement was certainly not approved by the bulk of the WPA workers themselves. It was one more thing which differentiated our WPA work from ordinary work, and made it difficult to maintain good morale on our projects.”

In view of the fight made by organized labor in 1935 to get Congress to write into the first ERA Act a provision requiring payment of prevailing rates to workers employed on the Works Program, it is remarkable that more pressure was not brought to bear to prevent abolition of prevailing wage provisions in 1939. This action of Congress apparently caught labor off its guard.

2 WPA Release 4-2057, November 2, 1939. In passing, it may be pointed out that elimination of one difference between WPA and other employment was achieved only by substituting differences in hourly rates of pay for it. Furthermore, the substitution still left untouched the most characteristic, and in the long run probably the most important, aspects of WPA employment—the limitation of jobs to needy workers and the limitation of monthly earnings to the so-called “security wage.”
3 In explanation of labor’s position, William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, soon after enactment of the new law declared that labor had thought the “government was committed to pay the prevailing rate of wages. It is written in the Walsh-Healy Act. . . . We thought that was part of the Ten Commandments of the government.

“We assumed that we were committed to that policy. Imagine our surprise when the recent relief bill was passed by the House and we found that the provision of prevailing rate of wages was eliminated. We became active and the A. F. of L. prepared an amendment to restore it. The Senate accepted it and referred it to the conference committee of the Senate and House and the committee eliminated it.

“I can’t understand the action of the committee. I can’t believe it was a move of the leaders of the government . . . .

“We are going to petition Congress to right the wrong that was committed and we are going to place the responsibility where it belongs. We are going to mobilize the strength of the 5,000,000 men and women members of the A. F. of L. and their friends. . . .

“ar Congress refuses, then, in pursuance of our non-partisan policy, we will be
Kenneth Crawford, writing in the New York Post, declared that although one representative of the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) appearing before the House Appropriations Committee asked abolition of the 130-hour clause “the lobbying machine of the Federation was not put in operation to defeat it.”

This was explained in part, no doubt, by the speed with which Congress acted. Requested by Colonel Harrington, supported by the President, and accepted by the House Appropriations Committee, the House itself without debate avidly seized upon the proposition requiring all WPA workers to work 130 hours a month in return for their “security wage.” Unlike the House, the upper chamber refused for a time to go along with the administration on the abolition of prevailing hourly rates, but ultimately had to yield.

Having been caught flat-footed and quiescent while prevailing hourly rates were being written into the discard, organized labor was quick to spring to the attack once the law had been passed and abolition of the cherished “prevailing rates” effected. Strikes were called “spontaneously” in various parts of the country; a number of amendments to various pending bills were offered in both the House and Senate to undo what had already been done; and William Green called an “emergency conference” of 200 labor leaders to plan further action. Congress, however, remained adamant.

Payment of prevailing hourly rates, abandoned by Congress in 1939, had been made mandatory in 1936—but only after WPA officials on their own authority had opened the door to the payment of prevailing rates. This administrative action represented a complete about-face with regard to wage policy and caused no little bitterness in Congress. Resentment ran especially high in the Senate, which only with great reluctance and after what was probably the most bitter and closely drawn battle over any issue connected with the WPA program had finally agreed, in 1935, to omit from the original ERA Act a provision requiring payment of prevailing wages.¹

¹ New York Post, July 7, 1939.

² When Mr. Hopkins in 1936 urged payment of prevailing hourly rates, Senator Carter Glass, who had supported the administration in its opposite position in 1935, retorted: “That makes me deplore the fact that I have been put in a position of heard from in the next political election.”—As quoted in the New York Times, July 11, 1939.
Making Up Lost Time

WPA workers, as noted already, are paid only for time actually worked. This policy, adopted when the ERA Act of 1936 became operative, marked the scuttling of the WPA’s original policy of regarding monthly earnings as “a salary” payable even though project operations were suspended because of weather conditions or other temporary interruptions beyond workers’ control. This principle, it is important to remember, was one of the fundamental arguments advanced in justification not only of the whole concept of the security wage but of the low rates prescribed.

Even while workers were being paid for time lost through no fault of their own, they were required to report for work and to be officially dismissed for the day unless otherwise notified by the project supervisor.

Upon abandonment of the policy of paying workers for time lost through no fault of their own, they were given opportunity to make up time lost because of weather conditions or other temporary interruptions to projects just as they had previously been allowed to do if they were injured and suffered disability of less than fifteen days duration. Gradually permission to make up lost earnings was extended to losses resulting from other causes such as military training, voting, legal holidays, illness, illness or death of a member of the employee’s immediate family, attendance at meetings of labor organizations representing the immediate interests of WPA workers, looking for other employment or taking civil service examinations, interviews by relief or public welfare officials responsible for determining workers’ eligibility for continued employment, or finally, for any cause found by a state administrator or his authorized representative to be “reasonable.”

Opportunity to make up earnings lost because of these or other specified causes, though liberal, is not without limits. For example, even workers making up time are not permitted to work more

making myself very obnoxious to organized labor, because I was authoritatively told that the prevailing rates of wages would greatly diminish the amount of work done, would involve an additional expenditure of more than a billion dollars and impair the credit of the United States.”—U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 27.
than a specified number of hours a day or a week. Limits have also been placed on the total number of hours a worker may accumulate. Sometimes these have been limited to 50 per cent of a worker’s normal monthly hours, sometimes to a total of sixty-five hours. A further limitation has been the requirement that lost time must be made up either in the same or succeeding payroll period.

Although time lost for specified causes may be made up, and although temporary absence because of other reasons is excusable, workers are subject to dismissal for “habitual absence.”^1

**Overtime**

Although WPA workers are docked for time lost, they are not given extra pay for “overtime.” Instead, they are subsequently given time off to compensate for extra hours put in for one reason or another. Especially in time of emergency, or to complete a particularly important project by a given deadline, WPA workers have sometimes earned well-merited commendation by volunteering to work overtime without asking any assurance that they be given compensating time off. Regularly scheduled hours in excess of 130 a month, when authorized for any of the purposes noted above are, of course, paid for and are not considered overtime.

**Rights to Organize, to Present Grievances, and to Strike**

**Freedom to Organize**

WPA workers are permitted to join any kind of labor organization they choose. To guarantee this freedom, WPA officials are forbidden both by law and regulation to interfere with workers’ rights to organize and are forbidden to discriminate against workers because of activity in unions or other labor organizations. Severe penalties are prescribed for either offense.2

---

^1 This provision has been subject to a wide variety of interpretations from time to time and from place to place, and has been variously administered in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, WPA officials in testimony in 1940 declared that the administrative provision for dropping workers after five days’ absence without notice was “universally applied.”

^2 Exceptions to these generalizations would have to be made, of course, in the case of workers belonging to organizations which advocated overthrow of the government or otherwise ran athwart specific legislation regarding eligibility for employment.
The WPA and Its Program

Recognition of workers' rights to organize was reaffirmed by President Roosevelt in August, 1940, when in a letter to the American Security Conference (made up largely of WPA workers and others interested in their cause) he declared:

I have consistently maintained that those unemployed through no fault of their own or employed on work projects have the same right of self-organization possessed by other groups in the population. This Administration has upheld the right to self-organization of project workers and will protect them in the orderly exercise of that right. Our democracy, threatened as it is today, needs the viewpoint of all sections of our population in order to solve our pressing economic and social problems.¹

Despite all that administration spokesmen have said—and done—about giving to WPA workers what President Roosevelt termed "the same right of self-organization possessed by other groups in the population," such vital questions as wages and hours (since 1939 at least) have been determined by Congress and have therefore been beyond the pale of bargaining. Furthermore, WPA workers have been denied the powerful weapon traditionally resorted to by organized labor—the right to strike.

In spite of explicit prohibitions of discrimination against members of any organization, various complainants have, from time to time, declared that their organizations and members were discriminated against.²

Although workers on WPA projects are supposed to be permitted to join unions or other labor organizations of their own choosing, WPA officials have frequently emphasized the fact that it is not necessary for them to do so.³ Early in the history of the

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, August 19, 1940. WPA policy on this question, in July, 1940, prescribed that "Project employees who are qualified by occupational training and experience for assignment to work on projects shall not be discriminated against because of organizational activity, membership or non-membership in a labor organization, or for any other reason whatsoever, nor shall their jobs be in jeopardy because of failure to make a contribution to collections of money for any purpose. No person employed by or seeking employment with the Work Projects Administration shall be denied such employment opportunity because he is or is not a member or officer of any labor organization, league, council, or an association of the unemployed, or because of any petition or complaint he may have filed."—WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, secs. 62-63, July 16, 1940.

² Prominent among these is Frank Ingram, general secretary-treasurer of the Workers Alliance, who, in testimony before a House Committee, charged that the WPA had hampered the Alliance's efforts to organize WPA workers.—See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 928-929.

³ In their emphasis on this point various officials have sometimes leaned over backward—even to the extent of appearing to belittle membership in such organi-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA Victor Ridder, while serving as WPA administrator for New York City, expressed the ambitious hope to be able to administer the New York City program so fairly that labor organizations would not be necessary. To this a leader among WPA workers retorted: "Past experience has convinced WPA employes that the bureaucracy of the relief set-up will not listen unless forced by unions. Individuals are lost in the maze of assistant to assistant supervisors."¹

WPA officials repeatedly have refused to enter into written agreements with labor organizations, and (despite pressure from a number of groups) have also refused to recognize any one organization as a bargaining group for all WPA workers in any given area.

Grievances and Appeals

WPA workers are permitted to present grievances either to foremen or to other local WPA officials. This they may do themselves or through "delegates, stewards, or other representatives of their own choosing."² Such representatives need not necessarily be persons employed by the WPA. A worker having grievances not settled to his satisfaction by his foreman or by area or district WPA officials may appeal to the Division of Employment of the state WPA, which may review the case, render a decision, or hold a hearing. Final decision rendered by the state administrator or his authorized representative must be made in writing to the complainant or his representative. If this decision is not satisfactory, the grievance may be carried to the assistant commissioner of the federal WPA in charge of the Division of Employment.

Appeals taken to Washington have, since early in 1939, been handled by a special section on labor appeals. Such appeals are,


For a description of procedures and machinery for the handling of workers' grievances and complaints in New York City see New York City WPA, The Employment Program, [1939], pp. 35-37.

220
The WPA and Its Program

however, relatively few in number, only 15 or 20 having been made each quarter during 1940.

That workers have appreciated efforts made by the WPA to protect their rights is evidenced by a memorandum issued in 1938 by the Workers Alliance. This declared:

We believe that the Administration does not desire that workers shall be subject to any form of coercion, abuse, favoritism, or discrimination. We believe that the Administration desires that only such conditions shall be imposed as are absolutely necessary to assure maximum possible productivity, efficient operation, and that it seeks to make no other demands upon the workers.\(^1\)

Despite all the WPA has attempted to do to safeguard workers' rights, however, complaints have frequently been made that the mills grind much too slowly and none too smoothly. Repeatedly congressmen and senators as well as representatives of WPA workers themselves have sought modifications in the WPA's labor policy. The Workers Alliance, for example, though appreciative of what the WPA has done to foster good labor relations, has also criticized what it termed the WPA’s failure adequately to protect workers' rights.

To remedy what were termed “basic deficiencies” the Workers Alliance in 1938 proposed “an independent agency” which could act “with authority” and not be “subordinate to the very officials in the field that may be party to the disputes.” It was proposed also that this agency should “have the power and capacity to indemnify the workers for losses unjustly sustained.”\(^2\) Various proposals to establish independent appeals boards of one kind or another have received support from a number of quarters.\(^3\)

Though the WPA has established—and has taken no little pride in—methods by which workers may appeal questions relating to working conditions and possible discrimination or other unfair treatment, it is remarkable indeed that no comparable provisions have been made to assure fair treatment of workers who apply for but are denied certification for WPA jobs.\(^4\) In a few

\(^1\) U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, p. 1280.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 1281.

\(^3\) See, for example, U. S. House, H. R. 8615. 76th Congress, 3d Session. February 22, 1940.

\(^4\) This issue is further discussed in chap. 14.
isolated jurisdictions appeals systems established by relief authori¬ties to assure fair treatment of relief applicants and recipients have been said to be available also to applicants for WPA jobs. When this has occurred, however, it has not been because it was required by the WPA, but in spite of the fact that it was not.

The Right to Strike

Although WPA workers are free to organize and to be repre¬sented by job stewards or others of their own choosing, they have never been officially admitted to have a right to strike. From the first months of the WPA’s existence, President Roosevelt and WPA officials have frequently reiterated their position that there could be no “strike against the government” by WPA workers. As early as August, 1935, for example, the President was reported by the New York Times to have declared that there could be no strike against relief projects. He was also said to have pointed out that jobs were being offered on the principle that con¬tinuance of “the dole” would have a bad effect on morale, but that if relief clients did not choose to accept the proffered work they could not be compelled to do so. In almost identical lan¬guage, the President in 1939 reaffirmed his earlier position, de¬claring “you cannot strike against the government.”

With this view most observers appear to agree. What is most noteworthy about this general consensus, however, is that many who share it do so not because the struck jobs were “government” jobs but because they were relief, not real, jobs. “What the dis¬satisfied workers are threatening to do,” said the New York Times editorially, “is to remove themselves from the relief rolls.” Even liberal Senator Norris of Nebraska once said he thought the President’s position was sound because “when people

1Refusal to recognize this right has resulted in humorous attempts to find words to describe such “strikes” as are attempted and to apply to workers participating in them. Early in WPA’s history this difficulty was encountered in a press interview with the President who questioned whether the stoppages or “defections from WPA employment” then in effect could be called strikes. Instead, he agreed, they might be termed “so-called strikes,” and those who participated in them, “men who had re¬turned to their homes.”—As quoted in the New York Times, August 10, 1935.

2Ibid., July 8, 1939.

222
The WPA and Its Program

are getting something from the government they should not attempt to strike.\(^1\)

Most emphatic of all was Harry Hopkins. In 1935 he declared, "There is no such thing as a strike on a relief job. This is a relief program," he said of the Works Program. "We can't force people to take jobs. If they don't want to take jobs at relief wages, they don't have to. But they will not be on relief if they refuse to take jobs."\(^2\)

Since WPA employment is limited to needy workers who, in the absence of their WPA earnings, would probably have to apply for relief, refusal of WPA employment frequently is regarded as tantamount to refusal to support one's family. Thus local authorities have at hand a powerful weapon to break WPA strikes. They may not only refuse to grant relief to WPA strikers (even though strikers in private jobs might be wholly eligible for relief) but may also institute court action for willful refusal to support dependents for whom the workers may be responsible.

Critics of WPA strikes frequently point out that WPA workers, like any other group of government employes or citizens, have the right to state their case to Congress and the nation. Once the time for discussion is past, however, and the nation acting through Congress made its decision, workers should not, say these observers, expect the further right to strike against that decision.

As Mr. Green put it to labor representatives called to Washington to discuss what to do about abandonment of the prevailing wage principle in 1939, strikes on WPA projects had never been ordered by the American Federation of Labor, because they recognized that the remedy lay with Congress rather than through the exercise of economic power.

Although he said he deplored strikes of WPA workers because "they mean interruption of the program, loss of time and money for the workers," David Lasser, while president of the Workers Alliance in 1939, nevertheless condoned them on the ground that sometimes "there are occasions when conditions become so intolerable that strike action must be used to call them to the attention of the public and the Federal Government. Depriving WPA

\(^1\) Ibid., July 15, 1939.
\(^2\) Denver Post, August 9, 1935.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

workers of the right to strike," he declared, "would mean instituting forced labor—a thing abhorrent to our democracy." ¹

Late in 1936, while all Chicago was discussing the merits of WPA "strikes" and "sit-ins," then being directed primarily against reductions in employment, Frank McCullough, liberal leader in many progressive movements, was asked to write for the News Letter of the Chicago Council of Social Agencies "a word for the strikers." In response Mr. McCullough wrote:

To men and women fighting the waves of depression without chance of employment in private industry, a job on WPA is a life line. . . . To be cut off from this life line or threatened with such a cut off is a calamity for those directly concerned. . . .

Until this colorful action [i.e., the "strike"] took place, Chicago had little notion of the WPA layoffs both present and threatened—or of the temper of workers who had lost or are about to lose their jobs. It has been good for Chicago to awaken somewhat to this need. It is certainly doubtful if any more conventional protest would have dented the surface of the city's consciousness. . . .

If they [our friends in official positions] will look beyond the extra bother we cause them to the larger needs we are serving, they will appreciate that a well organized "sit-in" protest is not nearly so disorderly as the failure of responsible governmental officials to provide employment and security to meet pressing human needs.²

Called Strikes

Notwithstanding official policies that one cannot strike against the government or against relief, strikes have, with varying degrees of success, been carried out by WPA workers as protests against many kinds of grievances.³ Among the most noteworthy of these were strikes in New York City⁴ and elsewhere in 1935 when workers demanded prevailing hourly rates of pay. Further walk-outs, sit-downs, and stay-ins have broken out from time to time, first in one section of the country and then another, as organized or sporadic opposition to general policies or local grievances came to a head. One widely publicized wave of "strikes" came in 1939 when the 130-hour-a-month provision

¹ As quoted in the United States News, July 17, 1939.
³ For detailed discussion of these see Ziskind, David, One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees. Columbia University Press, New York, 1940.
⁴ For a day-by-day account of these strikes in New York City see the New York Times for August and September, 1935.

224
The WPA and Its Program

knocked out the policy of paying prevailing hourly rates of pay.¹

WPA policies with respect to strikes have differed according to time, place, and circumstance. To minimize the likelihood of violence projects have frequently been suspended as soon as strikes were called. Although actions of this kind have sometimes been criticized as lockouts, labor leaders in Minneapolis in 1939 severely condemned WPA officials for not closing down projects there before two fatalities occurred.²

A second practice frequently resorted to by the WPA has been to discharge strikers. These discharges are sometimes not for striking alone, but for making trouble, being intractable, being obstructionists, Communists, "unadaptable to a work program," or (as in 1939) for being absent from the job for five days or longer without notice.³ Further actions against strikers in 1939 included the listing of strikers’ names for the House Committee Investigating the WPA which was interested in uncovering subversive influences at work "among discontented WPA employees."⁴

Most drastic of all, however, was the action taken against pickets in Minneapolis where, after agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had been brought in, some 160 men and women were indicted for "conspiracy" to keep other workers from their WPA jobs. The offenses charged were punishable by fines of as much as $10,000 or imprisonment for two years. The demonstra-

¹ These "widespread stoppages," according to the Monthly Labor Review, were led in many cities by the local building trades councils. In July alone 369,766 man-days of idleness were reported on "WPA, relief, and resettlement projects." This was approximately one-third the total number of man-days of idleness resulting from strikes during the month. The total number of WPA workers idle for one or more days was estimated at about 123,000. The WPA "stoppage" was said to have extended into 37 states and the District of Columbia, with "the largest numbers of workers out in Illinois, Wisconsin, New York, and Minnesota."—Vol. 49, no. 5, November, 1939, pp. 1142, 1145.

² Minneapolis Labor Review, July 28, 1939; Congressional Record, February 19, 1940, p. 1606; see also Minneapolis Journal, July 29, 1939.

³ WPA Serial Telegram 232, July 6, 1939. In New York City alone during the 1939 strikes some 13,000 workers were fired because of at least five days’ absence from their jobs.

⁴ New York Times, July 20, 1939. Denouncing this action by the Committee, one strike leader declared: "Woodrum and his reactionary colleagues at first condemned millions of American citizens to starvation and hunger.... Now they are trying to choke off the protests pouring in upon Congress. In requesting the names of workers who are exercising their American right to petition the Government for redress of their grievances, the Woodrum committee is violating fundamental American principles.

"The committee has openly assumed the role of strikebreaker in the best traditions of Hitler and Mussolini."—As quoted in the New York Post, July 19, 1939.

225
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy
tions in which those who were indicted were alleged to have taken part had resulted in two fatalities—one a policeman who died of a heart attack and the other a bystander accidentally shot by a policeman’s bullet as police (with drawn guns and tear gas) advanced upon pickets. In a series of mass trials 32 persons including 14 women were convicted. Some were convicted of committing a substantive offense in violation of the ERA Act of 1939 and some were found guilty on charges of “conspiracy.” Some were convicted on both counts. Of the 32 who were convicted, 14 were given jail and prison sentences ranging from thirty days to as much as eight months.

Soon after some of the earlier verdicts were announced, 24 leaders of labor and liberal groups addressed the President, assailing the indictments and prosecutions.

Early in 1940 indictments against the workers who had not yet come to trial were dropped—apparently upon intervention by President Roosevelt. Dismissal of the 125 defendants who had not yet been brought to trial followed consultations between federal officials in Minneapolis and O. John Rogge, Assistant United States Attorney General, who declared that President Roosevelt had discussed this issue with the Attorney General. The President, Mr. Rogge declared, felt that “the duty of WPA workers had been made clear: that while they may organize like others on the government payroll, they have no right to conduct a strike or engage in acts of violence.” Furthermore, declared Mr. Rogge, although judgment to be imposed upon the 32 already convicted was for the court to determine, “it was felt that this lesson had been duly learned.” Finally, it was stated that the Department of Justice believed that “the 32 persons most culpable” had already been convicted.

1 The specific section of the act which was said to have been violated was that (sec. 28) which prescribed in part that: “Any person . . . who knowingly, by means of any fraud, force, threat, intimidation, or boycott . . . deprives any person of any of the benefits to which he may be entitled under any such appropriations, or attempts so to do, or assists in so doing . . . shall be deemed guilty of a felony and fined not more than $2,000 or imprisoned not more than two years, or both.”

2 Among these were Joseph A. Padway, counsel to the American Federation of Labor, James B. Carey, secretary of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Mayor Daniel W. Hoan of Milwaukee, John Haynes Holmes, Roger Baldwin, Upton Sinclair, Harry W. Laidler, Arthur Garfield Hays, Professor George S. Counts of Teachers College, and Norman Thomas.

3 As quoted in the Minneapolis Star Journal, February 1, 1940.

After dismissal of the defendants who had not yet been tried the New Republic stated editorially: “It is now virtually admitted that the prosecution of these workers
The WPA and Its Program

WPA practices with respect to re-employing workers taking part in strikes against the WPA have varied no less than those regarding the handling of strikes themselves. Policies have ranged from reinstatement at the close of hostilities to total debarment from further employment. This latter course was that adopted in Minneapolis and St. Paul where “strikers” known to have engaged in violence or illegal activities in connection with the 1939 demonstration were refused further employment by the WPA.

represented an extraordinary use of the courts for political purposes—to stifle criticism of the WPA and to establish the precedent, handy in case of war, that organized protest against the government is illegal. What the defendants had done was mainly to picket the WPA in Minneapolis in protest against the lay-offs and pay cuts of the Woodrum Act last July. How little violence was involved is shown by the fact that the police made only half a dozen arrests at the time for disorderly conduct. Three of these were later dismissed, the other three receiving nominal fines. It was not until months later that the 'criminal conspiracy' indictments were handed down, and the defendants arrested—for the first time—and held on bail ranging as high as $15,000. Now, after some months in which the victims of this experiment have suffered great hardships, because their indictment barred them from relief employment, they are told that they have 'learned their lesson.'”—“Mass Trials in Minnesota,” in the New Republic, vol. 102, no. 8, February 19, 1940, p. 228.
CHAPTER IX
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT: USE OF AVAILABLE SKILLS VERSUS SKILL FOR THE JOB

Two important aspects of the WPA program have been (a) to employ workers at jobs in keeping with their skills and ability, and (b) to make reasonably sure that work assignments are given only to workers who are competent to perform them.

EMPLOYMENT IN RELATION TO SKILLS

The administration's objective of providing for workers jobs in keeping with their skills has been emphasized again and again. This intent was stated tellingly in 1939 in an inscription on the WPA building at the New York World's Fair. This read:

WPA seeks to employ at their own skills: accountants, architects, bricklayers, biologists, carpenters, chemists, dentists, draftsmen, dietitians, electricians and engravers, foresters and firemen, geologists and gardeners, hoisting engineers and housekeepers, instrument men and iron workers, inspectors, jackhammer operators and janitors, kettlemen and kitchen maids, librarians and linotypers, locksmiths and lumbermen, millwrights and machinists, musicians, nurses and nutritionists, oilers and opticians, painters and plasterers, plumbers and pattern makers, photographers and printers, physicians, quarry men and quilters, riveters and roofers, roadmakers and riggers, sculptors and seamstresses, stonemasons and stenographers, statisticians, teamsters and truck drivers, teachers and tabulators, upholsterers and ushers, veterinarians, welders and wood-choppers, waiters and watchmen, X-ray technicians.

PURPOSES UNDERLYING FEDERAL POLICY

The need for this policy was restated by President Roosevelt in April, 1939, as follows: "The provision of work for . . . people at occupations which will conserve their skills is of prime importance."

1 Terming preservation of the usefulness of the unemployed a

1 As quoted in the New York Times, April 28, 1939. For further discussion of the importance of preserving skills and work habits see chap. 32.
responsibility which was "perhaps the fundamental concept of the work-relief program," Aubrey Williams, deputy WPA administrator, declared in 1938: "We should be doing the nation and industry a great disservice if we did not provide useful work for our unemployed at their own trades."^1

Employment of workers at their usual occupations, held to be essential to the preservation of skills, has also been thought to be indispensable to the maintenance of efficient work standards and to the preservation of morale. "We realized early," said Jacob Baker, a high WPA official, in 1935, "that it was more harmful to a man's morale, to put him to work at a job he was not fitted for, to put a doctor of philosophy, or a mechanic to digging ditches, than to give him a dole, and let him remain idle."^2

Efforts of the administration to employ so far as possible workers at their usual occupations have received widespread support both from individuals and from representative organizations. Important among the latter has been the Congress of Industrial Organizations which repeatedly has endorsed the principle that workers should be employed on work suited to their needs and skills.^3

Not all sentiment has been on this side, however. Serious objection has sometimes been raised against the administration's attempts to provide suitable tasks for workers with special skills. "Is the Government," the New York Times once asked editorially, "to supply particular kinds of work simply because many people want [them]?" In reply to its own question (and to Mayor La Guardia who was urging restoration of federal theater projects because there were 3,000 actors who had to eat) the New York Times replied that though they had to eat, they did not have to act.^4 However desirable employment of workers at

---

^2 WPA Release 4-38, July 3, 1935.
^3 See, for example, Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. [Washington], 1938, pp. 50, 118.
^4 June 26, 1939. For further examples of attitudes of this type see the New York Herald Tribune, June 22, 1939, and December 15, 1938. Yet another sharp criticism of the federal theater project was that made by Nation's Business, which in February, 1941, contended: "The project was inspired by a theory that the Government is obligated to give the unemployed work at their regular vocations. No indigent thespian, no mute, inglorious bard, no unwashed composer must be insulted with the offer of a charity job less creative than that to which he was accustomed or had aspired. The project attracted a horde of out-at-elbows Communists and other nondescript amateur actors, all averse to the rigors of leaf raking."—Vol. 29, no. 2, p. 11.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

their usual occupation might be thought to be, the New York City WPA Advisory Council, composed of outstanding civic leaders and businessmen, concluded that it was "impractical to create projects to fit the previous training of all who are unemployed."^1

Attitudes of this kind have contributed materially to the enactment of legislation severely limiting the kind of work the WPA may undertake, and are responsible in large measure for the WPA's failure to realize more fully its objectives of employing workers at their usual occupations and of maintaining a genuinely useful work program.

Difficulties Presented

Difficulties to be surmounted in 1935 in carrying out the administration's intent to organize the projected work program so as to employ workers at jobs as nearly like their normal jobs as possible, were clearly disclosed by two comprehensive surveys, one of which was made before the WPA was established^2 and the second of which was made relatively early in the WPA's history.

The latter, made in January, 1936, included a total of 6,402,171 workers of whom 4,405,002 were economic heads of families. The largest single group of family heads, over 800,000, fell in the category of unskilled labor in industries other than agriculture. The largest class of female workers, as might be expected, were found to have been domestic and personal service workers of whom there were nearly 211,000—approximately a third of the female heads of relief families. Other occupational groups that included relatively large numbers of family heads were: semi-skilled workers in manufacturing and other industries; skilled workers and foremen in building and construction; and farm operators and laborers. This last named group, however, assumed relatively less importance to the WPA program than their numbers would indicate because of WPA policies regarding eligibility of such persons for WPA employment.^3

Domestic and personal service workers totaling over 350,000

^1Recommendations, March 14, 1939. In support of this conclusion the Council declared that the administration must "rigidly" avoid "competing with normal private construction and production." Maintenance of regular industry, it was said, was "more important than the usefulness of work relief projects."


^3See chap. 20.
in all ranked fifth in importance among family heads eligible for Works Program employment in January, 1936. Near the bottom of the list, so far as numbers were concerned, were more than 150,000 inexperienced persons and nearly 100,000 professional and technical workers. The former, obviously, constituted a difficult group for whom to provide jobs. The latter, though relatively unimportant numerically, presented an unusual challenge to the administration since it included workers who, if employed at their occupations, could render to society highly valuable and badly needed services.¹

Whatever doubt there might be as to how long the detailed findings of any given study of the skills of potential workers might be valid, there can be no doubt that the WPA, from the first, has been confronted with responsibility for providing jobs for an amazing variety of abilities. As one state administrator put it in a statement to the writer, “I can give you anything—Phi Beta Kappas, all-American football stars, and Ph.D.’s galore.”

**Barriers to the Use of Workers’ Special Skills**

In view of the myriad difficulties confronted, it should not be surprising if the earnest effort made by the WPA to utilize the best skills of workers should have been crowned with something less than overwhelming success. Congress has repeatedly imposed restrictions upon permissible types of projects and upon materials and equipment that might be purchased with federal funds; potential sponsors have failed—even within limits prescribed by Congress—to initiate and finance appropriate projects; and finally, there has been the dual work-and-relief nature of the WPA program. Under obligation and pressure to provide workers with jobs in order that they might eat, the WPA frequently found itself obliged to put them to work on some kind of job without respect to such niceties as whether these gave them opportunity to “carpenter,” to “paint,” to “plumb,” to act, or otherwise to use their special skills.

In addition to these obstacles has frequently been the difficulty of the lack of any considerable number of workers of a given specialty. Particularly in small cities or sparsely settled

areas, this problem has proved almost insuperable, since the operation of projects for only a handful of workers having a given skill is sometimes prohibitively costly even if sponsors could be found to initiate them. A further difficulty is the public’s reported preference for “tangible” projects, “things that could be seen and recognized as some return on the money invested in projects.” This desire for tangibility has been blamed for overemphasis on construction projects. In Chicago, for example, it is said to have been partly responsible for the arbitrary limitation of assignments on white-collar projects to 5 per cent, even though workers qualified for such assignments represented some 20 per cent of the total to be employed.

**The WPA’s Use of Available Skills**

Attempts to appraise what the WPA has or has not done in terms of employing workers at their normal jobs, usual occupations, or “highest skills” cannot fairly be made without reference to the degree to which private employment or normal public employment has achieved this same end. One has but to recall the “miscast” elevator operators, taxi drivers, machine operators, or other workers among his own acquaintances in private employment to realize that the WPA is not the only employer confronted with the problem of using workers’ skills and abilities appropriately and usefully. Without far more study of the question it cannot even be conjectured whether or not the WPA has done any better or worse than private enterprise.

What is certain, however, is that the WPA has provided work in an almost unbelievably wide variety of occupations. In the words of General Hugh S. Johnson, first WPA administrator for New York City, “There are ‘projects’ which provide work in their crafts for every class of unemployed from puppeteers to lawyers and from eurhythmic dancers to biologists—it’s a holy show.”

Although much is known about the occupations and skills of workers employed by the WPA, relatively little is known of the relationship of these occupations to occupations at which they are employed by the WPA.

---

1 As quoted in the New York Times, October 13, 1935.
2 However, periodic reports show employment by type of work and type of project as of specified dates. See, for example, that (relating to June, 1940) presented in Report on Progress of the WPA Program, June 30, 1940, p. 49.
The WPA and Its Program

In the absence of general studies of the relationship of the usual occupations of workers and their WPA jobs, a few scattered local studies must be relied upon to suggest how well the WPA has lived up to its own ideals. Unfortunately, several of these relate to earlier years of the WPA program. Since then conditions undoubtedly have changed appreciably, probably for the better.

One of these studies, made by the WPA in 13 cities, and covering in each city some 250 cases with one member employed on the federal Works Program (not that of the WPA alone) as of April 15, 1936, led to the conclusion that:

The requirement that projects should not compete with private industry, . . . made it impossible to employ at their usual occupations certain types of workers such as those skilled in manufacturing, and resulted in a disproportionately large number of unskilled jobs. More than three-fifths of the available jobs were in unskilled occupations, although only one-fifth of the workers had been unskilled laborers by usual occupation. . . . Consequently, a certain amount of occupational "degrading" occurred. Professional workers and office workers were given work of their usual kind in about half of their assignments. Most of the skilled and semiskilled workers were assigned to laboring jobs.¹

A still earlier study made by the WPA in rural areas in 108 counties in 12 states showed that during September and October, 1935, only about 3 per cent of those employed by the Works Program were employed at semi-skilled occupations whereas the usual occupation of 12.5 per cent of the workers was so classed. Only 1.7 per cent were employed at white-collar jobs although 3.9 per cent were said to be white-collar workers by usual occupation. By contrast, approximately 89 per cent were employed as unskilled workers although less than half were said to have usual occupations in this category.²

A report on the degree to which Works Program (not WPA alone) jobs in Pennsylvania were in line with workers' usual occupations reveals that only about 94,000—or 38 per cent—of the 255,359 persons at work in June, 1936, were assigned to Works Program jobs which were either the same or of "the same general type" as their usual occupations.³


For examples of studies made in New Jersey and Connecticut, see Douglas H. 233
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

From St. Paul, in 1938, it was reported to a Senate Committee that although “20 percent of all men available for assignment to W.P.A.” in that district were “salesmen and nonmanual workers . . . such as elevator operators, barbers, gas-station attendants, restaurant employees, clerks”; it was “a practical impossibility to devise work projects to employ these people at the type of work they are ordinarily engaged in.” The WPA in this area, according to the testimony, was “not even able to offer regular employment to all of the skilled mechanics. It is estimated that there are ordinarily approximately 500 skilled mechanics doing common-labor work.”

Early in 1938 the WPA administrator for New York City reported that “putting people to work at tasks they were best fitted to do” was one of the most difficult jobs he had tackled. Nevertheless, about 74 per cent of the professional workers—whose employment at their occupations was especially complicated—were employed at work “in their usual capacities or at jobs closely related to them.” Elaborating on the WPA’s success in New York, Mayor La Guardia a few weeks later added: “Today there is hardly a single mechanic employed by WPA who is working out of his class.”

As a result of a 1941 study of WPA workers in three Massachusetts cities it was estimated that in one city only 35 and in another city as many as 70 per cent of the skilled workers employed were “exercising their skills.” Of the semi-skilled workers even smaller proportions—from 25 per cent in one city to 50 in another—were thought to be employed at their customary trades.

This rough appraisal of the success of the WPA’s attempts to


4 The Problem of Public Relief in Massachusetts. An unpublished manuscript prepared by the staff of the Bureau for Research in Municipal Government, Graduate School of Public Administration, Harvard University, Cambridge, December, 1941.
preserve skills raises, of course, the whole question of the effectiveness of these efforts even when workers are employed at jobs that are closely related to their usual occupations. Scant indeed is the evidence available to support any side of this question. Outstanding, however, among the meager existing data on this subject is a report published by the Yale Institute of Human Relations. After a five-year study of unemployed workers, some of whom were given WPA employment, E. Wight Bakke, who directed the study, reported:

... if unskilled workers are employed, there can be very little question about the possibility of retention of skill, for it is the retention of a general fitness for work which is sought. ... There was ample evidence in the testimony of the unemployed that the daily work routine, the necessity for using one's muscles, and the outdoor life were beneficial in maintaining the worker's general health and physique except during the most severe weather. It is questionable, however, whether those who were formerly engaged in more skilled occupations were equally benefited by such a course of training. We ran across numerous men who complained that their finesse and ability on highly skilled jobs were being impaired by the necessity of doing manual labor. Particularly was this true of men whose former jobs required the performance of very delicate operations. Far from retaining their skills they felt they were losing them. It is frequently not possible to use the skill of the workers for consonant functions on the jobs. It is scarcely to be expected that the government in supplying relief employment should be able to duplicate the exact skills which these workers used formerly on their regular jobs.¹

Speaking from her experience as Industrial Commissioner of the state of New York, Frieda Miller, in testimony before a Committee of the New York City Council, also raised sobering questions about the WPA's success in preserving marketable skills. "Despite every effort on the part of the W.P.A. authorities to assign workers according to their occupational skills," she declared, "persons on W.P.A. have been placed on jobs which are not regarded as sufficiently related to their former occupations to make their W.P.A. experience acceptable to employers as a continuation of previous trades and skills."²

While there have been those who have criticized there are also those who have praised the WPA's success in using workers' special skills in spite of the many obstacles hampering realization of this objective. There is, for example, the testimony of Don D.

¹The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, pp. 412-413.
²As quoted in the New York Herald Tribune, May 23, 1940.
Lescohier who, after directing a study of the WPA in New York City in 1939, concluded that despite tremendous odds the WPA so well employed two-thirds of its workers "in jobs sufficiently similar to those they had had in private employment that it could reasonably be said that their previous skills were being conserved in whole or in considerable part." ^

For all its shortcomings, however, the WPA's failure to utilize the best skill of workers dwindles to almost nothing in comparison with the wastage of skill and ability that would otherwise have resulted during the past several years if there had been no WPA. Some indication of how devastating this might have been is afforded by studies of what workers have been compelled to do to keep themselves—to say nothing of their special skills—alive while they were waiting for or after they lost their WPA jobs. ^ Unable to find employment of any kind, they have resorted not only to almost every conceivable kind of odd job and intermittent employment, but have sometimes been reduced to begging and to collecting unsalable foods.

**Skill for the Job**

Important as the principle of utilizing workers' skills may be, its counterpart—limiting employment to workers capable of doing the job prescribed—is equally important.

To make sure that workers possess the ability or skill necessary for the work assigned them, various devices have been adopted by the WPA in different parts of the country. Examining units, for example, have sometimes been established to pass upon the ability of skilled workers such as carpenters, plumbers, or painters. When, in conformity with suggestions made by labor leaders, tests for skilled workers were instituted in New York City, it was found that some 16.5 per cent of those examined were not equipped for their jobs. This resulted in the demotion of some 4,000 workers—at a saving, it was reported, of some $90,000 a month.

In the field of the arts, boards have been set up in some areas to examine and criticize paintings, etchings, writings, or other works submitted by candidates for employment on art, writers', or com-

---


^ These studies are referred to in greater detail in chaps. 3 and 25.
parable projects. It was to a board of this kind that Richard Wright, a Negro manual laborer, in 1936 submitted a sample of his writings which won for him a transfer to a writer's project. This was just two years before his Uncle Tom's Children won a first prize conducted by a national magazine for employees of WPA writers' projects, and some four years before his Native Son, a best seller, appeared.

Tests of competence before assignment have to some degree quieted the protests of organized labor against "upgrading," (i.e., the training on the job of WPA workers in higher skills than they possessed at time of induction) and the consequent dilution of the supply of skilled or semi-skilled workers when persons so trained return to the labor market. For example, the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor in 1936 charged: "Unskilled workers have been employed and trained for jobs requiring special skills, while the skilled workers trained for those jobs were unemployed. Public buildings have been constructed with indefensibly low wages." In order to remedy this situation it was urged "that funds should be allotted to local governmental agencies with the provision that unskilled workers should not displace or be trained to displace skilled workers." ¹ A further proposal approved by this same convention was that boards should be established to pass on the fitness of skilled mechanics considered for WPA employment. Such boards were needed, it was said, because WPA officials "either through a lack of understanding or favoritism" had "attempted to advance men into trades without the proper care so necessary to the training of apprenticeship for skilled craftsmen," and because these officials "in haste" and "in a false hope of producing mechanics for the work at hand" were destroying the apprenticeship system which the building industry had found "so necessary to good and safe construction." ²

In reply to labor's opposition to training through WPA employment, various WPA officials have urged the importance of helping individual WPA workers to improve their skills and

² Ibid., pp. 598-599.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

status. This position is clearly set forth in a WPA report from Pennsylvania which states:

. . . the Works Progress Administration and other Works Program agencies have been responsible for introducing many workers to new skills, many of which are of a nature which will be of inestimable value to the persons involved when positions in private industry are open to them again. The need for this sort of transfer to new occupations and new industries is particularly acute in the case of workers formerly engaged in industries which are now suffering from style changes, inventions, and other technical developments which have seriously reduced the total business or the need for workers.

Of . . . 255,218 cases studied, 11,675 were inexperienced persons or persons for whom there was no previous employment record. Many of the latter, no doubt, were persons who formerly had been casual workers or youths without work experience. To these, the Works Program has offered the first opportunity for the development of work habits and occupational skill.¹

This same tendency toward upgrading was observed in the WPA study of workers in 13 cities already noted. Although considerable “degrading” was also found, it was reported that “the proportion of workers whose status was improved varied from 37 percent of the domestic workers to 6 percent of the office workers.” ²

Hints of another conflict between the training and, in this case, the work aspects of the WPA program, appear in reports submitted by some 8,000 public officials for the United States Community Improvement Appraisal. “Many” of these reports, it was said, spoke of “workers trained to new trades which enable them to get private employment (for example, as stone masons and cement workers).” However, the necessity for training men on the job was sometimes “deplored as creating delay and increasing the costs of the project; while again such training is regarded as an asset to the community that is well worth the extra costs.” ³

A further consideration regarding skills which WPA workers bring to their jobs has been the frequently voiced criticism that certain workers—usually actors, artists, or teachers—had never

¹ Pennsylvania WPA, One Year of WPA in Pennsylvania, July 1, 1935-June 30, 1936, p. 44. For further discussion of the importance of teaching new skills see chap. 32.
previously made a living at their purported vocations, or could not expect to do so in the future. This, in fact, was one of the criticisms that contributed in no small measure to the discontinuance of the federal theater project in 1939. Actors employed on these projects, it was charged, were not bona fide actors in need of employment but "hams" or perhaps young hopefuls who had never before worked seriously in the theater.¹

Suspicious of this kind were voiced by Republican Representative Taber of New York, who in 1940 requested Colonel Brehon B. Somervell, WPA administrator in New York City, to submit information regarding the number of workers in New York City's art, music, and writing projects who previously had "earned their living in the particular line" in which they were currently employed by the WPA.

In response to this request Colonel Somervell submitted data indicating that 584 of the 608 artists employed on the art project in New York City in December, 1939, had "previously earned a livelihood in the same field." Of the remaining 24 artists, 17 were reported to have been graduates of accredited art schools. On the music project all but one of the senior musicians employed were reported as previously earning a livelihood in the same field. All but three of the 87 writers employed on the writers' project were also reported previously to have earned a livelihood in that field. Furthermore, the average length of such employment as writers was said to have been nine-and-a-half years. The remaining three writers who had not previously earned a livelihood through writing were reported to have had "academic training in writing or journalism prior to assignment as writers."²

When Representative Taber asked Florence Kerr (assistant commissioner in charge of the Professional and Service Division of the WPA) how many of the 5,471 workers employed throughout the country on the arts projects in February, 1940, had ever "earned their living as artists prior to the advent of the [WPA's] program" she replied: "The number would be small, of course."³

¹ See, for example, Congressional Record, June 28, 1939, pp. 8086, 8089.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Work Projects Administration. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, Part HI, p. 491.
³ Idem (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 801.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

With respect to the music project, however, it was reported by Colonel Harrington that “the proportion would be very high.”

According to testimony presented to a House Committee by Colonel Harrington in 1940, approximately 26 per cent of the 1,670 teachers employed on educational projects in New York City had previous teaching experience. In four states for which reports were submitted the proportion was as follows: Massachusetts, 44 per cent; Oregon, 63 per cent; Southern California, 65 per cent; and Texas, 74 per cent. Those not having teaching experience were said to have had other qualifications such as college degrees, some college education, or experience as mechanics, fitting them to give vocational training.

How effective have been the various devices designed to limit WPA employment to workers capable of performing their assigned tasks would be difficult to say. Nevertheless, one fairly comprehensive study ¹ of the efficiency of various types of skilled workers led to the conclusion that the skilled labor covered by the investigation was “generally of a high caliber.” It was also reported “that 78 percent of the craftsmen were capable of doing passable or better work from the point of view of quality and that only 9 percent of the workers were definitely unfit in this respect.” Finally, it was declared “that 79 percent of the craftsmen were capable of doing passable or better work from the point of view of quantity and that only 8 percent of the workers were definitely incapable in this respect.” The craftsmen, it was reported, “had an average of 21 years of experience.” ²

Somewhat less optimistic than this appraisal of the skills of WPA workers is that made by Nels Anderson, head of WPA’s Section on Labor Relations, who declared: “Among the skilled and technical workers on WPA are many who have ability but do not have speed. At the prevailing rates of pay for first-class workers they cannot be profitably employed by private industry.” ³

Whatever the facts may be with respect to the skills and abilities

¹ WPA, The Efficiency of Skilled Workers on Works Progress Administration Projects. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1937. This study was conducted by the WPA in co-operation with three international trade unions, and covered some 1,200 to 1,400 stone masons, carpenters, and painters employed on WPA projects in seven cities—Baltimore, Birmingham, Hartford, Memphis, Minneapolis, Scranton, and Toledo—in January, 1937.

² Ibid., pp. 1-2.

The WPA and Its Program

of WPA workers as a whole, it is noteworthy that even the severest of critics have agreed that WPA work has been well done even though it may have taken too long or been wasteful of materials. This was the verdict of even those engineers who had been sent out by the House Committee to investigate WPA projects, and who had sharply criticized many aspects of the WPA program.¹

Special Training Projects

Because of difficulties involved in training, on WPA jobs, workers for many kinds of work at which they might be expected to find employment, the WPA has established several types of special training projects. First in point of time, were the household training projects on which women, whether employed by the WPA or not, were given training calculated to help them find employment in domestic service. During the fiscal year 1941 this training was given to approximately 3,000 trainees of whom some 2,800 were placed in jobs. WPA workers, who usually make up from a fourth to a third of the total number of trainees, may be paid during the training period, a training-wage of half the scheduled rate for unskilled labor “B”² applicable to the community in which the project is located.

Further types of special training projects, initiated when it appeared that war demands would result in a scarcity of skilled labor, have been those established to teach skills such as are needed in welding, shipbuilding, and aircraft and automobile servicing. By April, 1942, some 232,000 WPA workers (of whom approximately 34,000 were still in training) had been enrolled in these training courses. Of the 198,000 who had previously been enrolled, 143,000 had voluntarily left the program, “most of them”—it was officially reported—“for jobs in industrial plants.”³

Vocational training provided by the WPA is sometimes given in regularly established vocational training schools and sometimes, though for a maximum of only four weeks, in industrial plants engaged in war production. During the training period trainees

¹ See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, pp. 680-681, 813.
² See Appendix Table 3.
³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 40.
assigned from WPA rolls may be paid by the WPA the regularly
established learners' rates agreed upon by employes and the man-
gagement in the co-operating plants.

WPA workers assigned to vocational schools as trainees are
normally paid the scheduled rate for unskilled work "A" in the
community in which the school is located.¹

Payments made to trainees under the WPA's program of train-
ing for national defense, during the period from July, 1941, to
March, 1942, totaled nearly 20 million dollars. This represented
an average of $186 per trainee. Although the WPA program
during the fiscal year 1943 was to be only about half what it had
been the previous year, it was expected that expenditures for voca-
tional training would be materially higher.

Though pleased with what they had accomplished through the
training of workers for war industries, WPA officials in 1942 ad-
mitted that the number of persons for whom training had already
been provided had "not been as large as had been hoped." For
this there were said to have been two reasons: the restrictive hiring
standards of private industry which had directly affected the en-
trance requirements of vocational schools; and, secondly, a hesi-
tancy on the part of vocational-training authorities to expand the
training program where job opportunities were not immediately
available.

While recognizing the fact that many kinds of training could be
given only through special courses or in private industry, WPA
officials in 1942 again recalled that "there is an important training
factor in employment on any W.P.A. project."² By way of illus-
tration it was pointed out that not only tens of thousands of indi-
vidual workers have been transferred to war jobs but that whole
projects have been taken over just as a large statistical project in
Philadelphia had been transferred to Selective Service Adminis-
tration, a camouflage research project in Boston had been trans-
ferred to the Army, and as WPA sewing projects have been taken
over by the Army and Navy for the repair of equipment.

To assure proper attention to the WPA's responsibilities for
the training of workers and for the placement not only of trainees

¹ See Appendix Table 3.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief
for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 47.
The WPA and Its Program

but of all WPA workers in private jobs, the WPA in June, 1941, established in the Washington office and in regional, state, and local offices a special Division of Training and Re-employment under the direction of an assistant commissioner.
CHAPTER X
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT: CONCLUDED

Closely related to the problem of skill for the job assigned is the allied question of how assiduously workers apply themselves to their tasks. Additional conditions of employment relate to (a) the provision of jobs near workers’ homes, (b) freedom from discrimination, and (c) safeguards against accidents and injuries.

A Day’s Work for a Day’s Pay

Despite the fact that it was not until 1939 that Congress wrote into law a provision forbidding the employment of workers who were thought incapable of performing satisfactorily their assigned tasks, the WPA has, since its establishment, again and again emphasized the worker’s responsibility for giving a day’s work for a day’s pay. In a handbook prepared for distribution to WPA workers early in 1936, for example, the question is raised: “Can I be fired from the job?” The reply was, “Yes. You can be fired if your work is not satisfactory.”

A further statement of official policy, announced the same year, prescribed that “project workers must discharge their duties to the fullest extent of their ability.” This raises interesting questions as to what WPA officials should expect of workers who, though working to “the fullest extent of their ability” were still incapable of performing satisfactorily the jobs to which they were assigned.

Warnings and suspensions without pay have been prescribed as the penalties for “demonstrated” shirking. Foremen and supervisors have been made responsible for seeing that “conscientious service” is rendered and have themselves been threatened with suspension or discharge if they permitted “habitual shirking.” Furthermore, WPA officials have been directed to do every-


244
thing possible to eliminate legitimate causes for complaints by workers regarding such matters as transportation, delayed pay, and occupational classification, which might otherwise give rise to dissatisfaction and result in shirking.\(^1\)

Regulations issued in July, 1939, prescribed that project employees “who shirk their duties or otherwise violate Work Projects Administration regulations shall be subject to disciplinary action.” Penalties for shirking and inefficiency have sometimes been even more severe than mere suspension or discharge. They have sometimes resulted in total debarment from future employment.\(^2\) In areas where general relief was lacking or wholly inadequate, penalties of this kind were of utmost gravity.

Official reports do not yield information about numbers of workers removed from the WPA program because of inefficiency. It is probable, however, that discharges for this reason are an almost negligible proportion of the total employed. This is suggested by an official report that of a grand total of 104,362 workers removed from WPA rolls in New York City during the year ending September 30, 1937, only 246 were reported as discharged because of inefficiency.

In addition to prescribing means for eliminating inefficient workers, official WPA policy has specified repeatedly that in the selection of workers for employment, preference shall be given to those who appear to be “qualified by occupational training, experience, and ability to perform satisfactorily the duties required.” Moreover, many statements of federal policy have specifically declared that preference on these grounds was supposed to take precedence over other preferential considerations such as those accorded workers on the basis of relative need or because of veteran status.\(^3\)

\(^1\) WPA Handbook of Procedures, chap. 15, sec. 5, May 15, 1936; also chap. 15, sec. 6, September 22, 1936. For more recent statements of policy see WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 46, July 31, 1939.

\(^2\) See chap. 21.

\(^3\) A typical statement of this kind was the following, incorporated in a regulation issued in July, 1940: “This regulation does not extend preference to veterans, or persons in greatest need, in assignment to the various classes of work, nor does it extend preference to veterans, or persons in greatest need, over other certified persons who are better qualified by occupational training, experience, and ability to perform the duties required.”—WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 46, July 16, 1940. See also WPA, Commissioner’s Letter No. 18, July 17, 1941, sec. 3, p. 3.
Obstacles to Realization of WPA Policies

Regardless of what the WPA has tried to do about getting workers to return a day’s work for a day’s pay, it is noteworthy that it has constantly had to work under various handicaps. Some of these were of the WPA’s own making; others were imposed by Congress.

Limitations most frequently cited as hampering the standards of performance on WPA projects are of four general types: those having to do with the selection and characteristics of workers; those relating to wage policies; those having to do with supervision; and, finally, restrictions placed upon the use of necessary supplies and equipment. Underlying all of these, and in no small measure responsible for them, is the dual work-and-relief objective which has plagued the WPA since its inception, and which has made it seem necessary to give workers the opportunity to earn wages needed for the support of their families even under adverse working conditions when private employers, showing less concern for their employes, would not think of allowing jobs to continue.

In addition there are a number of miscellaneous considerations such as the newness and the experimental nature of the whole WPA idea and organization. Of this Colonel Harrington once said: “Our organization has been in existence less than five years. It takes much longer than that for an organization of the size and complexity of the WPA to settle down to work at maximum efficiency. Any industrialist or engineer will corroborate this.”

WPA: A Dual Program of Work-and-Relief. Fundamental to the problem of WPA efficiency is the perennial question as to how far the WPA should be regarded as a relief program as opposed to a work program. Neither Congress nor administrative officials have made this point clear. When the WPA program has been attacked as inefficient, it has been defended on the ground that it was a relief program. When critics from the opposite camp have urged that wages be graduated in accordance with workers’ needs, that tests of need be more strictly applied, or that other devices be adopted to make it more strictly a relief measure, these have frequently been opposed as being incompatible with a work program.

This basic duality in the WPA’s responsibility for efficient operation of work projects on the one hand, and on the other, its re-

1 WPA Release 4-2094, February 15, 1940.

246
The WPA and Its Program

responsibility for providing employment and wages for needy workers, is epitomized within the WPA's own organization by frequent clashes at the district, state, and federal levels between those units which are responsible for placing needy workers on jobs and those which are responsible for project operations. In one middle western city an official of the WPA's Division of Employment declared that one of his most important functions was to interpret to foremen and supervisors the importance of not being too hard-boiled with needy workers who perhaps lacked skill or training for their assigned tasks or who for some other reason were unable to do a real day's work.

Most important of all, perhaps, is the necessity of the WPA's employing almost exclusively workers who are regarded as being in need and are referred by relief agencies on this account rather than because they have special aptitude for the work at hand.¹

A second dramatic illustration of the WPA's basic duality is that confronted whenever the weather is bad. Should the WPA, like other employers, close down when snow, rain, or cold makes operations difficult and excessively costly? Or, should it play the part of a good relief agency and carry on regardless of weather so that needy families will not go hungry?

Again, there has frequently arisen the necessity of suddenly putting to work large numbers of workers who can be helped to earn the bare essentials for their families only by assigning them to projects already fully manned—if not indeed already over-manned.

When precipitate reductions are ordered because relief needs in general appear to be lessening or because funds are running low this, too, necessitates adjustments which affect the efficiency of operations.

Not only are workers taken on because they are in need, but they are kept on only as long as they continue in need of their WPA earnings to support their families. In addition, there is the practice of rotating jobs. This, obviously, increases labor turnover and requires the breaking in of new workers taken on as those employed for specified periods are released. A further consideration that should be noted is that here is employment in which the chief idea is not, as in other enterprises, to hold on to the best

¹ See chaps. 14, 15, and 16 for detailed discussion of the basis on which needy workers are referred for WPA jobs.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

workers, but to get them off the rolls and into some other employment. Thus, the peculiar methods of selecting workers and the mixed work-and-relief nature of the WPA have resulted, during periods of declining WPA employment, in sometimes releasing not the worst workers, as might be expected under a real work program, but the best—on the ground that they would be most likely to find jobs elsewhere. When this practice has not been followed, and the most efficient workers retained, there have been outcries from relief officials and taxpayers who complained that this was a sorry way to run a relief program!

As for the characteristics of WPA workers, it is held that their ability to give a day's work for their pay is affected by the relatively high ages of certain types of workers, by the comparatively high incidence of physical handicaps and disabilities, by loss of morale and confidence due to protracted periods of unemployment which frequently precede application for WPA jobs, and, finally, by their low standards of living due to running through their resources and credit until they could meet prescribed means tests.\(^1\)

Because of the many limitations imposed upon the WPA program and because of its fundamental work-and-relief function, it is not possible fairly to appraise the "efficiency" of WPA operations by comparing the unit cost of work performed by the WPA with that done under very different auspices, as for example, that done by private contractors. Obviously, the efficiency and costs of any social program, like those of anything else for that matter, can be properly measured only in terms of a total end to be achieved and not merely in terms of only one of a number of ends that must be served. No farmer needing a general purpose horse, for example, would have any right to think himself cheated if, upon purchasing such a horse, he found it unable to win the Kentucky derby. A sportsman owning a good race-horse, on the other hand, would not be likely to think the less of it merely because it proved incapable of heavy work.

Simple facts like these critics of the WPA often overlook. Because the WPA program (which has not been one of work-versus-relief but one of work-and-relief) does not appear to have effectively served the ends realized by other types of work which are more familiar, WPA work is held to be "uneconomical" and

\(^1\) The effect of these factors upon one's chances of getting WPA jobs is presented in chaps. 11, 18, 19.
“inefficient.” Furthermore, various observers often forget that private employment, with which the WPA program is so often contrasted, is almost always prosecuted primarily in the hope of making profits; what happens to the workers if they are dismissed when it does not “pay” a private employer to employ them—either because of long-term economic and industrial changes or because of temporary factors such as adverse weather conditions—is of only secondary importance if, indeed, it is given any consideration at all. What happens to a community because it is denied services which no longer return or promise a profit to some employer is of little moment under the work-and-profits system. Similarly, little thought is given under this scheme of things to expenditures a community may be called upon to make in order to provide relief, medical care, vocational retraining, or placement for workers whose employment permanently or temporarily no longer yields a profit. Thus what is “economical” for a profit-making employer may be very expensive for his employees who are thrown out of work. It may also be expensive for communities which may not only be deprived of the benefits of the labor of these workers but may also be called upon to provide for them financial support and, possibly, further costly social services.

From the point of view of the total community therefore, a work-and-relief program which to one who is interested only in making a profit out of workers might seem to be a relatively costly way of getting certain work done, may represent greater economy and a more efficient use of available resources than the profit-or-no-work system with which work-and-relief programs are so frequently compared.

To say that a program of work relief must serve two ends at the same time is not to deny that it can go only so far in serving one end without impairing its ability to serve the other also. If a work-relief program becomes too obviously a relief program its value as a work-and-relief program is inevitably lessened. Similarly, the work-and-relief balance is upset if too much emphasis is placed upon work and too little stress upon relief. However, regardless of the relative proportions of work as opposed to relief that may be mixed together in any program of work relief, it remains true that the value of such a dual program can be fairly judged only in

1 See chaps. 32, 33, and 34 for discussion of considerations to be taken into account in evaluating work as opposed to relief.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

relation to the total purpose served and not in relation either to an unadulterated work program or to one of pure relief.

In view of the importance of the fundamental dichotomy of the WPA program, it is all the more remarkable that the federal government has refused to help underwrite some respectable program of cash assistance to employable persons. Co-operation in maintaining such a program undoubtedly would have relieved the WPA of a great deal of the pressure under which it has sometimes been placed by the necessity of its serving primarily as a relief measure. To a great extent, the need for the WPA to subordinate its emphasis upon work standards has been attributable to the inadequacy of other relief measures and the fact that many thousands of necessitous families dependent upon WPA wages would be thrown into truly desperate need unless the WPA managed by hook or by crook to keep them at work regardless of weather, efficiency on the job, or a host of other considerations which, under a program placing less emphasis upon its relief role, would have resulted in a termination of employment.

Supervision and Efficiency. Blame for inefficiency in WPA operations is frequently attributed to the lack of proper supervision. On this, relatively detached observers, WPA officials, sponsors of projects, and WPA workers themselves are in agreement.

Speaking for WPA workers, David Lasser, while president of the Workers Alliance, told a House Committee: "It is our belief that the situation surrounding the supervisory force is a key to many of the difficulties of the present program." Responsibility for this situation, declared Mr. Lasser, did not rest so much with the administration in Washington as "with the Members of Congress who insist on the right to appoint and have control over these officials." 1

Objections similar to those advanced by Mr. Lasser were also unearthed in New Haven, where, writes E. Wight Bakke, there were indications that a man's political affiliations were "important" in securing supervisory jobs which were known to the workers as "gravy jobs." 2 The significance of this is of course far-

reaching. It means that supervisors and foremen may not only be less competent than necessary to proper performance of their jobs but may also curry favor with workers by not pushing them too hard.

A further significant observation advanced by Mr. Bakke with respect to WPA supervision is that workers as a group resent what he terms the “constant pressure” which characterizes private employment, especially in factories. If they had the power, he points out, this pressure is one of the things they would eliminate. “Were it not for the tempo made necessary by machines and by the driving of foremen,” he writes, “there is little question in my mind but that on the ordinary job in factories men would slow down considerably, and there is constant evidence that they find ways of combining to ‘dodge the whip’ even on private jobs.” ¹

This obviously raises the question of the extent to which a public employment program in a democracy, controlled as it is by public opinion, can or should attempt to perpetuate conditions in private employment which workers resent as too oppressive.

A further factor that has probably had its effect upon the quality of WPA supervision is the emphasis laid upon appointing to supervisory and foremen’s positions needy workers whether already employed or awaiting assignment. Early in 1939 it was estimated that half of “all foremen, timekeepers, and other supervisory workers on WPA have been promoted from the project ranks.” ² WPA officials in various parts of the country have ventured the opinion that the WPA’s success with respect to helping project workers gain experience as foremen and supervisors is perhaps the most effective work that agency itself has done along the line of training workers and fitting them for employment in private industry. As the WPA prepares workers to be drawn into private employment, it only adds to its own difficulties, however, since every transfer to another job means that a new beginning must be made to develop a new supervisor or foreman.

Like many other difficulties confronting the WPA, those relating to supervision are frequently attributable to the Janus-like nature of its program. The same ambivalence which is apparent in other WPA practices has also appeared in differences between official warnings against shirking given to workers and the in-

¹ Ibid., p. 418.
² WPA Release 4-2027, August 21, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Instructions given to foremen. This division of attention is clear from the official WPA Foreman's Handbook, issued in 1937, which raised the following question: "By what tests should the foreman know what is a fair day's work for workers taken from relief rolls?" To this query the Handbook replies: "The foreman must realize that the work must be efficiently done and the cost kept down." Then, as if to suggest that foremen must not take this reply too seriously, the Handbook continues: "At the same time, the foreman must keep in mind that the Works Program has a responsibility for training or rehabilitating the unemployed."

Equipment, Materials, Supplies, and Efficiency. Legal requirements and policies regarding equipment, material, and supplies used on WPA projects further illustrate the ways in which the work-or-relief issue hounds efficient administration of the WPA program at every turn. Various restrictions upon the so-called "non-labor expenditures" have had a direct and immediate effect upon the nature and efficiency of the entire WPA program.¹ Many local WPA officials who, in conversation with the writer, have seemed most appreciative of WPA workers' capabilities and eagerness to work have complained bitterly about their own inability to speed up production and reduce unit costs by using equipment which, as one official said, "any private contractor in his right mind would employ as a matter of course." In some instances WPA authorities themselves have estimated that costs of doing certain kinds of jobs could, through the use of proper machinery, be reduced by as much as two-thirds!

Restrictions on non-labor expenditures in effect since 1939 are of two kinds. The first restriction provided that such expenditures from federal funds could not in any state exceed a specified amount (which in 1941 was $6.00) per man per month except upon authority of the commissioner of work projects.²

The second provided that WPA funds could not be used "for

¹This, apparently, is no new problem. In his popularized history of social programs of "old Rome," H. J. Haskell reports that when Caesar Augustus in the latter part of the first century inaugurated a public works program "the government refused to use a new invention to move large columns . . . because it was feared the labour-saving device would throw men out of jobs."—The New Deal in Old Rome. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1939, p. 186.

²Since 1940 further exceptions in the prescribed limitation upon non-labor expenditures were authorized in the case of projects certified as "important for military or naval purposes."—See, for example, ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 1(d).
The WPA and Its Program

the purchase of any construction equipment or machinery if such could be rented at prices the commissioner found to be "reasonable"—not necessarily the most advantageous terms on which it might be procured. This was first written into the ERA Act of 1939 and re-enacted the succeeding year. Like the other, this restriction, too, was designed to conserve funds for wages. It was also intended, however, to serve other purposes.

Limitations upon the use of federal funds for materials and equipment have made it necessary for sponsors to contribute relatively large amounts when their projects required especially heavy expenditure for materials, supplies, and equipment.

When adequate contributions from sponsors were forthcoming, the WPA was not greatly handicapped by existing limitations. When sponsors were unable or unwilling to make the necessary outlays the limitations on federal expenditures have contributed to inefficiency due either to performing jobs the hard way or to the overloading of projects through assignment of more

---

Examples of this include: ERA Act of 1939, sec. 1(c); ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 1(c).

This issue was sharply drawn by Colonel Harrington in 1940 when he explained to a House Committee that even though rentals "on a basis of cost, risk, and profit" might be "reasonable," they might "be so high as to make any expenditure for rental unreasonable in comparison with purchase." The net result of the new policy, he declared, was "that the Government is sometimes obliged to rent equipment contrary to public interest and to pay rental which would amortize the vendor's investment several times within the useful life of the equipment." Moreover, the provision was said to give rise to delays because "in most instances" purchases were not permitted until after the "cumbersome procedure" of taking bids.

As of December 31, 1939, the WPA, according to a report submitted by Colonel Harrington, had on hand construction equipment to the value of $7,366,403 and other equipment valued at $9,296,522. Of this over $5,000,000 worth was office furniture and equipment and nearly $2,000,000 worth equipment for sewing and canning projects.—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 452, 482, 597.

Some hint of what at least one of these might have been is embodied in Representative Dempsey's explanation that the monthly allowance for non-labor costs was intended for materials. It was not, he said, to be used for heavy equipment such as steam shovels "to compete with contractors who have bought that equipment." Why should the WPA, he asked, "not be required to rent the equipment where it exists in a district? ... If the program continues, as it is continuing now, of buying heavy equipment, we will have all the contractors of the Nation on relief."—Congressional Record, June 16, 1939, p. 7294.

In fairness to the WPA it must be said that even when sponsors agreed to provide materials and equipment necessary to the efficient prosecution of projects they sometimes failed to provide these by the exact time they were needed. Lapses of this kind obviously delayed operations, yet were almost wholly beyond the control of WPA officials.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

men than were really needed except for the express purpose of building up a larger allowance for non-labor costs. When this occurred, congressional attempts to conserve funds for relief purposes have operated against the equally desired objective of maintaining an efficient work program. When the WPA elected not to overload projects, it faced the alternatives—both equally undesirable—of undertaking second-rate projects or failing to employ needy workers awaiting jobs.

That overloading of projects, whether due to shortage of materials or to some other cause, has reduced efficiency is apparent from reports from localities where increases in efficiency are reported as WPA rolls go down. These are explained on the ground that supervision can be intensified, that workers can have more elbowroom and probably work harder during periods of declining employment in the hope of escaping discharge.

Condemning measures to restrict unduly the use of materials and equipment on WPA projects, Representative Jerry Voorhis of California in 1939 declared:

... one of the principal arguments that has been used against the program by its opponents has been that it was a leaf-raking program, that it did not get anything worth while done; yet the very people who make that criticism come in here now and say we should not buy necessary equipment which would enable them to do worth-while things and make it a worth-while and constructive program. ...

To this Representative Keller of Illinois added:

When W.P.A. workers have had sufficient materials and proper equipment they have done as efficient work as any men can do. When they have been denied the proper equipment and materials to work with, of course, they have not done efficient work. Neither does any other worker. ... It is nonsense to expect a different result. 3

This view is also supported by the United States Community Improvement Appraisal. Of the nearly 8,000 reports upon which

1 Speaking of the overmanning of projects as a cause of loafing and inefficiency, Oscar Hewitt, Chicago commissioner of public works and superintendent of thousands of men engaged on city projects, declared in 1938: “For each man assigned to a project the sponsor is allowed $7 a month for purchasing materials and tools. ... And $7 doesn’t buy much sewer pipe, bricks, asphalt, or tools. If 100 men are put on a project there is $700 available for the purchase of materials the first month ... but suppose $3,500 a month is needed for supplies. Five hundred men are then assigned and, since there is work for only 100, they fall all over themselves.”—As quoted in the Chicago Daily Tribune, September 6, 1938.

2 Congressional Record, June 16, 1939, p. 7294.

3 Ibid., p. 7395.
this appraisal was based many replies asserted that "when there is plenty of material and equipment on a project there is never any trouble about workers keeping busy . . . it is lack of proper working facilities that creates loafing in practically every case."¹

Expenditures for materials, equipment, and other non-labor purposes made from both federal and sponsors' funds through December 31, 1939, totaled over two billion dollars. Of these some 61 per cent was from sponsors' funds. Amounts spent for various non-labor purposes and expenditures from federal and sponsors' funds, respectively, are shown in Table 17.

A Day's Pay for a Day's Work? As commonly used, the phrase "a day's work for a day's pay" clearly implies that workers who are willing to perform a full day's work should be paid a full day's wage. When applied to WPA workers, however, this interpretation breaks down. The wages paid them have purposely been fixed below those paid in private industry.

When the WPA, soon after its organization, adopted the principle of paying prevailing wage rates it was assumed that workers would be required, in their turn, to produce at prevailing rates. This point has been stressed by Arthur E. Burns and Peyton Kerr. The prevailing wage, they wrote, presupposed "a productivity of work-relief labor approximately equal to the customary efficiency associated with these rates."²

If payment of prevailing rates assumed prevailing efficiency, WPA workers might well wonder whether abandonment of prevailing rates in 1939 in its turn presupposed abandonment also of "normal" standards of production. This issue raises several intriguing questions: Are present WPA wages established below going rates because WPA workers are thought to be unable or unlikely to work as efficiently as those in private or normal government employment? If so, then how far should the WPA go in discharging workers for "inefficiency"?

Or, if "a day's work" is to be exacted in return for WPA wages which are less than "a day's pay," what is to be said of work which may be done in excess of that for which full payment is made? Is this, perhaps, to be regarded as a sort of royalty for the privilege

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

TABLE 17.—DISTRIBUTION BY CLASS OF EXPENDITURE OF NON-LABOR EXPENDITURES ON WPA PROJECTS, JULY, 1935, TO DECEMBER, 1939, AND PERCENTAGE OF EACH CLASS MET FROM SPONSORS’ FUNDS a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of expenditure</th>
<th>Amount (million dollars)</th>
<th>Per cent of total</th>
<th>Per cent from sponsors’ funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of materials, and equipment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, clay, and glass products</td>
<td>421.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron and steel products</td>
<td>213.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber and its products, except furniture</td>
<td>121.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bituminous mixtures, paving and other</td>
<td>108.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery and equipment</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor trucks and tractors</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals and allied products</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petroleum products</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>128.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,200.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>57.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>59.4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental of equipment</td>
<td>737.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space rental and services</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>116.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total non-labor expenditure</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,108.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source of data: U.S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 804.

of working while one has no other job? Or, is it to be thought of as a fine for needing public employment?

That there are important relationships between WPA wage levels and standards of work done on projects has frequently been suggested. There is, for example, the testimony given in 1936 before a House Committee by Harry Hopkins, who, in answer to a question from Representative Taber as to "how efficient ... WPA workers were" replied: "When they get fed and get enough money to get an adequate amount of food and clothing and are under proper supervision, I think they are 100 percent efficient; just as efficient as any other men. A lot of them were underfed and improperly clothed." ¹

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 233.
Still, it is not only the general wage level of the WPA that has been blamed for contributing to the inefficiency of its workers. A second problem is that two men, working side by side at the same task, receive the same pay regardless of differences in the quality or quantity of their work. This was declared by the National Appraisal Committee to be one of the chief obstacles to WPA efficiency. "There has not been enough flexibility to adjust wages and hours," reported the Committee, "to meet variations in local conditions and the competency of the workers."¹ To overcome this difficulty there has been some experimentation in paying workers a bonus for increased efficiency.²

A different approach to this problem has been advanced by Nels Anderson. He suggests that WPA employes "who have ability but do not have speed," if given the same monthly wage paid to others might be required to put in more hours during a month in order "to equal the output of a first-class worker."³

Needless to say, the WPA's whole wage level is inseparably bound up with its dual work-and-relief nature. Thus, as has already been suggested, problems arising from the wage structure are attributable, in part at least, to the dual nature of the WPA program.

Appraisals of WPA Efficiency

Like many other questions regarding the WPA, that relating to success in applying (in the teeth of admitted obstacles) its policy of requiring a day's work for a day's pay has aroused endless controversy. Differences of opinion with respect to the efficiency of the WPA program often arise because observers fail to think in terms of its dual nature and think of it rather as one of work or as one which should be more largely one of relief.

WPA: "Shovel-Leaners." On the one hand there have been claims that WPA workers, for the most part, are "shovel-leaners" and "bums." Whatever the facts about the efficiency of WPA workers may be, it is undeniable that in the public mind these workers have frequently been regarded as substandard and as

² For statements of how this worked in connection with sewing projects in New York City, see the New York Times, October 14 and December 10, 1937; and the New Republic, vol. 93, no. 1208, January 26, 1938, p. 341.
bearing what Colonel Somervell once termed “the WPA look.” Among evidences of public opinion on this subject have been an allegedly “popular” song ridiculing the industry of WPA workers,\(^1\) the wave of “WPA stories” and cartoons,\(^2\) and the attitudes of certain private employers, particularly during the early stages of the WPA program, toward hiring workers formerly employed on WPA projects.

Fun poked at the efficiency of WPA labor repeatedly has drawn from WPA officials sharp denunciations and vigorous defense of their employes. Aubrey Williams in 1937, for example, declared:

Throughout this program, the man who has taken the hardest knock is the project worker. . . . He has been ridiculed by thoughtless and cruel people as a loafer, and the fine works he has built or public services he has rendered have been tragically misrepresented as leaf-raking or boondoggling.\(^3\)

Again, Howard Hunter, in an attack on the jokesters, in 1939, warned his hearers against being “fooled by shopworn jokes or partisan and false attacks on WPA workers because the people really know. . . . Shovel-leaners just can’t build the Los Angeles Airport, the Chicago Outer Drive, the parks in New Orleans and the East Side Drive in New York, the thousands of miles of improved roads, the thousands of new school houses.”\(^4\)

Prejudice against WPA workers on the part of employers has been evidenced time and again in a wide variety of ways. In New York City, for example, “an overwhelming” proportion of employers replying to a questionnaire declared that a worker’s having been “on WPA” militated against his employment in private industry. These prejudices, according to Colonel Somervell, have not only kept WPA workers out of private jobs, but caused many of them to develop an “underdog attitude.”

That such prejudices against WPA workers may not have been warranted is suggested by the fact that among 50 employers included in the study made by the Yale Institute of Human Relations “those who had knowingly hired W.P.A. or C.C.C. workers

---

\(^{1}\) The song, which included the restful advice, “Sleep while you work. . . . Lean on your shovel to pass time away. . . .” was banned by the American Federation of Musicians and the major radio networks. According to Time, a talent scout for Columbia thought the song “insulting to workers, degrading to Negroes.”—Time, vol. 35, no. 26, June 24, 1940, p. 60.

\(^{2}\) For discerning comment on these, see the Christian Science Monitor, September 6, 1938.

\(^{3}\) WPA Release 4-1530, May 10, 1937.  
\(^{4}\) WPA Release 4-1904, February 26, 1939.
The WPA and Its Program

in the past year (1938–39) had found no difficulty in working
them into the production schedule required by their enterprise."

In the opinion of a state WPA administrator of an important
eastern state, employers' refusal to take WPA workers is due less
to proved inadequacies of WPA workers than to a desire to dis-
credit the Roosevelt administration. "What it boils down to," he
maintained, "is a strike against the President."

Criticisms voiced by employers who have claimed that WPA
workers were not fit for private employment are difficult to
square with the claims, also loudly made by employers, that WPA
employment was maintained at so high a level that private enter-
prise could not find enough workers to meet its own needs! Fur-
thermore, the fact that during each year of the WPA hundreds of
thousands—and in 1941 probably a million—workers left WPA
rolls to accept jobs in private employment, provides ample refuta-
tion to the charge that WPA workers are not qualified for jobs
provided by private enterprise.

WPA: "Too Efficient." At the opposite extreme from those
who have condemned and ridiculed both the quality and tempo of
WPA work have been claimants that the WPA has been too effi-
cient, and put too much emphasis upon "hitting the ball." Most
prominent, perhaps, among those taking this position have been
relief officials, who, with every increase in the WPA's effort to
emphasize the work rather than the relief aspect of its program,
have seen older or less skillful workers dropped by the wayside
as "unemployable," compelled by necessity to apply for general
relief—if any. Criticizing the WPA as "too darned efficient,"
H. G. Parker, director of public welfare, Norfolk, Virginia, once
declared that the accursed word "efficiency" when first taken to
the WPA's bosom was "a harmless infant," but by 1940 had be-
come a "fearsome monster." 2

Increasing insistence upon performance on the job is also said
by WPA officials to make it more difficult to take the time neces-

1 Bakke, E. Wight, The Unemployed Worker, pp. 419-420
2 Virginia Department of Public Welfare, Virginia Public Welfare, March, 1940,
pp. 1-3.

A similar objection was presented to a Senate Committee by F. M. Rarig, Jr.,
executive secretary of the County Welfare Board of St. Paul, Minnesota. "As the
W. P. A. becomes more efficient," he declared, "it becomes more standardized and
inflexible." The result, he feared, would be to make it increasingly difficult to pro-
vide for all employable persons through a work program.—U. S. Senate Special
Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

sary to help workers acquire new skills since this is likely to reduce the volume of work accomplished.

WPA: "As Good As Can Be Expected." Midway between these two camps have been those who, seeing more clearly the dual work-and-relief nature of the WPA program, have contended that WPA workers, by and large, are as capable as any, are as eager to work, and, given the necessary materials, equipment, and a job to do, are able to give a good account of themselves. This is not to say that WPA work has not frequently been handicapped by the more or less arbitrary limitations and restrictions which have increased unit production costs over what they might have been under more favorable working conditions. Neither is it to say that those who hold these views blink the fact that many WPA workers have physical handicaps, are relatively old as ages for certain types of work in private employment go, or suffer other disabilities affecting their "employability."

It is to say, rather, that (in the bailiwicks and in the opinion of those making such claims, at least) these obstacles have been offset by the painstaking efforts of WPA officials (a) to discover what workers could do despite such disabilities as they might have, and (b) to create jobs on which these workers could be used, despite their disabilities.

Since WPA work is of so wide a variety and its workers are of so many different types, generalizations regarding efficiency are all but impossible. Nevertheless, with respect to the single field of construction work—which, incidentally, is not only hard work but apparent to the public eye and therefore most likely to give rise to charges of shovel-leaning—state and local WPA officials in various sections of the country have declared to the writer that they believed their crews to be fully as good as those employed by telephone, street railway, or similar companies and, notwithstanding the many handicaps under which the WPA must operate, were better than gangs employed locally by county or city departments responsible for street, park, sewer, or similar work.3

1 Colonel Harrington, in testimony before a House Committee, declared that in the light of his twenty-five years of experience as an engineer he had found WPA workers as willing to work as any people he had ever seen.

2 As shown in some detail in subsequent chapters, particularly chaps. 11 and 18.

3 As early as 1936, before the WPA program reached anything like the efficiency it later achieved, Victor Ridder, then WPA administrator of New York City, told a Senate Committee that at least one sponsor in New York City was willing to state that workers provided by the WPA were "better qualified than his regular civil-
The WPA and Its Program

It has been held by WPA officials in some jurisdictions that the cost of building construction done by the WPA is approximately equal to that done under private contract—despite limitations under which the WPA must operate. Some who hold this view have admitted, however, that this would not be true if—other factors remaining the same—the WPA were to pay prevailing, instead of the lower security wages.

How mixed up are questions regarding WPA efficiency is apparent from the conclusion of Mr. Bakke, who, upon completion of his extensive study referred to earlier, reported that he and his co-workers saw "little reason . . . to doubt that the following description by a relief worker is a true representation of the attitudes of most of the men."

Most of the men on the jobs want to do a day's work and they want to do a good day's work. They know that their position in the eyes of the community and their fellow workers is dependent upon that. They know that that is the only chance they have, too, to earn money and if they are laid off they will have to go back on direct relief and will have no money. For the most part they are grateful for the opportunity to live as normal workers. . . . They know of thousands of men who would be glad to have their jobs. They know that there are men working in factories that have to work very hard that make only a few dollars more than they do, and they believe rightly or wrongly that if they are good workers when the time comes to cut down on the gang they will not be the first ones to be laid off. . . . Nevertheless, before a man has been on the job very long, he knows that there is such a thing as "learning the stroke." Partly that is the thing to do because the men are afraid the work will run out, partly it is because the men have sympathy with the fellows who are coming in fresh and without hardening up and do not want them to appear in a bad light in the eyes of the supervisors. But mostly I guess it is just human nature not to work any harder than you have to, and since you aren't pushed very hard on these jobs, well, you just don't go any harder than you're pushed. But the biggest thing, I think, is that there's . . . no chance for advancement, and while this has the advantage of giving no cause for jealousy, it certainly isn't the kind of a situation which causes you to feel that if you work hard you'll get some place because you do.1

Whatever validity various appraisals of WPA efficiency may have, it is clear that (as already suggested) the question of how well WPA workers work is not one that stands alone. It is inex-

---
1 Bakke, E. Wight, The Unemployed Worker, pp. 418-419.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

tricably bound up with the many handicaps—particularly the dual work-and-relief nature of the program—that have harassed the WPA from the first. So long as this twofold purpose must be served or until the nation has made up its mind whether it wants less relief and more efficiency or more relief and less efficiency, existing conditions probably cannot be expected to change much.

Employment Near Workers' Homes

Even before the program of the WPA was launched, the administration realized that it faced enormous difficulties in bringing together workers and work. Previous experience under the Civil Works Administration late in 1933 and early in 1934 and under the FERA had already demonstrated some of the difficulties involved in creating employment where needy unemployed workers were to be found, and in finding in the immediate neighborhood of projects needy workers with the requisite skills.

In spite of the President's reassurance in April, 1935, to the United States Conference of Mayors that, so far as possible, employment would be given in the places where relief need existed, and that he hoped there would be very little shifting of men from one locality to another, suggestions were made of moving large numbers of workers, if necessary, to supply labor for huge contemplated projects. Although nothing much came of this, the WPA did establish a few camps to provide employment, largely for unattached men, in relatively deserted areas where other workers were not available.¹

Typical of the emphasis laid on the importance of creating jobs where there were workers to fill them was a Louisiana ruling of 1937 which prescribed that projects selected for prosecution should be "in the vicinity of the available relief load in order that transportation of workers, especially by motor transportation [might] . . . be reduced to a minimum."²

¹ See chap. 13 for further mention of work camps. That the possibility of moving workers to jobs was still contemplated in 1940 was indicated by Colonel Harrington, who told a House Committee that he favored moving people from the centers of unemployment to "the public domain" to work on conservation and reforestation projects. Moreover, he added, the WPA was then making an experiment of that kind in New Mexico where it was intended "to establish camps on a project in one of the public forests and provide in that camp a house for the worker and his family."

² WPA of Louisiana, No. 437. New Orleans, June 17, 1937.
The inevitable counterpart of policies designed to help workers remain in the communities in which they live—whether this is done by giving them jobs or by providing cash allowances—is the danger of encouraging workers to remain in areas even after they can no longer expect profitable employment there and might better look to moving to some other locality where future prospects might prove brighter. Writing of this danger, John V. Van Sickle, professor of economics at Vanderbilt University, has declared that the nation's public works program, particularly as it has operated in the rural South, "by providing the younger and more adaptable men with work ... has discouraged them from seeking employment elsewhere. ..." ¹

While it is admitted that nationwide provision should be made, when necessary, to help workers in one locality move to other areas in which they are more likely to find suitable employment, it does not follow that, as Senator Taft suggested in 1942, the best means of effecting these transfers is to refuse to help workers in the localities where they find themselves. What they need most is probably not to have cut from under them what little security they know, but to be given help in reaching some area in which they are needed and there to be assured at least some degree of security once they have arrived.

Just as the availability of workers has affected the selection of projects, so also has the likelihood of being able to provide a job somewhere near a worker's residence affected his chances of being employed by the WPA.

When it has proved impossible to assign workers to projects near their homes or when transportation costs have been "more than reasonable amounts that would be normally paid by em-


Although they sometimes may serve to "freeze" workers in an area where they should not remain, public assistance measures are sometimes designed specifically to hold workers in communities where employers want them to be. This was well illustrated by the demands which were made in 1941 for special assistance for workers temporarily thrown out of work during the change-over of the automobile industry from peacetime to war production. Such assistance was needed, it was often declared, to keep temporarily unemployed workers from being enticed away to nearby states and as far as California, where even then shortages of skilled labor were being experienced.

Similarly, in agricultural areas, WPA officials have sometimes been asked by farmers to give between-season employment to migratory workers so as to hold them after one seasonal demand is over, until another begins.

263
employees," the WPA has attempted to get sponsors to provide or pay for the workers' transportation. If they refused, the WPA itself has had to provide transportation or to deny assignments to workers living too far from available projects.

In areas where there has been only inadequate general relief, or practically none at all, workers deprived of employment, for either of these reasons, frequently faced real privation. Even when relief was normally available to employable persons it has sometimes been denied to workers who were unwilling to walk—if necessary—as much as five or six miles a day to a proffered WPA job.

**Freedom from Discrimination and "Politics"**

Of utmost importance to WPA workers have been the safeguards established to protect them against discrimination on the grounds of politics, race, or any other consideration. These safeguards, which apply not only to those actually employed by the WPA but also to those applying for WPA jobs, are discussed at some length in succeeding chapters, principally in Chapter XII.

**Accident Prevention and Compensation**

Ever since the WPA program was first launched, continued emphasis has been placed upon the importance of preventing accidents and making WPA jobs safe. In fact, the Executive Order in which President Roosevelt in 1935 first defined conditions of employment to be maintained on the projected work program required that "All works projects shall be conducted in accordance with safe working conditions, and every effort shall be made for the prevention of accidents."

In keeping with this requirement, the WPA has designated specific state and local officials to make sure that jobs were made as safe as possible and has constantly endeavored to teach the rudiments of first aid and to inculcate in foremen and project workers the importance of accident prevention.

Among the earliest conditions of eligibility for employment on WPA jobs was the requirement—continued to this writing—that no one whose age or physical condition made his employment dangerous either to his own or others' health or safety could be em-
The WPA and Its Program

ployed. The tremendous emphasis laid upon accident prevention by the WPA was, said Mr. Hopkins in 1935, the first move in the history of the nation to give a countrywide safety program the backing of the federal government.

Congress has since 1935 provided that compensation for accidents resulting in loss of time, injury, or death shall be paid by the United States Employees' Compensation Commission. Benefits payable to injured workers or to survivors of those suffering fatal injury have been liberalized several times since the earlier years of the WPA program. These increases have been of two types: in the proportion of his monthly pay a worker might receive as compensation and in the total amounts he might receive. Beginning with the fourth day of disability, injured workers in 1940 might receive two-thirds of their normal monthly pay but could not receive in excess of $50 a month. Prior to the fiscal year 1938 the monthly maximum was $25, which was later increased to $30, and then again to $50 at the beginning of the fiscal year 1939.

The maximum total that may be allowed for death or permanent and total disability has, like the monthly benefits, been gradually increased until in 1940 an aggregate total of $4,000 might be paid, the payments to be at a rate not to exceed $50 a month. When the WPA was first launched, maximum benefits could not exceed an aggregate of $3,500.

Compensation for specified injuries such as the loss of an arm, a leg, or an eye, has been granted in accordance with a prescribed schedule. For these particular injuries this schedule in 1940 allowed two-thirds of the worker's wage for 280 weeks, 248 weeks, and 120 weeks, respectively. In addition, workers suffering these injuries were allowed medical benefits during the healing period.

Medical and hospital care have been provided through government hospital or medical facilities, or, where these were not available, through private physicians or facilities.

1 See for example Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935, and WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 10, July 31, 1939.

2 This agency is responsible for administering accident compensation benefits for all civil employes of the United States government, employes of the government of the District of Columbia (exclusive of those in the fire and police departments), members of the Naval Reserve, Officers' Reserve, and Enlisted Reserve Corps while in authorized training, and for workers employed on projects created under federal ERA acts including, of course, those employed by the WPA.—United States Government Manual. Government Printing Office, Washington, October, 1939, p. 432.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

From 1935 through 1940 approximately 1,100,000 injuries occurred on the federal emergency work program. This meant that on the average about 1 per cent of those employed each month suffered injury. The frequency rate of lost-time injury in emergency work (including WPA employment) was officially reported in congressional hearings as approximately the same as that in regular government employment. In emergency work (including WPA) this rate, in both 1937 and 1940, for example, was approximately 14 per million man-hours of exposure while that for regular government employment was approximately 12.

Through December 31, 1939, there had been 1,796 fatalities since the beginning of the WPA. This number represented an average of one to each 7,182,000 man-hours of employment. During the same period, there were on WPA jobs a total of 245,733 disabling injuries. These represented an average of approximately one injury per 52,000 man-hours.
PART THREE

ELIGIBILITY
CHAPTER XI
ELIGIBILITY: AGE, SEX, AND RACE

WPA jobs, as federal officials have pointed out repeatedly, are designed to provide employment for needy unemployed workers. Need and employability, therefore, are the two primary—though by no means the only—considerations in determining eligibility.¹

Conditions of eligibility for WPA jobs have been modified again and again since the WPA was first established. Workers meeting all requirements for work at one stage of the game have, at a later stage, frequently found themselves suddenly ineligible for further employment. This fact has caused no end of misunderstanding on the part of both workers and the public since wholly eligible persons have found themselves transformed overnight into "chiselers," not because of something they did, or did not do, but because of sudden changes in the rules while the game was in progress. Conversely, persons ineligible at one moment may by changes in policy or law suddenly find themselves eligible for employment.

Some of the changes in rules regarding eligibility have been more or less consistent from year to year. Typical of these has been the increasing stringency of the policies of Congress (a) in precluding the employment of aliens, and (b) in limiting jobs to workers who are in need. On the other hand, from year to year, Congress has made it less and less difficult for veterans, veterans' widows, and the wives of unemployable veterans to secure jobs with the WPA.

Other changes have been more erratic. Provisions in effect at one time have frequently been reversed at a later time only to be adopted again some time still later.²

¹This is not to say, of course, that all who are in need and employable (and otherwise meet prescribed eligibility requirements) are assured of employment. For, as shown in some detail in chap. 25, thousands upon thousands of admittedly needy and employable persons meeting all eligibility requirements have been denied jobs simply because there have never been enough jobs to go round.

²Because changes in policy have followed one another so rapidly, little attempt is made in this volume to show how long any given policy continued in effect. Usually all that is specified is the date on which a given policy is prescribed. However, poli-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Second in importance only to Congress, in the matter of determining the types of persons to be employed by the WPA, has been the WPA itself. Within limits set by law this agency has had power to prescribe conditions upon which workers might be given employment.\(^1\) Certain policies originally adopted by the WPA on its own initiative have so appealed to Congress that they have been written into law and made mandatory. Others, however, have found less favor and have been reversed or negated by congressional action.

Such confusion as has frequently resulted from switches and reversals in national policy has sometimes been heightened by differences of interpretation adopted by regional and state WPA officials and differences in policies adopted by state and local relief authorities (sometimes termed "certification" or "referral" agents\(^2\)) who, since the beginning of the program, have been drawn into the process of selecting those to be given jobs by the WPA.\(^3\) Thus, just as conditions of eligibility have varied with time, so also have they varied from place to place, differing not only among the 48 states but among the thousands of subdivisions within states. However, as time has gone on (and especially since July, 1939, when the WPA undertook to exert increased control over the selection of workers for employment) state and local policies and practices have become much more nearly uniform.

Another important variable affecting standards of eligibility has been the number of WPA jobs available at any given time. When jobs are comparatively plentiful standards of eligibility have frequently been liberalized. Conversely, eligibility requirements have usually been made more strict as jobs became scarcer.

Conditions of eligibility have also been affected by the status of the potential worker and have depended upon whether he was making his first application for WPA work, was already employed, or had previously had WPA employment which he had given up for another job or because of illness, or which he had lost through suspension or discharge.

\(^1\) During the earlier years of the WPA program certain conditions of eligibility were prescribed by the President.
\(^2\) For detailed discussion of their functions see chap. 14.
\(^3\) Relief agencies and the WPA in various states frequently issue in the form of manuals their rules and regulations regarding eligibility for WPA employment. Such manuals from many states are frequently referred to in this volume.
Eligibility

A further factor which has contributed to variations in conditions of eligibility for WPA employment has been the existence, non-existence, or relative adequacy of state or local programs of general relief for needy employable or near-employable persons not given WPA jobs.

Apart from unemployment, need, and employability, consideration which, at one time or another, have affected eligibility for employment by the WPA include: age, sex, race, citizenship, participation in allegedly subversive activity, residence, family status, political activity and finally, status with respect to military service.

Age

No person under eighteen years of age may be considered as eligible for employment on a WPA project. The minimum age for employment originally had been established at sixteen, but was raised to eighteen, effective July 1, 1936. To safeguard against employment by the WPA of youths under eighteen, state policy has sometimes required verification of birth dates of all workers under twenty-one or when there was doubt as to an applicant's age.

The federal government has never imposed a fixed maximum age limit for WPA employment. On the contrary, Congress in February, 1939, wrote into law a provision which specified that "no requirement of eligibility for employment . . . shall be effective which prohibits the employment of persons 65 years of age or over. . ." This provision, adopted to stop wholesale discharges of aged workers presumptively eligible for old-age assistance, has not been incorporated in subsequent WPA legisla-

1 Discussed in succeeding chapters.
2 The upper age limit for employment provided for youths by the CCC and NYA during the past several years usually overlapped the lower limit for employment by the WPA.
3 See, for example, Louisiana WPA, Manual of Procedure for Referral to Work Projects Administration. [New Orleans], sec. 2, p. 6, March 1, 1940.
4 Early in 1941 certain high WPA officials considered proposing that WPA employment be limited to workers who could produce birth certificates establishing age and citizenship. This proposal was abandoned, however, when it was seen that the deplorable lack of birth records in many sections of the country would make administration of such a provision almost impossible and would deny employment to thousands of workers for no fault of their own.
5 See chap. 17.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

tion. Nevertheless, WPA regulations have continued in effect the policy that unless they are receiving or have, with the intent of establishing eligibility for employment, relinquished old-age assistance "persons 65 years of age or over, if certified as in need and employable, shall be eligible for [WPA] employment." 1 Despite this general policy, state and local practice is sometimes hedged about by so many qualifications that it is with utmost difficulty that persons eligible for old-age assistance can secure WPA employment. 2

While it is true that the federal government has never established a maximum age limit for WPA employment, it has established other criteria which have sometimes resulted in denying employment to persons over sixty-five or perhaps seventy years of age. For example, the WPA has always prohibited the employment of any worker whose age or physical condition would endanger either his own or other workers' health or safety. 3 Furthermore, in harmony with the policy that WPA employment is designed for unemployed but employable workers, state and local relief authorities have sometimes prescribed that workers above a specified age are not "employable," or that workers above a prescribed age limit may not properly be classed as "unemployed" and "in the labor market" and therefore not among those for whom WPA employment is intended. 4 Although certain policies regarding employability have sometimes meant denying employment to older workers, other policies (such as limiting employment to family heads and giving preference to those with especially large families) have frequently had the opposite effect, militating against the employment of younger workers.

In Pennsylvania unprecedented industrial activity resulting

---

2 Typical of these policies is that prescribed in California when it was ruled that an aged person eligible for old-age assistance could be granted unemployment relief (a necessary prelude to referral for WPA employment) only if "he has been self-sustaining in private employment for at least 8 out of the previous 12 months, is temporarily unemployed, and has verified evidence of imminent reemployment."—California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 510.1, rev. January 13, 1941.
3 For a more detailed discussion of this requirement, see chap. 18.
4 While youth and employability are usually thought of as going together, it has been claimed by some local WPA officials that their best workers were usually older workers. When the writer (in 1941) asked one district director whether defense industries were taking his best workers, he retorted, "No. Not the best, only the younger workers, some of whom have never worked a day in their lives except for the WPA. Many older workers are more employable, know what it is really to do a day's work."
Eligibility

from the war program had by 1941 so increased demands for workers that the State Department of Public Assistance ruled that no able-bodied person between twenty and forty years of age could be referred for WPA employment. This stand was subsequently modified, however, and although relief was still denied to them, able-bodied persons between twenty and forty were eligible for referral for WPA employment.

TABLE 18.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE OF WPA EMPLOYES, FOUR SELECTED MONTHS, 1936 TO 1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>June, 1936</th>
<th>November, 1937</th>
<th>February, 1939</th>
<th>February, 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employes (thousands) | 2,286 | 1,501 | 2,905 | 950
Median age (years)   | 39.9  | 42.4  | 39.4  | 46.4

Sources of data: WPA, Age of Persons from Relief Rolls Employed on WPA Projects in June 1936, p. vii.
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session, 1940, p. 741; (Hearings under H.Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration, 76th Congress, 1st Session, 1939, Part II, p. 1429; (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943, 77th Congress, 2d Session, 1942, p. 46.

In June, 1936, the minimum age was sixteen. In November, 1937, and thereafter, it was eighteen. Data for June, 1936, relate to workers taken from relief rolls and pertain to their ages at the time of certification for WPA employment. Data for November, 1937, apply to more than a million workers included in a survey made in conjunction with the 1937 Census of Unemployment. Data for February, 1939, are for workers continued after review of need. Those for February, 1942, are also for certified workers only.

Ages of WPA Workers

The age distribution of workers employed at various stages of the WPA program is presented in Table 18. As may be noted, the median age which was only 39.4 in February, 1939, when

Because the WPA ruled that no person could be discriminated against merely because he fell within a certain age group, Pennsylvania authorities countered with a suggestion that denial of employment to such workers should be explained not by the fact that they were of a certain age but on the ground that private employment was available.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

employment totaled some 2.9 million, was 46.4 in February, 1942, when WPA employment totaled less than a million. In the two remaining months for which comparable data are presented the median age fell within the limits noted above. So also did the prevailing levels of WPA employment. What difference there was in the median ages in these two months bears out the previously noted tendency of the average age to be high when employment is low. This tendency may be explained in large measure by the fact that when reductions in WPA rolls are possible because of the availability of other jobs, it is usually the younger workers who leave the WPA to take them. It is probable, too, that when WPA rolls are reduced because of the lack of funds rather than because economic conditions justify such curtailment, the number of younger workers released may be somewhat high in proportion to their numbers either because they may have relatively fewer dependents or because they may be regarded as more likely than older workers to find other work, once they are cut off by the WPA. A further factor affecting the number of older persons employed in February, 1942, is that a considerable proportion of those employed in that month were workers who, because of liberalized legal provisions enacted in 1941, were veterans. These, for the most part, were forty-five or older.

One significant aspect of workers' ages is their relationship to the length of time they remain continuously in WPA employment. Although only 16.7 per cent of all the 2,724,000 workers studied in February, 1939, had been employed continuously for three years or more, the proportion of those in the various age groups employed for this period varied directly in accordance with age, ranging from only 6.3 per cent of those under twenty-five to 29.2 per cent of those sixty-five and over. Among workers in age-classes between twenty-five and forty-five, the proportion employed continuously for three years or more ranged from 10.8 per cent to 19.0 per cent, while that among workers between forty-five and sixty-five ranged from 20.2 to 24.7 per cent.

Difficulties experienced by older workers in securing private employment are reflected in a number of studies of the ages of workers who are able to leave WPA or relief rolls because they find other employment. Whereas the median age of male workers in the general relief population in 1935 was estimated as 39.7 years, the median age of some 1,100 workers who were able to
Eligibility

leave the WPA rolls because of private employment was only 35.5—more than four years less.¹

When the WPA in 1940 and 1941 established a special register of workers with skills likely to be needed in defense industries, it was said, officially, that the average age of those listed (and therefore most likely to be drawn into other jobs) was perhaps two or three years lower than that of WPA workers as a whole.

A similar tendency has been revealed in studies of the ages of those workers who, after being separated from WPA rolls, are able to find other employment. One such study, made in 1938, of 2,481 cases in nine sample areas, indicated that the average age of workers whose household income was derived mainly from private employment was two years younger than that of all separated workers and five years younger than workers whose households subsisted mainly upon relief grants. This same fact was revealed even more clearly by an earlier study which showed that “in 1936 separated workers whose families derived the bulk of their post-separation income from private employment were fully 10 years younger, on the average, than other workers.”²

In view of difficulties experienced by older workers discharged from WPA employment, various attempts (thus far unsuccess ful) have been made from time to time to exempt older workers from the operation of certain policies which have resulted in special hardship to them. Most important of these efforts, perhaps, was the proposal to exempt workers forty-five years of age or over from automatic dismissal after eighteen months’ continuous employment. Because this practice created such hardship for older workers, the House in 1940 voted that this requirement should not apply to workers who were forty-five years of age or more. The Senate, however, disapproved of the House action, as did Colonel Harrington, who declared that it would result in freezing into employment an ever-aging group that would prove inimical to WPA’s attempts to maintain a real work program.

When, in 1942, war production had boosted employment to previously unsurpassed levels, the continuing inability of older workers to find work was a cause of great concern. Voicing his


The WPA and Federal Relief Policy
solicitude for them, Representative Woodrum in June, 1942, told the House Committee that was considering new legislation for the WPA:

I am sure that it is the experience of every Member of Congress that they have had in their offices splendid, fine workingmen, in their fifties, vigorous people who could pass a life-insurance examination. They cannot get a job because they are too old. That is a hiatus in our industrial philosophy that we will have to bridge. If industry will not give them a job, then somebody has got to undertake it somewhere.¹

While Congress has never prescribed that older workers, as a whole, should be given special consideration in the distribution of WPA jobs it is noteworthy that one of the arguments most frequently advanced in support of the preferential treatment accorded by Congress to veterans in 1941 was the fact that they frequently experienced great difficulty in securing employment since their average age was then about forty-eight.²

That older workers eligible for WPA employment have not been denied their proportionate share of WPA jobs is suggested by a number of analyses. For example, a 1936 study covering a sample of some 315,000 households in 13 cities revealed that the median age of the economic heads of families certified for Works Program (including WPA) employment was 40.1 years. That of workers actually given employment was 40.8 years.

Among certified economic heads of families reported as not employed but able to accept Works Program employment there was, said the report, “a definite concentration . . . in the age range from 18-24 years (many of them with no usual occupation) and of heads over 65 years of age. Persons in both age groups,” it was reported, “were evidently at a disadvantage in getting Works Program jobs.”³

A similar situation prevailed in April, 1941, when those who

² See, for example, Congressional Record, June 13, 1941, pp. 5255-5260.

Although the median age of those employed on the Works Program was slightly higher than that of all economic heads certified, workers sixty-five years of age or over were slightly underrepresented inasmuch as they constituted 3 per cent of all the economic heads but only 2 per cent of those employed. Workers who were between forty-five and fifty-five (and who constituted only 24 per cent of the total) represented a somewhat larger proportion of those who were employed.
Eligibility

were employed by the WPA were, on the average, 2.5 years older than those who were known to be eligible but who had no assignment. Among women workers the situation was reversed, the average age of those who were unassigned being about a year more than that of those already at work.

A third indication that older unemployed workers are probably getting their proportionate share of WPA and other federal emergency jobs is afforded by the Enumerative Check Census taken in 1937.¹

Further evidence that older workers have received relatively favorable treatment is provided by a WPA study of unemployment in three cities—Birmingham, Toledo, and San Francisco. This revealed that unemployed workers "with jobs on the Works Program" were older than unemployed workers not employed on the program. The median age of workers employed on the Works Program in these three cities was thirty-eight, forty-one, and forty-five years, respectively. Median ages of unemployed workers not on the Works Program were six years lower in Birmingham and San Francisco and eight years lower in Toledo.

WPA policies and practices with respect to workers of various age groups, like a number of other aspects of the WPA program, highlight the mixed goals underlying a work-relief program. If, as WPA officials maintain, one important role of the WPA is to preserve working skills and habits of workers who may be expected to return to private jobs, the age of workers selected for this refurbishing would appear to deserve more consideration than it has been given. On the other hand, if the WPA program is to provide for older workers who are unable or unlikely to be absorbed in private industry a sort of sheltered employment—safeguarded against too rigorous competition from younger workers, the older workers might well be given some protection against the severity of such arbitrary policies as that requiring automatic discharge at the end of a prescribed term of employment.

¹Bureau of Census, U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Census of Partial Employment, Unemployment and Occupations, 1937, vol. 4, The Enumerative Check Census. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938. Again, exception to this generalization must be made with respect to workers who were sixty-five or over. Although workers who were sixty-five but less than seventy-five comprised 3.2 per cent of those reported as "totally unemployed" or employed on emergency work they constituted but 2.4 per cent of the "emergency workers." These ratios for male workers who benefited most from emergency employment showed more significant variation. The proportions, respectively, were 4.1 and 2.7 per cent.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Sex

Women are supposed to be no less eligible for WPA employment than men. Nevertheless, women have frequently experienced special difficulties in securing WPA jobs.

Special Difficulties Militating Against Employment of Women

Special difficulties confronting women applying for WPA jobs fall roughly into two classes: those that preclude their being placed on the eligible list and those that make it difficult for them to land jobs once they are declared eligible.

Difficulties of the first sort do not arise from the mere fact that the applicants are women but rather because they lack appropriate work experience, are not regarded as being "in the labor market," or are unavailable for steady employment because of responsibility for the care of children or invalids. Closely related to this last consideration is the probability that the WPA, in states having no federally approved plan for aid to dependent children, has sometimes deliberately refused employment to mothers of young children in the hope that this would hasten the day when the state would do more for them. A further obstacle to the employment of women has been the fact that the WPA has normally limited jobs to the "economic heads" of families and that women frequently could not qualify on this ground.

Just how these various considerations can affect the employment of women is evident in a Louisiana ruling which (in 1940) prescribed that:

Unemployed women in need are eligible for referral to the Works Program under the following circumstances:

1. They are the logical heads of families or are unattached. As a general rule, a woman with an employable husband is not eligible for referral, as her husband is the logical head of the family.
2. The problem is actually one of unemployment, they are seeking employment and could be considered as potential wage earners. This must be decided on an individual basis, taking into consideration the age, health, previous experience and educational qualifications. The W.P.A. will

For further discussion of work experience, employability, and availability for work see chaps. 18 and 19.
This issue is discussed further in chap. 17.
For further discussion of this policy see chap. 13.
Eligibility

not accept women when it appears that they could not be suitably em¬
ployed in the Works Program.\footnote{Louisiana WPA, Manual of Procedure for Referral to Work Projects Adminis¬
tration. [New Orleans], sec. 2, p. 14, March 1, 1940.}

Once women have met all eligibility requirements they are still
confronted by a second series of obstacles which WPA officials
sometimes refer to as “project trouble.” These include the dif¬
culty of devising suitable projects for the types of women avail¬
able. Not the least of these problems is that sewing projects,
which provide work for more women than any other type of
project, require considerable expenditures per woman-month for
materials.\footnote{For a similar ruling from Georgia, see Georgia WPA, Manual of Procedure for
Certification to W.P.A. [Atlanta], Part II, sec. 14, p. 36, February 15, 1940.}

On occasion, issues regarding the WPA’s employment of
women have become so tangled that it has been thought necessary
to restrict the number of women to a specified proportion of the
total number of workers employed by the WPA. Controls of
these types have been attributed to a wide variety of factors.
Among these may be noted: (a) a desire to compel WPA and
relief officials to exert greater care in determining whether the
women seeking work are indeed the economic heads of their
families, genuinely employable and eligible in other respects; (b)
a desire to avoid substituting the wife for the husband who is
thereby enabled to seek odd jobs which might enable him more
easily to supplement the wife’s earnings than she could supplement
his if he were the one employed by the WPA; (c) a desire to put
some brake upon women’s eagerness to be the family breadwinner,
wage recipient, and controller of the family pocketbook; (d) an
effort to reduce expenditures for materials; and finally (e) a de¬
sire to protect the WPA program against possible public criticism
for employing “too many women.”

One arbitrary reduction in the number of women employed by
the WPA had repercussions in the 1936 convention of the Ameri¬
can Federation of Labor. Protesting the action of Harry Hop¬
kins, WPA administrator, who it was said, “arbitrarily ordered
the dismissal of nearly fifty percent of the women employes of the
Works Progress Administration in the state of Colorado, solely
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

because of the fact that Colorado has 27 percent women employees in WPA projects as compared with an average of 16 percent for the nation as a whole,” the convention resolved: “That the WPA program be enlarged and extended to provide suitable and useful employment for all needy and employable women in Colorado and the entire nation, irrespective of arbitrary percentages which disregard human needs.”

Notwithstanding the various difficulties encountered, hundreds of thousands of women have been given WPA jobs.

Employment of Women

Employment of women on WPA projects, as shown in Table 19, has frequently exceeded 300,000 and has sometimes totaled more than 400,000. These numbers, it may be noted, have ranged from 12.1 to 19.2 per cent of the total number employed by the WPA.

TABLE 19.—NUMBER OF WOMEN WPA EMPLOYEES, AT SIX-MONTH INTERVALS, 1935 TO 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year and month</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent of all WPA workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935, December</td>
<td>330,700</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936, June</td>
<td>387,800</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>353,000</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937, June</td>
<td>323,300</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>284,000</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938, June</td>
<td>372,100</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>405,700</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939, June</td>
<td>352,800</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>333,600</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940, June</td>
<td>243,300</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>323,300</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941, June</td>
<td>254,800</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The proportion of women to men on WPA rolls has varied greatly from state to state. So, also, has the proportion of women among economic heads of families eligible for WPA employment.


280
Eligibility

In September, 1937, for example, when women employed by the WPA represented about 18 per cent of the total number of workers employed throughout the United States, the proportion in certain southeastern states was as high as 35 to 45 per cent.

To WPA officials their success in devising projects peculiarly adapted to the abilities of women has been a source of great satisfaction. Achievements in this area doubtless surpass any results previously realized in a vast public employment program and are attributable in large measure to the fact that federal, regional, state, and local WPA staffs have, from the beginning, included specialized officers designated to plan projects and to see that women's interests were properly safeguarded.

Among the special types of work designed for the employment of women may be noted health projects, education, recreational leadership, library extension work, research, laboratory and clerical work, art, music, cooking, and other professional and service projects which in April, 1938, for example, accounted for approximately 41.0 per cent of the 335,408 women then employed. Most important, however, were the sewing projects which at that time provided over half (53.2 per cent) of the jobs for women.

Women Sometimes Underrepresented on WPA Rolls

Despite tremendous efforts put forth by the WPA to give women their proportionate share of WPA jobs, they have sometimes been underrepresented on the rolls. Among economic heads of families eligible for WPA employment on January 15, 1936, for example, almost 16 per cent were women. Of those employed by the WPA at this time approximately 13.6 per cent were women. A month later, however, this proportion had risen to 15 per cent.

In the study of 13 cities in 1936, analysis of cases certified for Works Program employment revealed that although women constituted 17 per cent of the total economic heads of certified cases, they represented only 14 per cent of those employed on the Works Program.

More recently, reports from every section of the country reflect the fact that the proportion of women among those eligible and available for but not assigned to WPA jobs is frequently so high as to make WPA officials wonder how they can possibly
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

provide jobs for them. In Cleveland when the war program (during the spring of 1941) reduced to only about 4,800 the number of workers awaiting assignment, some 3,900 were women. Throughout the United States, as a whole, approximately a third of the white workers certified as eligible for but not given WPA employment in February, 1942, were women. Among Negro workers awaiting assignment, however, the number of women was approximately equal to the number of men.

All these reports, it will be noted, apply to the proportion of eligible women as opposed to eligible men who have succeeded in getting WPA employment. It is recalled, however, that many unemployed women (for reasons already enumerated) frequently face greater difficulty than men in qualifying as eligible for WPA jobs. Therefore the underrepresentation of needy unemployed women on WPA rolls may be more significant than appears from analysis of the extent to which the WPA has been unable to find employment for even those women who had crossed the first hurdles and been declared eligible for jobs. That this has been the case is suggested by data collected in the Enumerative Check Census of 1937 which indicated that 22.3 per cent of the 7,418,000 men classed as totally unemployed or emergency workers (i.e., workers employed by the WPA, CCC, and NYA) were emergency workers, whereas only 11.2 per cent of the 3,565,000 women classed as totally unemployed or emergency workers were thought to be emergency workers.¹

Characteristics of Women Employed by the WPA

But little, unfortunately, is known of women employed by the WPA. However, the very fact of their employment means that they were regarded as the logical wage-earner of the family, the economic head of the family, or the only worker available. Several studies made of the ages of WPA workers reveal that the relationship of women's ages to those of the men varies, depending upon when the studies were made. Two studies (made in 1937 and 1941) indicate that the average median age of women employed by the WPA has been somewhat lower than that of the men, lower by nearly three years in 1937, but by less than one

¹This relatively low ratio is, of course, affected by the fact that there was no feminine counterpart of the CCC (though what were dubbed “she-she-she” camps were frequently suggested) to give young women the same types of opportunity made available for young men.
Eligibility

year in 1941. In 1939, however, the reverse was found; the median age of women workers was more than a year higher than that of the men.

In the case of slightly more than a fifth (21.4 per cent) of the women employed by the WPA in 1939 it was reported that there was no other person in the family. Approximately 28 per cent of the women employed were members of families of only two persons. The proportions of men falling in these two groups were only 9.1 and 19.5 per cent, respectively. Whereas nearly half (49.7) of the men were members of families of four or more persons, less than a third (29.4 per cent) of the women fell into this category.

One study made by the WPA of some 2,000 women workers in Philadelphia during October, 1937, revealed that although 90 per cent of them were married, wives were reported as living with their husbands in only 15 per cent of the cases. Only 2 per cent of the husbands had private employment. "All of these [2,000] women," it was reported, "were responsible for from one to five additional people in the household."^1

On the basis of another study (of 553 rural women employed by WPA in 12 selected counties in Missouri in 1936) it was reported that approximately 60 per cent of those included in the study were without husbands: 12 per cent were single; 25 per cent widowed; and the remaining 23 per cent were either divorced, separated or deserted.

Of the total only 40 per cent were married and living with their husbands. "These [221] women," it was reported, "had been married for an average of 22 years and on the average were 43 years of age. Fifty-nine per cent of the husbands were permanently sick or otherwise disabled, 17 per cent were temporarily sick or disabled, 13 per cent were too old to work, while the remaining 10 per cent were either unemployed, mentally unbalanced or otherwise handicapped. Other data received during the study indicate that there has been an average of five years since the husband’s last employment at his regular occupation."^2

When the WPA in 1939 made a study of some 2,724,000 workers (of whom 355,555 or 13.1 per cent were women) it was found that these women had been continuously employed a

^1 WPA Release 4–1807, October, 1938.
^2 Ibid.
little longer than the men. Among women the median number of months of continuous employment was 14.6, while that for men was but 12.2. Whereas only 50.6 per cent of the men studied had been employed continuously for one year or more on their last WPA job prior to the study, 57.9 per cent of the women had been employed for this length of time. Among the men only 24.4 per cent had been employed two years or more, yet 33.7 per cent of the women fell in this category. Finally, while only 16.1 per cent of the men had been employed continuously for three years or more, 20.5 per cent of the women had been employed this length of time. This situation was undoubtedly due in large measure to the difficulty women had in finding other employment that would permit them to leave WPA rolls.

That women have been somewhat less successful than men in finding employment that makes it possible for them to leave relief rolls is suggested by a WPA study of some 1,100 workers in 13 cities who left relief rolls in 1935 to take private jobs. Among this group there were 260 males for every 100 females although the number of males in the general relief population was only 222 per 100 females.

Just as women appear to remain in WPA employment longer than men and to have greater difficulty in securing other jobs so also has it seemed that they experience greater difficulty than men in obtaining other employment once they are discharged by the WPA. This was illustrated by a study made by the WPA of workers separated from WPA rolls in 1937 when it was discovered that while 66 per cent of the men in urban areas secured employment after their separation from WPA jobs, only 44 per cent of the women in these areas found other employment. In rural areas the proportion of women to obtain jobs after separation from WPA employment was somewhat higher (47 per cent) than was true in urban areas. However, in comparison with the men in rural areas (who were more successful at job finding than were men in urban areas) women in rural areas suffered relatively greater handicaps that did those in urban areas.¹

Failure to temper federal policies (especially that requiring the automatic discharge of workers after eighteen months of continuous employment) to the peculiar difficulties experienced

Eligibility

by women in finding other employment again highlights the fundamental difficulties which spring from the WPA's dual nature. The WPA's efforts to be a genuine work program and to force people to seek private employment even when they face special handicaps in securing such employment inevitably conflict with its role as a relief measure.

Furthermore, so far as projects on which women are employed fail to prepare them for jobs open to women in private enterprise or fail (as the sewing projects are said to fail) to maintain normal standards of production they preclude realization of some of the most important objectives of a work program.

Race, Color, and Creed

One policy that has been insisted upon repeatedly and firmly by WPA officials is that there shall be no discrimination. Its importance was first stressed by President Roosevelt's Executive Order of May, 1935, which prescribed that workers who were "qualified by training and experience to be assigned to work projects shall not be discriminated against on any grounds whatsoever." 2

Typical of the many efforts made by WPA officials to prevent discrimination of any kind whatever were two administrative orders issued by Harry Hopkins in June and July, 1936.3 The latter prescribed that "workers who are qualified by training and experience to be assigned to work projects and who are eligible as specifically provided by law and by these regulations shall not be discriminated against on any grounds whatever, such as

1 For a typical example of criticism of WPA projects on this ground see that by Sarah Ginsberg, economist on the staff of the federal WPA: "The experience of the District [of Columbia] WPA sewing rooms is an example of what can be done in the way of training on a WPA project. Few knew how to sew when assigned; fewer knew how to sew well. The greater number did not know how to use a sewing machine. . . .

"Although these women have learned to do excellent work as seamstresses, the commercial possibilities of their acquired skills are not great. Washington has no large garment industry to absorb them. A large proportion, moreover, are not employable in private industry. Many are too old, and a large number have physical disabilities such as cardiac conditions, orthopedic troubles, etc."—Report of Investigation of Public Relief in the District of Columbia. Washington, December, 1938, Part III, vol. 2, pp. 103-104.

2 Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935.

3 WPA Administrative Orders Nos. 41 and 44, June 22, 1936, and July 11, 1936, respectively.

285
race, religion, or political affiliation." So eager were WPA officials, from the beginning, to prevent discrimination that many of the innumerable record and report forms prescribed for use by WPA and relief agencies made no provision for the regular inclusion of information regarding a worker’s race, religion, or politics.

Nearly four years after the President by executive order and WPA officials by administrative order had prohibited discrimination as already noted, Congress, in February, 1939, wrote into law a provision making it unlawful “for any person to deprive, attempt to deprive, or threaten to deprive, by any means, any person of any employment, position, work, compensation, or other benefit, provided for or made possible [by the ERA Act of 1938 as amended] on account of race, creed, color, or any political activity, support of, or opposition to any candidate or any political party in any election.” “Knowing” violation of this prohibition was termed a felony punishable by fine of not more than $1,000 or imprisonment for not more than one year or both. Substantially these same provisions have been written into subsequent ERA Acts.

Efforts of the administration to safeguard the rights of minority groups have not stopped with prohibitions against discrimination. Positive action has frequently been taken to assure fair treatment, especially to Negroes whose needs might not otherwise be given due consideration. One form this concern has taken is the establishment of national, state, and local advisory boards

Steps taken by the WPA to prevent discrimination on the basis of politics are discussed in the next chapter. Since discrimination on the basis of religion has never presented much of an administrative problem it is not discussed here apart from other types of discriminatory treatment.

This did not, however, prevent local WPA and relief officials from inserting on forms and records symbols or codes to denote Negroes, Mexicans, and so forth, to guide them in making assignments. Still it has militated against official studies of the WPA program’s effect upon people of different races or other groupings.

Even these provisions, according to testimony presented to a House Committee in 1941 by John P. Davis, executive secretary of the National Negro Congress, were inadequate properly to safeguard Negroes’ interests. He asked, therefore, that they “be so implemented that it will be easy for a person . . . to get justice, to get the law enforced.”—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1942, p. 417.
Eligibility and the appointment of Negro advisers to certain state and local staffs as well as to the federal WPA staff.¹

Criticisms of WPA Practice

Despite all that the WPA has done and tried to do to assure fair treatment to Negroes, there have nevertheless sometimes been charges of discrimination. There was, for example, the criticism voiced by John P. Davis who, in an address before the National Right-to-Work Congress in 1939 condemned “carrying over in the state WPA and relief administrations of the segregation practices of private industry.”² In testimony before a House Committee in 1941 Mr. Davis complained of the WPA’s failure to employ Negroes “in executive or administrative capacities” in the southern states “where this program comes in contact with the largest number of Negroes.”³

Notable among other charges of WPA discrimination against Negroes were those advanced in the Report of the New Jersey State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population:

It would be expected that in an intelligently planned WPA program the Negro unemployed would certainly receive equal consideration, and possibly special consideration, since it has been proved beyond doubt that it is especially difficult for this group to find re-employment in private industry—more difficult even than for the foreign-born unemployed. That such consideration has not been effectively given is immediately apparent from study of the official figures on relief and W.P.A. . . . In spite of the fact that Negroes indubitably constitute more than 20 per cent of the State’s unemployed, they composed 15.9 per cent of those assigned to W.P.A. jobs during 1937.⁴

³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 417.
⁴ WPA officials point out, however, that at least “a small number” of Negroes were employed in administrative jobs in West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Oklahoma.
⁵ Trenton, 1939, p. 16. As further evidence of discrimination this report cites data from a number of cities to show that the proportion of Negroes among WPA workers is lower than among cases granted relief. Without further refinement such comparisons are likely to be misleading, however, since studies made in various localities suggest that the proportion of white relief cases including employable workers is higher than among Negro cases. An extensive study (made in 1939) of relief recipients in Illinois, for example, revealed that although 56.6 per cent of the white
Employment of Negroes

But few data are available, unfortunately, to show how Negroes have fared under the WPA program. Many important WPA reports do not present separately data relating to white and Negro workers. Not even the extensive report of cases certified for Works Program employment in 13 cities, referred to earlier, tells anything about the relative proportion of certified white and Negro workers assigned to WPA jobs. Neither have the several WPA studies of conditions among workers laid off by the WPA from time to time made it possible to see how needs among discharged Negroes may have varied from those among white workers.

There have been several notable exceptions to this generalization, however. One of these is a report (made late in 1939) on "the peculiar effects of the thirty-day layoffs" on Negro WPA workers. This, however, was not published. An earlier report dealing with work-relief matters affecting Negro workers particularly in 1937, was also regarded as "confidential" and "for the guidance of WPA officials."

Although periodic reports of WPA employment make no reference to the number of Negroes employed from time to time, one report shows that in February, 1939, when the WPA reviewed the eligibility of practically all workers, the number of Negroes who were certified as eligible for continued employment was 387,138. These represented 14 per cent of the total number of certified workers employed. The proportion of Negroes to the total varied widely, as would be expected, and ranged from as high as 67 per cent in the District of Columbia, 39 per cent in South Carolina and Louisiana, 37 per cent in Georgia, 20 per cent in Illinois, and 14 per cent in New York and Kansas to less than 5 per cent in New England, many plains states, and the Northwest.1

An earlier report relating to the last quarter of 1937, indicated that a total of 225,080 Negro workers were employed by the WPA. This represented approximately 15.2 per cent of the total

---

Eligibility

number employed. Although this number was some 195,000 lower than the number of Negroes employed in 1936, it represented a larger proportion of the total than were employed at that time.

Whether the number of Negroes given WPA employment represents a fair distribution of these jobs would be most difficult to say since needs among Negroes are undoubtedly relatively greater than among white workers because of the relatively large proportion of them employed in poorly paid work (such as unskilled labor and domestic service), special difficulties in securing jobs in private enterprise, and the greater likelihood of discharge by private employers during periods of declining employment.

That Negroes have faced special difficulties in getting employment is evidenced by a WPA study of some 1,100 workers who left relief rolls in 1935 to take jobs in private enterprise. Although Negroes were thought to constitute approximately 26 per cent of the general relief load, they represented only 15 per cent of 1,100 cases which were able to leave the relief rolls because of getting other jobs.

Further indications that unemployed Negroes face special difficulties in finding jobs are presented in a report of long-term unemployment in Philadelphia where it was found that in "the hard core of unemployment" there was a "relative predominance of older workers, of unskilled workers, and, perhaps as a corollary of the latter, of Negroes."^1

Apparently at variance with these findings are those disclosed by WPA reports which showed that Negro workers separated from WPA employment during the spring of 1937 were somewhat more successful in getting other jobs than were white workers.²


Of the separated Negroes in urban areas 62 per cent (as opposed to 59 per cent of the white workers) had found other employment by the time of the study. In rural areas the percentages were 85 and 81, respectively. Although these findings might, at first blush, appear to conflict with those of other studies, this is not necessarily so since the study included not only those who left WPA rolls voluntarily but also those who were released for other reasons including quota reductions. This last group comprised 25 per cent of the total sample, and it is possible that in selecting workers to be discharged for this reason, WPA officials took into account the likelihood of their finding other jobs. (Note continued on p. 290.)
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In view of the many difficulties confronting Negroes in their efforts to find private employment and the relatively larger numbers found on relief rolls in areas where comparatively decent relief standards are maintained, it is not surprising that they have been employed by the WPA in the numbers already noted. In fact, the WPA has taken no little pride in having helped to equalize employment opportunities for Negroes. That this has been done, to some degree at least—though it would be impossible to say how well—is indicated by the fact that in areas covered by the Enumerative Check Census of 1937 it was found that in proportion to their number in the total population between the ages of fourteen and seventy-five the number of Negroes and persons of other colored groups employed as “emergency workers” (including those employed by the CCC and NYA as well as WPA workers) was about 1.7 times the number of white workers so employed. This ratio, it is important to note, corresponded almost exactly with the incidence of unemployment among colored as opposed to white workers.

The same tendency may be noted in preliminary 1940 census data relating to 26 states from which figures, to this writing, are available. These reveal that 13.8 per cent of all white and 16.3 per cent of the “non-white” workers at the time of the census were reported as seeking work or engaged in “emergency employment” which consisted primarily of jobs made available by the WPA. Whereas only 4.2 per cent of the white workers had emergency employment, 5.5 per cent of the non-white workers had this type of work. This proportion for colored workers varied widely among the 26 states, however, and ranged from 4 per cent or less in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North

Furthermore, if it were known what wages the released Negroes were compelled to accept, it might be found that the very slight advantage they had over white workers in getting private jobs had not been purchased without sacrifice. Finally, it is to be noted that the white workers separated from the program included a large proportion of aliens who constituted 15 per cent of all the separated workers and who, like Negroes, were experiencing special difficulties in finding jobs even in 1937.

1 This type of “equalization of opportunity” has been bitterly condemned by Negro leaders as a sort of “Jim Crowism” in employment attributable to private industry’s failure to give them what they regard as their fair share of jobs paying standard wages, making it necessary for the federal government to employ disproportionate numbers of them on low-paid WPA jobs.

2 According to the findings, 9.1 per cent of the white population was totally unemployed, 15.7 per cent of the Negro. Those having emergency jobs constituted 2 per cent of the white and 3.4 per cent of the Negro population.
Eligibility

Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas to more than 10 per cent in New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

Difficulties Encountered in Employing Negroes

Successes attained by the WPA in helping to "equalize" employment opportunities for Negroes, have not been achieved without difficulty. Like obstacles confronted in giving jobs to women, those impeding the employment of Negroes have been of two kinds: (a) those involved in getting Negroes referred and certified for employment; and (b) those arising from the necessity of getting sponsors to initiate and contribute to the cost of projects requiring such skills as eligible Negro workers might have.

Typical of the first type of difficulty are certain policies of relief agencies responsible for the referral of workers. These sometimes prescribe differential treatment of white and Negro workers with respect to various conditions of eligibility. Negro workers accustomed to relatively low standards of living, for example, may be denied WPA employment on the ground that they are not in need whereas workers accustomed to relatively higher standards of living may be declared eligible for such employment even though they have as large and possibly larger resources than the former. Similarly, since workers are denied WPA employment if they refuse private employment at pay prevailing in the community for the type of work offered, Negro workers refusing jobs at prevailing rates of $3.00 or $4.00 a week may be denied WPA employment whereas white workers might not be required to accept jobs at such rates if these were lower than those customarily paid white workers.

Although this type of practice has sometimes operated against

---

1 As shown in chaps. 15 and 20.

2 The WPA on occasion has taken a firm stand against discrimination of this sort. See chap. 15.

3 An example of this type of discrimination was cited in Work, the official organ of the Workers Alliance, in which it was charged that although a specified county welfare board in Georgia had certified for WPA employment half the white workers laid off under the eighteen-month rule, "almost all" of the Negro workers in the county had been refused recertification on the ground that they had refused offers of jobs in private industry.—Vol. 2, no. 15, October 26, 1939, p. 4.
Negroes, it has operated no less against any type of worker whose living standards or customary wage levels were relatively low.

Instead of limiting the number of Negroes to be employed by the WPA by applying different standards of eligibility to them, another device adopted by some relief agencies has been to handle more slowly the applications of Negroes, thus giving priority to other workers. Still another method of limiting Negro employment has been the practice (used particularly in the South) of controlling certifications or referrals of Negroes on a "quota" basis.

The second type of limitation upon the employment of Negroes is that it has been found difficult to find sponsors who are willing to devise projects on which Negroes in skilled or professional occupations can be advantageously employed. One result of this difficulty has been the employment at unskilled jobs of workers having a variety of special skills. A further difficulty is that a relatively large proportion of Negro workers are women who, as shown already, experience special difficulty in getting WPA employment whether they are Negro or white. Negro women, however, have further disadvantages in that their previous work experience is largely in domestic service and therefore difficult to use on the types of projects most usually available for WPA prosecution. Still greater difficulty has been encountered in finding sponsors for projects to employ unskilled Negro women accustomed only to manual labor, and those whom communities want to keep available for domestic service. Thus, responsibility for what Ruth Durant has termed the "Jim Crowism" in the WPA frequently must, as she says, "rest with the local welfare agencies and sponsors."

While their occupational backgrounds often make it difficult to employ skilled and professional Negroes on WPA jobs, some WPA officials have reported that there is a counter-tendency—the assigning of Negro white-collar workers to manual labor whereas white workers of the same type might not be so assigned.

1 In February, 1942, when about a third of the white workers awaiting assignment to WPA jobs were women, approximately half the Negro workers awaiting jobs were women.

Eligibility

and therefore given no employment—which in a fashion at least may be said to work in favor of Negro workers.¹

Concrete evidence of difficulties encountered in developing projects for Negroes is found in the report of a discussion of this question by a group of officials particularly interested in how administration of relief programs in the District of Columbia affected colored workers. After several participants deplored the lack of suitable projects for various types of Negroes, John W. Whitten, junior race relations officer of the WPA, declared:

I agree . . . that negroes should be allowed to work on a greater number of projects than they are in the District . . . but I should put the blame where the blame is. . . . A lot of the fault, . . . is at the District Building. . . . As you know, the WPA is run by the District Building, and not until this WPA is separated from the District Government will you be able to do anything here in the District towards integrating negroes in all types of projects.

To this Mary Steele, director of the Women’s and Professional Division of the District WPA added: “It is a fact that frequently projects are written and the Federal Government and District Government will not allow negroes to be employed. It is also a fact that we can’t get sponsors to have projects when negroes are employed.”²

While Negroes in many areas have experienced special difficulty in securing WPA employment in keeping with their ability, there have been a few instances where it has been easier for Negro than for white workers to find suitable jobs. This has sometimes been the case on educational projects, particularly in the South, where, in recruiting classes, Negroes have responded more readily than white persons.

Although most obstacles to the employment of Negroes and certain other racial and minority groups have been attributable to relief and other local or state authorities, some have been of the WPA’s own making. These, however, have frequently been

¹ Though not without its advantages, this tendency frequently is attacked on the ground that, in the long run, the detrimental effects of “underplacing” may offset its apparent benefits to workers who otherwise might have gone without jobs.

In fairness to federal agencies in Washington it must be said that they later overcame their earlier reluctance to sponsor projects and, as one WPA official has said, “eventually led the way” in providing certain types of employment for Negroes.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

short-lived and, when brought to the attention of federal authorities, removed. There have been, for example, instances of differential treatment accorded in certain parts of the South and Southwest to Negro and Spanish-American women who were allowed to work only a part of the regularly scheduled project hours. The purpose of this, obviously, was to arrange matters so as to permit them to earn less than the standard monthly wage which was thought to be so high as to discourage acceptance of other employment that might be available to them.

Still another limitation of the WPA's own devising has been the practice which has sometimes been followed of restricting Negro employment to a specified proportion of the whole. This percentage has sometimes been the same as the percentage of Negroes found in the general population, even though it was known that the incidence of need among Negroes was higher than among white persons. In some instances, however, attempts have been made to assign Negro and white workers in approximately equal numbers even when Negroes constituted a smaller proportion of the general population.

Notwithstanding many instances of apparent discrimination in connection with various aspects of the WPA program, the policies and influence of the federal WPA have undoubtedly served to remedy abuses wherever found. In fact, there are indications that the federal WPA's refusal to discriminate between Negro and white workers on federal theater projects may have contributed to the liquidation of these activities. This possibility is suggested by the interest various members of the House Committee investigating the WPA repeatedly evidenced in the employment of white and Negro actors on the same theater projects.

On May 1, 1939, for example, one of the investigators for the Committee (who on a number of occasions emphasized to the Committee that Negro and white actors appeared together in some productions) testified as follows: "Sing for Your Supper is being played . . . now. That is a mixed cast, white and colored."

When Representative Woodrum disclosed interest in the mixed nature of the cast, the investigator elaborated further: "There is no distinction in the cast. The colored and white are mixed
Eligibility

together, dance together, and the actors are the same. Of course, it is only a question of opinion . . . I noticed it especially."^1

In subsequent testimony on theater projects this same investigator emphasized employment of Negro and white actors together. Among others who, like Mr. Woodrum, showed particular interest in this subject were Representative Johnson of West Virginia, and J. O'Connor Roberts, counsel to the Committee.

It is also noteworthy that in a statement filed with the Committee by one of its investigators giving the names and types of productions presented under the federal theater projects, rehearsals, opening and closing dates, and other information about them, there were included statements as to the number in and nature of each cast, whether white, colored, or mixed. Although other considerations, such as purported "subversive" activities of federal theater employes, "radical" and "red" emphases in production, costs of production and alleged competition with private producers, all figured in the liquidation of the federal theater projects, it would be hard to prove that failure to draw the color line had nothing to do with their demise.

That the administration's efforts to minimize discrimination against Negroes have been appreciated is evidenced by an editorial appearing in Opportunity—a journal of Negro life—which declared:

It is to the eternal credit of the administrative officers of the WPA that discrimination on various projects because of race has been kept to a minimum and that in almost every community Negroes have been given a chance to participate in the work program. In the South, as might have been expected, this participation has been limited, and differential wages on the basis of race have been more or less effectively established; but in the northern communities, particularly in the urban centers, the Negro has been afforded his first real opportunity for employment in white-collar occupations.^2

As a result of this success, thousands of Negroes could undoubtedly second, with enthusiasm, the declaration of the Negro WPA worker in North Carolina who said, "The govern'ment is the best boss I ever had."^3

^1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 191-192.
^2 Vol. 17, no. 2, February, 1939, p. 34.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The administration's desire to minimize discrimination against Negroes and other minority groups has been advanced from time to time as one of the reasons why federal operation and control over the WPA program should be continued. Increased state and local control, it is held, would give rise to increased discrimination. That Negroes, too, have shared this opinion is evident from the fact that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1936 supported President Roosevelt's federal work-relief program as opposed to Republican presidential candidate Landon's proposal to return control of relief to states and localities. Furthermore, an official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People declared in 1940 that continued federal control over the WPA program was imperative if discrimination against Negroes and other disadvantaged groups was to be kept at a minimum. Admitting that local prejudices and pressures would not permit even federal officials completely to eradicate discriminatory practices, he nevertheless affirmed his belief that these prejudices could be more quickly overcome with a liberal national government in the saddle than if greater control over the program were given to state and local authorities and the role of the federal government reduced to one of moral suasion.

In view of one of the objectives of a work program (which, among other things, is supposed to help preserve working habits and skills of workers in the expectation that sooner or later they may be returned to private employment), it has been urged that the WPA has provided employment for too many Negroes. Attitudes of private employers being what they are, the argument runs, the WPA would better give more of its jobs to workers having relatively better chances of being taken on by private employers.

This position, obviously, contrasts sharply with that of those who urge that WPA jobs be provided to those most in need of jobs and that preference in WPA employment should be given to those least able or likely to find jobs elsewhere. This conflict again vividly illustrates some of the basic contradictions upon which, if somewhat hazardously, the WPA program rests.

1 As shown in chap. 31.
Eligibility

Employment of Indians

American Indians are frequently said to be denied their fair share of WPA jobs. In 1940, for example, Representative Mundt of South Dakota (a member of the House Committee on Indian Affairs) told a Committee that was considering a pending WPA measure that while he did not want to say the federal government would not employ Indians he would say that it was "more difficult for the Indian [than the white worker] to secure work on an ordinary project. . . . If there are 10 Indians and 10 white men available," he explained further, "the chances are there will be considerably more white men employed than Indians."^1

Among reasons cited for this discrimination has been the fact that many Indians were wards of the government and therefore had access to other resources not available to non-Indians to meet their needs; that they did not pay taxes nor own property and therefore were not thought to be as much entitled to WPA jobs as property-owners and taxpayers. One further reason has been that Indians in need of WPA employment are frequently found in sparsely settled areas in which the operation of WPA projects is difficult, relatively expensive, and would not be likely to be undertaken even if those who might be given employment were not Indians. Then, too, there has been what Representative Mundt has termed "the same psychological reason" which lay behind the Indian's having been pushed on to marginal land.

Just how many Indians have been employed by the WPA from time to time is not known. In April, 1940, when Representative Taber asked Colonel Harrington for figures on Indian employment by states the Colonel agreed to furnish them for the record. What had to be supplied, because of the lack of better data, was not Indian employment by states but an analysis for a few states of "estimated average employment" on projects on Indian reservations approved under the ERA Act of 1939 but not actually in operation. This analysis showed a total of 68 projects in 14 states and the District of Columbia. These were estimated to provide an "average employment" for 2,589 workers. States in

^1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 852.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

which "average employment" fell between 400 and 500 were Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Montana. Other states having relatively high averages were California and North Dakota with averages approximately 240 each.
CHAPTER XII
ELIGIBILITY: POLITICS, CITIZENSHIP, AND SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

Politics

All that is said in law and WPA regulations about discrimination against applicants for WPA jobs on the basis of color, race, and creed also holds for discrimination because of politics. In fact, restrictions upon political discrimination are prescribed in even greater detail than those upon discrimination on other grounds, which in many instances appear to be thought of as secondary and merely incidental to the one great bugaboo of Congress and the administration—politics.¹

"Political Pull" an Elusive Force

The extent to which politics has or has not played a part in placing workers on WPA jobs is, by its very nature, most difficult accurately to appraise. In the first place, it is no easy task to define what is meant by politics. When a worker is referred to a relief agency or the WPA for a WPA job how are "political" referrals to be distinguished from those which social workers even in private social agencies have long been accustomed to receive from influential board members, prominent local leaders, or even politicians? Social workers who have had experience with private social agencies as well as with the WPA program have frequently emphasized the fact that the "politics" and personal influence of board members and prominent citizens in connection with getting benefits from private agencies are frequently more difficult to combat than those experienced under the WPA program because in private agencies there are no safeguards com-

¹Restrictions on political activity are not limited to favoritism or discrimination in giving out WPA jobs but apply also to the treatment of those already employed by the WPA. Some safeguards, such as the letters which have been sent all workers with their pay checks from time to time (or have been posted on project sites), have assured workers again and again that they could vote as they pleased and that how they voted could have no effect on their WPA employment. For a typical example of such letters and notices see WPA Release 4-2124, April 22, 1940. See also chap. 30.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

parable with the legal provisions behind which WPA officials can take refuge when "the heat is turned on."

A further difficulty in appraising the degree to which politics may be a factor in placing people on WPA jobs is the fact that when an applicant is referred for WPA employment by a politician and is found honestly to meet all the conditions of eligibility for employment, it is all but impossible to convince those having knowledge of the case that it was the honest need and not the politician's referral that turned the trick. This difficulty of fairly assessing the degree to which political pull is an important factor is further enhanced by the politician's eagerness to claim credit for his protégé's being selected even though his recommendation may have had no material bearing on the placement.

Yet another obstacle to evaluating the effect of political pull in connection with WPA employment is that it does not always result in giving to certain people something for which they are not eligible. It may take the form of withholding benefits from those who are entitled to them. As Colonel Harrington once told a House Committee, it is "difficult to detect the instances where persons are denied referral because they are not 'right' politically. Very grave injustices," he said, "can be worked in this respect."^1

In a number of states (notably in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) local officials unsympathetic toward the Roosevelt administration have sometimes been reluctant, and have even refused to refer for WPA employment workers who were admittedly in need and eligible. This has been particularly likely to occur just prior to important elections when it was thought best not to have too many people grateful to the administration for a job and a pay check.

These injustices, it may be noted in passing, are doubtless facilitated by the WPA's lack^2 of any effective system of granting appeals or hearings to persons who believe themselves denied just treatment with respect to their eligibility for WPA employment.

Political pressures to give jobs to certain favorites are probably applied to local relief authorities, who are responsible for referring workers to the WPA, as frequently, if not more frequently, than to the WPA itself. In fact, pressures upon these

^2 See chap. 14.
local and state officials have sometimes proved so intense that WPA control over assignments has proved a welcome "escape-hatch" for relief authorities. Some of the methods devised by officials who have been subjected to more political pressure than they could bear have been truly ingenious. One of these was to mark in some characteristic manner (or fail to sign) certain prescribed documents used in referring workers to the WPA. Upon observing these irregularities, WPA officials would refuse to accept the referral or refuse to assign the worker in question. This was said to have left everybody—except, of course, the unsuccessful applicant—happy: the WPA, because it was not maneuvered into being controlled by a political wire-puller; the relief official, because he made the referral as requested; and the politician, because he could say to his friend, "I've done everything I can for you."

Instead of marking (or not marking) prescribed documents so as to prevent political appointments to WPA jobs, local relief authorities sometimes submit the necessary documents properly executed, but by telephone to WPA officials recommend that action should not be taken.

**Charges of Political Favoritism**

Despite all that Congress and the WPA have done to minimize the influence of politics in getting WPA jobs, there have frequently been charges that workers in one place or another have been put to work or kept on the job because of political pull. Not infrequently the controversy as to how much or how little politics there is in the WPA resolves into a battle of affidavits—the chargers producing sworn statements that political skulduggery was going on, the defenders producing equally impressive affidavits supporting the lily-whiteness of their acts. Unfortunately, there is almost no body of data to help the impartial observer to make his choice between these two camps.

Hazardous as judgments on the subject may be, first-hand contacts with relief and WPA officials in nearly half the states and in many cities and counties lead this writer to believe that in the distribution of WPA project jobs as opposed to those of a supervisory and administrative nature politics plays only a minor and comparatively insignificant role.

This general conclusion has been confirmed, so far as Massa-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

When Massachusetts is concerned, by a survey made by the staff of the Bureau for Research in Municipal Government, Graduate School of Public Administration, Harvard University. Public officials approached in the course of that study were reported as agreeing that in the vast majority of cases—amounting to perhaps 90 per cent of the total—politics played no part in the selection of workers for WPA project jobs. Further corroboration of this view is provided by E. Wight Bakke, who in his extensive study of unemployment in New Haven reported: “We found little evidence to verify the contention on the part of many citizens that actual securing of the ordinary work relief depended upon a man’s political affiliations.”

To say that politics has been a comparatively unimportant consideration in the allocation of the relatively few WPA jobs available is not to say that it is nowhere a consideration in getting WPA employment. Neither does it mean that officials connected with the WPA program have not been subjected to political pressure. Many have admitted to the writer that they have. Far more, however, have reported that they were “let alone by the politicians,” were not “interfered with,” were “free to do a good job,” and “to do their duty as they saw it.” It is the opinion of this writer that the net effect of the control exercised over the WPA program by Congress and the WPA itself has been greatly to reduce the extent to which state and local politics, in the absence of federal control, might affect the selection of workers for WPA jobs. Public officials consulted during the course of the Massachusetts study already referred to also agreed that increase of local control over the WPA program would probably open the door to more political chicanery.

In passing, it is significant to note that in some instances in which political pull is a factor in determining which eligible worker shall be placed on a WPA project, reliance upon such influence has been invited by the great scarcity of jobs. Thus, the very inadequacy of the WPA program may be said to have set the stage for just such conniving as has sometimes been resorted

1 The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, p. 405.
2 There was, for example, one eastern city where administrative employees having direct knowledge of methods by which workers were referred to the WPA for jobs observed that in determining who should be given WPA employment, the question “Who do you know?” (ungrammatical as it is) was of greater importance than “What do you need?”
3 Discussed further in chap. 25.
Eligibility

to, even by wholly eligible applicants, to make sure that they land one of the few available jobs.

Citizenship

WPA employment since 1939 has been restricted by act of Congress to United States citizens, Indians, and others (such as Filipinos) owing allegiance to the United States. Allegiance is officially interpreted to mean “permanent” allegiance. Before any worker may be paid from funds appropriated to the WPA, he must execute a prescribed form testifying that he is a United States citizen. These affidavits are by law made prima facie evidence of citizenship.

Acceptance of these affidavits, rather than some formal documentary proof, as evidence of citizenship represents a compromise between the House and the Senate, inasmuch as the former once voted to bar all aliens from WPA jobs. This would have required proof of citizenship before payments could have been made to workers. As Colonel Harrington explained soon after this proposal was advanced, “Proof of citizenship would have been very difficult. In this country, many of the vital records—birth records and so on—of 30 or 40 or 50 years ago are either incomplete or non-existent, and the task of attempting to affirmatively prove citizenship for 3,000,000 WPA workers would have been stupendous.” Of this he was finally able to convince Congress. The requirement was therefore modified so that only an affidavit of citizenship was required.1

Earlier Policies Regarding Aliens

Sweeping restrictions first put into effect against aliens in 1939 marked the climax of a series of increasingly severe limitations upon the employment of non-citizens by the WPA. Under the program as originally launched, no distinction of any kind was made between aliens and citizens. In fact, many of the records and forms used during the early stages of the program purposely made no provision for routine reporting of information regarding the citizenship of applicants or workers.

During hearings before a Senate Committee in May, 1936,

1 Harrington, F. C., The W.P.A.—Its Immediate Future. New York (City) WPA, No. 5 in a series of talks to New York City executives as part of the Executive Training Program, February 25, 1939, pp. 5-6.
Mr. Hopkins was asked how many aliens the WPA was then employing. In reply, he stated that, since prevailing law made no provision for discriminating against aliens, the WPA had no exact figures as to how many were employed. He estimated, however, that in only about 4 per cent of the total number of families on relief was the head of the family an alien who had not declared his intent to become a citizen. "This is a smaller proportion than the proportion of aliens to the total population," he said, then added, "Probably two-thirds of the heads of these alien families receiving relief have American citizens who are dependent upon them." 1

Though admitting that the WPA, under existing law, could not discriminate against non-citizens, Mr. Hopkins, in reply to a question from Representative Bacon of New York as to what he would do about an alien illegally in the United States, replied, "If we knew a man was here illegally we would not take him on the relief rolls." 2 And, although such discrimination might not be authorized by law or executive orders under which the WPA was operating, Mr. Hopkins added, "Realistically, we would make it." 3

Despite this admission, Mr. Hopkins emphasized to a Senate Committee that this was only one aspect of a larger problem. The question of employing aliens illegally in the United States, explained Mr. Hopkins, "gets into the question of any person getting relief who has violated any statute." 4

This statement drew from Republican Senator Steiwer of Oregon a question as to whether Mr. Hopkins would not "distinguish" the case of a law-breaking citizen from that of an "alien

1 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 94.

One reason why the proportion of aliens on WPA rolls was so low, Mr. Hopkins explained to a House Committee, was because "some of the State laws [sic] require them [aliens] to be deported when they become public charges."—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 170.

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 221. Mr. Hopkins frequently distinguished between (a) what might be done if the WPA knew aliens to be in this country illegally and (b) responsibility for ascertaining whether or not they were here illegally. "We did not," he told a House Committee, in 1936, "think it was our business to run down and find out whether an alien had come in in violation of the quota laws. That is the responsibility of others."—Ibid., p. 171.

3 Ibid., pp. 170, 221.

4 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 95.
Eligibility

who was illegally admitted and who ought to be deported. . . .”

To this query Mr. Hopkins replied: “No; as between those two cases, I cannot see any distinction. I think in either case, if we had any knowledge of any kind about any violation of the law, it would be our duty to get him in the right hands, and I would think both of them stood on all fours.”

Despite administration opposition, Congress wrote into the ERA Act of 1936 a provision denying employment not to all aliens but to those illegally within the United States. This provision was qualified, however, in two important respects. One qualification was that the WPA (and other agencies granted funds under the act) were not “knowingly” to employ aliens illegally within the country.

The second qualification was that the WPA was not absolutely forbidden to employ aliens even when they were known to be here illegally since the law specified that officials had only to make “every reasonable effort consistent with prompt employment of the destitute unemployed” to see that such aliens were not given employment. To harassed administrative officials who already had more work than they could do and who were therefore eager to escape responsibility for checking up on the citizenship of all WPA workers, the failure of Congress to require the exclusion of aliens if this should interfere with “prompt” employment of the eligible workers proved as welcome a boon as did the word “knowingly.”

Upon passage of the ERA Act of 1936, WPA and relief officials in all parts of the country were warned that the question as to whether or not aliens were illegally in the United States was a highly technical one to be referred to representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The responsibility of relief and WPA officials was regarded as fulfilled when they determined the place and date of an applicant’s birth, naturalization, or declaration of intent to become a citizen. Applicants not born in the United States nor having at least declared their intent to become citizens were required to fill out a comprehensive questionnaire prepared by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. When information thus secured indicated irregular or illegal entry or when complaints or charges were brought against specific individuals WPA officials were responsible only for forwarding all

---

1 Ibid., pp. 95-96.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

available data for further checking by the proper authorities.

At the time the new law was enacted it was estimated, according to the New York Times, that only about "10,000 illegally entered aliens held relief jobs."¹ In June, 1937—a year after the first anti-alien provision was adopted—Mr. Hopkins reported to a Senate Committee that out of about 2,000 separate charges that persons were in this country illegally, the Department of Labor had been able to establish this fact in only four cases.

When time to consider a new relief bill rolled around, a growing chorus was demanding a tightening of restrictions against aliens. With enactment of the ERA Act of 1937, therefore, some of these proposals were written into law—again against the wishes of administration leaders of whom Mr. Hopkins was most vocal. Increased demand for further discrimination against aliens employed by the WPA was but part of a larger move to bar them from all government pay rolls. This culminated in the unanimous approval by the House of the so-called Starnes bill which was framed to prohibit use of federal funds to employ aliens on government jobs.²

Reporting on the number of aliens employed by the WPA, Mr. Hopkins in May, 1937, told the House Committee holding hearings on the pending relief bill:

... no more than 120,000 of the aliens who can legally be employed on the Works Program have jobs at the present time. ... The families of at least two-thirds of the aliens employed on the Works Program contain children who are American citizens. Thus relief funds extended to aliens provide benefits for approximately 160,000 American citizens, the great majority of whom are dependent children. ...

Furthermore [declared Mr. Hopkins, voicing a prophecy that time was to fulfill much too well], it is probable that action taken to bar all aliens from Federal relief jobs would be quickly followed by similar action on the part of the States and municipalities. A considerable proportion of the aliens receiving employment have already taken out first papers as a step toward citizenship.³

¹ June 21, 1936.
² The Starnes bill died in committee, in the Senate.
³ For a statement by Mr. Hopkins on the relationship between these two moves, see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1937. 75th Congress, 1st Session. 1937, p. 152.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 151-152. The administration's uncertainty as to the number of aliens employed by the WPA was widely assumed to mean that this was larger than could discreetly be revealed. In fact, unwillingness to disclose the number of aliens employed by the WPA was blamed for at least part of the administration's opposition to a census of unemployment.
Eligibility

Before the Senate Committee which later considered this issue, Mr. Hopkins again voiced his opposition to the proposed restrictions against aliens. However, he added, "If . . . Congress wishes to exclude aliens from the Works Program, there should be some language in here so that the burden of proof does not fall upon the applicant. I have had a great deal of experience in proving citizenship of people, and it is, administratively, one of the most difficult jobs there is. It would involve a tremendous amount of administrative machinery, to actually prove the citizenship of every applicant, especially in our great cities."^1

The upshot of all this discussion was that anti-alien restrictions were tightened in two ways: first, the WPA was forbidden knowingly to employ any alien who had not filed a declaration of intent to become a United States citizen; and second, even those aliens who were eligible for employment were placed in a less favored class than other groups. Among workers qualified by training, experience, and ability, first preference under the new law had to be given veterans of World War I and the Spanish-American War; second preference was accorded to other citizens; and third preference was extended to eligible aliens who, prior to the date of the approval of the act, had declared their intention of becoming citizens. These aliens had priority over those who declared their intent only after the enactment of the law. In view of the gross inadequacy of the jobs available, these restrictions meant, in practice, almost total debarment of aliens from employment except in rare instances where they possessed special skills not found among citizens. In New York City, for example, the need for skilled labor for building projects necessitated the appointment of aliens who had declared their intent of becoming citizens.

Two effects followed immediately the new restrictions against aliens who had not declared their intent to become citizens: first, the WPA discharged some 72,000 such aliens.\(^2\) Many of those discharged soon applied for relief. This brought to local authori-

---

\(^1\) U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 361), Emergency Relief Appropriation. 75th Congress, 1st Session. 1937, p. 142.

\(^2\) Although exact figures were not available, official WPA estimates indicated that most of the 72,000 discharges of aliens occurred in six states and that in these states the bulk of the separations was in industrial cities. In New York City alone some 17,000 were released. "Suspect" or "probable" aliens were eligible for subsequent reinstatement if they could establish their eligibility.
ties a realization of the effect the action of Congress was going to have upon them.

A second fact that gave rise to serious repercussions was that the number of aliens taking steps to declare their intent of becoming citizens continued at a relatively high level. Unfortunately, the continued eagerness of aliens to file these declarations proved to be a boomerang and gave rise to the charge that they were declaring their intent so that they could get jobs rather than because they wanted to be citizens. Additionally, it was alleged that, having declared their intent and obtained WPA jobs, many would not go on to secure their final papers. Therefore, when the ERA Act of 1938 came up for consideration, Representative Lanham of Texas proposed to overcome this alleged tendency on the part of aliens by ruling that declarations of intent should be sufficient to permit employment by the WPA only so long as they remained valid. Another suggestion, made by the legislative representative of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, was that aliens should be eligible for WPA employment "next after citizens" only if their declarations of intent were made before a specified time, such as the date of enactment of the bill then pending. Language finally written into law incorporated this suggestion.

Criticisms of Established Policies

One noteworthy aspect of the discrimination visited upon aliens in 1937 and 1938 is that some of those who were most responsible for this action felt that it went too far. They tried, therefore, to find some way of relaxing the sweeping prohibitions they had helped to put into the law books.

The truth, however, is that declarations during the fiscal year 1938 (the first year these more severe restrictions were in effect) actually fell 14.5 per cent below the number filed the previous year in which the total exceeded 176,000 and represented a gain of some 19 per cent over the year previous. This witness also urged that aliens legally within the country be made eligible for WPA employment (though in a deferred category) even if they had not declared their intent of becoming citizens by the time the new law was passed. This provision prescribed that "No alien illegally within the limits of the United States, and no alien who has not, prior to the date of enactment of this joint resolution, filed a declaration of intention to become an American citizen which is valid and has not expired, shall knowingly be given employment or continued in employment on any project prosecuted under the appropriations in this title. . . ."—Sec. 11.
Eligibility

There was, for example, Representative Lanham, who in 1938 told a House Committee, "Perhaps from a humanitarian angle there are exceptional cases . . . where some . . . relief should be afforded because of the promptings of the heart, in order not to do an injustice to a worthy person." By 1938 Senator Byrnes, who said he thought he had introduced the 1937 amendment against aliens, was also seeking some way of liberalizing existing restrictions.

One of the proposals designed to mitigate existing restrictions would have permitted employment of a legally entered alien (even though he had not declared his intent to become a citizen) if he had "resided continuously and lived honorably in the United States since January 1, 1928, and is ineligible under the laws of the United States to become a citizen." Aubrey Williams objected to this proposal on the ground that it would be very difficult to administer. Senator Adams of Colorado also opposed it, contending that it would give undue advantage not only to "Japanese, Chinese, and those of races that are not eligible for citizenship" but also to "anarchists who are not eligible for citizenship."^1

Congressional concern for aliens who suffered hardship as a result of being denied WPA employment under existing restrictions came to nothing, however, and the ERA Act of 1938 continued in effect earlier limitations.

In 1939, while a Senate Committee was considering new WPA legislation, Colonel Harrington declared that "In most States there are no aliens with first citizenship papers currently employed." This, he said, was due to the fact that "the funds and quota" never permitted the employment of all needy veterans and other citizens who, under existing law, were entitled to employment before aliens. The official WPA estimate of the total number of eligible aliens employed by the WPA throughout the country as a whole was "fewer than 30,000."^3

Drawing restrictions against aliens still tighter, the House in

^2 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 596), Supplemental Appropriation Relief and Work Relief, Fiscal Year 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, pp. 41-42.
^3 Idem (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 101-103.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

1939 adopted a flat prohibition against their employment. This was disapproved by the Senate Committee, which held hearings on the measure, on the ground that "Aliens who in all good faith have filed declarations of intention to become American citizens prior to June 21, 1938, which are valid and have not expired, and those persons who because of racial ineligibility or otherwise cannot become citizens of the United States, but nevertheless owe allegiance to the United States, are deserving of benefits under the Relief Act." ¹

Colonel Harrington’s objection to the House restriction, as already noted, was that it would impose upon the WPA the tremendous administrative burden of proving and regularly reporting to the General Accounting Office the citizenship of each WPA worker before he could be paid from WPA funds. In view of these difficulties, therefore, Congress (as previously described) finally decreed that a worker’s affidavit declaring himself to be a United States citizen might be accepted as prima facie evidence of citizenship. Workers unable or failing to file such affidavits were to be dropped from the rolls by March 6, 1939. As a result of this policy, approximately 45,500 were dismissed. Nearly half the total were concentrated in three states—Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan. The only other states in which 2,000 or more were discharged as ineligible aliens were Wisconsin, Texas, and California. Since citizens who were wholly eligible for employment but had failed to file affidavits were released along with non-citizens, WPA officials estimated that some 10,000 of those discharged might qualify for employment upon filing the affidavits.

Acting under law which permitted penalties of as much as a year’s imprisonment and a fine of $1,000 for submitting false affidavits with respect to citizenship, federal authorities by August, 1942, had convicted only about 20 persons in approximately 10 different states. Penalties inflicted were light, however, and in no case exceeded a short term in jail. No attempt was made to secure restitution of money paid to workers employed in contravention of law inasmuch as it was held that they had worked for it.

As soon as the first discrimination against aliens went into effect and as the ever-tightening restrictions became operative, WPA officials repeatedly made it clear to both WPA and relief author-


310
Eligibility

Eligibilities that the limitations applied only to the aliens themselves and not to members of their families who might be citizens and otherwise eligible for WPA jobs.

Discrimination against employment of aliens by the WPA has frequently entailed extremely serious consequences, particularly in areas where relief was denied to employable aliens either because of their citizenship or because of their employability.\(^1\) In jurisdictions where relief was not denied to employable persons as such, there was sometimes—as Harry Hopkins had once prophesied there would be—a marked tendency on the part of state and local authorities to follow the federal government's lead in denying relief to aliens.

In areas where local officials chose not to follow the example of Congress in reneging on their responsibility for aliens, it was soon found that a considerable proportion of the employable persons on relief rolls were those to whom WPA jobs were not available because of citizenship. In New York City in January, 1941, when some 66,000 employable persons were being granted home relief, approximately 25,000 were said to be aliens. In Massachusetts, in March, 1940, among a total of 37,566 employable workers granted general relief and not employed by the WPA 25.7 per cent were reported to be aliens. In Los Angeles County (California) almost 28,000 presumably employable cases granted unemployment relief early in 1938 were thought to include some 5,000 employable aliens.

Prohibitions against giving WPA employment to aliens, apparently, have been due less to a desire to deny needy aliens a means of support than to resentment arising from the denial of jobs to citizens (and particularly to veterans) while aliens were being employed. This was apparent in one of the first formal objections raised against employment of aliens when in 1936 in testimony before a Senate Committee, Millard W. Rice declared:

\[\ldots\] if the funds are not sufficient with which to furnish employment to all of those in need thereof—and that has been the case in the past, and admittedly will be the case in the future \[\ldots\] then we do most certainly feel that the first opportunity should be given to citizens and to those who have taken out a valid declaration of intention to become citizens; not with any intention to discriminate against aliens, but believing that those who have been suffi-

\(^1\) For states denying relief to employable persons, see chap. 2.
**The WPA and Federal Relief Policy**

...ently interested in American citizenship to take out first papers should have a preference with citizens for jobs that are available.¹

Similarly, when Representative Taber, bitter critic of the New Deal, attacked employment of aliens in February, 1939, he coupled his criticism with the statement that he knew of veterans who had not been assigned jobs.

Again, in an early discussion of the question of ousting aliens from WPA jobs, Representative Thurston of Iowa in 1936 introduced the subject by observing that there had been "very serious complaint by some of our citizens who could not obtain employment when they knew persons who spoke broken English, and who were recent arrivals, were being employed. . . . Of course, we do not want to be inhuman, but there were millions of our own people who were unemployed and many who were starving." ²

The obvious solution of the difficulty—suggested in 1936 by Representative Buchanan, then chairman of the House Committee considering the pending relief bill, but frequently overlooked by others—was to "feed them all; give them all work." ³

Although discrimination against aliens is probably attributable much more to the inadequacy of the WPA program than to any sadistic desire to see aliens denied support merely because they are not United States citizens, discussions of the desirability of denying jobs to aliens have been liberally sprinkled with observations that since foreign nations refused relief to American citizens, the United States was fully justified in denying aid to nationals of other countries.⁴

While it is agreed in most quarters that congressional discrimination against aliens constitutes less preferential treatment, it has sometimes been thought that it is the citizen rather than the alien who has been discriminated against. Citizens given WPA jobs, it is argued, must "work for what they get." Aliens, on the other

¹ U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H.R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 263.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 171.
³ Although restrictions against aliens urged by Representative Thurston in 1936 have subsequently been made increasingly stringent, there has never been a serious proposal that applicants for WPA jobs be required to pass a language test to determine whether or not they spoke broken English.
⁴ For a statement of Representative Lanham's views on this issue see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1938 and Public Works Administration Appropriation Act of 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, p. 711.
Eligibility

hand, are given relief without "having to work for it"—provided, of course, they are given relief. This feeling has been particularly strong both in up-state New York and in New York City whose mayor in 1940 assailed the federal government's discrimination against aliens and urged the state legislature to empower the city to put to work aliens and others receiving home relief. "In States like New York, where home relief is given to all in need," declared the mayor, "the result is that a citizen is compelled to take WPA work of any kind, while aliens simply remain on home relief without taking work." Because of this situation he demanded "a change in the state law which would permit the city of New York to put aliens and others who are on home relief to work, would equalize the situation and would require all who are able to do some work to do it." ¹

So far as this factor has been responsible for the establishment of state and local work-relief programs which WPA officials have frequently attacked as wholly undesirable and a threat to the integrity of the WPA program, federal authorities have Congress to thank. ²

Inasmuch as it is the federal government which alone has jurisdiction over immigration, naturalization, and deportation of aliens, it appears to many observers that the federal government's denial of aid to them is peculiarly inappropriate. Failure of the federal government to assist needy non-citizens throws responsibility for their relief upon states and localities which are powerless to do anything about immigration or naturalization. In the light of the federal government's peculiar relationship to aliens it has been held that it would be more logical for it to assume increasing and special responsibilities toward them rather than to relinquish any of its obligations.

Saddled as they are with the burden of aiding aliens who are in need because the federal government will not give them jobs, relief officials and other state and local authorities in various sections of the country have been among the most vocal protestants against the barring of aliens from WPA rolls. ³ Speaking for

¹ As quoted in the New York Post, March 7, 1940. This demand was repeated in 1941. See the New York Times, June 2, 1941.
² See chap. 25.
³ Noteworthy among these have been the protests of the National Council of State and Local Public Assistance and Welfare Administrators, California's Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Employment, heads of the public welfare departments of New York City and Detroit.
public welfare officials the nation over, Fred K. Hoehler, director of the American Public Welfare Association, in 1941 attacked the federal government's discrimination against aliens. "The fact of alienship," he contended, "is not of itself evidence or even necessarily strong indication of a failure to accept and be a loyal part of the social and economic life of the country. . . . There should be no discrimination in Work Projects Administration because of technical noncitizenship." 1

With a weather eye on the growing sentiment against aliens, the American Association of Social Workers, a consistent champion of equal treatment for aliens as of all other needy groups, has urged repeatedly that work or assistance should be made available to all without any more consideration given to citizenship than to race or creed. Equally forthrightly, the Workers Alliance in its national convention which met in Washington in 1938 declared: "There should be no discrimination against any legal resident of the United States." 2 In 1941 James B. Carey, secretary of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and chairman of its Committee on Unemployment, told a House Committee that his organization approved abolition of what he termed "the inhuman prohibition of jobs for aliens." 3

Similar concern over the situation in which aliens could not be employed because they were aliens and could not become citizens because they were poor was expressed before a House Committee in 1940 by the president of the Workers Alliance. To break this vicious circle he recommended that Congress make it possible for needy aliens to become citizens without payment of the usual fees.

While the House Committee in 1941 was holding hearings on the WPA bill there appeared before it a representative of the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born. 4 Condemning anti-alien provisions of previous WPA laws as being "at variance with our democratic traditions," this witness emphasized

---

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 10.
3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 415.
4 This organization was said to have been established some eight years previously and to be controlled by a board of directors from about 30 different cities. It had branch offices in Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, the head office being in New York City.
Eligibility

the obstacles which for many aliens block the road to citizenship. He declared:

Many immigrants, upon getting to this country, immediately went to work and never had an opportunity to attend our schools in order to prepare themselves to meet the educational and literacy requirements for citizenship. They were never encouraged to become naturalized and today they are too old to study. This group finds it impossible to become naturalized, since it cannot meet the educational and literacy requirements. In other cases, people cannot become citizens because of a lack of necessary documents, difficulty of verifying records, red tape, long delays, fees, high incidental expenses, and for other reasons. In the average case, inability to become naturalized is not the fault of the alien. . . .

We believe [he concluded] that the noncitizen should be accorded his full rights as a legal resident of our country, since any other policy generates additional forms of discrimination which affect, directly or indirectly, all Americans, whether citizen or noncitizen, whether native or foreign born.¹

As the nation’s defense program gained headway during 1941 there arose in various parts of the country a new interest in aliens. Being denied jobs in many private concerns that were manufacturing war matériel, the question was raised as to how they were to be expected to live. It was pointed out that alien workers, denied their share of the nation’s increasing prosperity, might prove easy prey to subversive interests. Officials in both the Department of Justice and the Office of Production Management expressed concern over this situation.

A further problem which became ever more serious the more the United States became involved in the war was that many of the aliens denied WPA employment were nationals not of “enemy” nations but of friendly, “ally” nations interested in putting down aggression or in defending the western hemisphere. To many observers, therefore, the nation’s policy of refusing WPA employment to aliens was incompatible with its policy of all-out aid to opponents of aggression and with its policy of trying to be a good neighbor in the western world.

By May, 1941, the issue of barring aliens from WPA jobs had become so important that President Roosevelt himself went to bat for them. Urging Congress to abolish the legal barrier to the employment of aliens, he gave it as his belief that the existing policy of denying them employment worked “a hardship upon a

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1942, pp. 406-407.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

class of persons whose private employment opportunities are becoming increasingly limited." 1 Backing up the President’s plea, Mr. Hunter, the commissioner of work projects, reiterated the belief that discrimination against aliens was “working a serious hardship on many deserving persons. This bar is all the more serious because many private employers have adopted a policy of not hiring aliens. This is in spite of the fact that in the past we have been glad to utilize their skill and special training." 2 In further support of his position, Mr. Hunter declared:

The term “alien” carries with it a suspicion of disloyalty to the United States which is not always consistent with the facts. I believe that the great majority of our aliens are entirely loyal to the United States and many of them are persons who came from the very countries we have been trying to help.

The fact that people have not become naturalized is not always their own fault. Some aliens who have been in this country a long time have been unable to prove the date, place, and manner of their entry because of the inadequacy of the records kept at the time of their entry. Some older aliens have been unable to obtain citizenship because they have been unable to read and write English. Others are not able to meet the costs of naturalization.

In general, aliens are subject to the laws of the United States and to its taxes in the same manner as citizens. Since they are subject to most of the responsibilities of citizenship, it seems to me that they should not be deprived of all its benefits when they are in need.

Most aliens have dependents who are American citizens—either American-born wives who have retained their citizenship or children born in this country. These dependent citizens are now deprived of help through the W.P.A. program.

Accordingly, in order to prevent the spread of unjust prejudices and discontent among any group in our population during this critical period, I recommend the elimination of the barrier to employment of aliens who are otherwise eligible under our legislation. 3

In reply to a question as to whether employment of aliens might not be inviting sabotage on WPA projects, Mr. Hunter replied that he did not think it would since other provisions in the law offered adequate safeguards against such eventualities. After thus supporting the President’s request to abolish discrimination against aliens, Mr. Hunter admitted that if existing legal barriers to the employment of aliens were eliminated, he would like to see

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 2.
2 Ibid., p. 20.
3 Ibid., p. 21.
Eligibility

resurrected the earlier policy of giving jobs to aliens only after prior consideration had been accorded to veterans and citizens. If this condition were met, confessed Mr. Hunter, the limited number of WPA jobs in prospect for the ensuing year probably would not permit the employment of many aliens—if any. When asked if such a provision did not render "purely academic and not practical" his recommendation to repeal existing prohibitions against aliens, Mr. Hunter replied that it was nevertheless "highly important for the country in the national defense program to try to bring all groups into national unity," and that he preferred "to see no discriminatory provisions against British aliens or aliens of other friendly countries." 1

Despite the request of the President and other groups who were interested in restoring to needy aliens the privilege of competing for WPA jobs, both the House and the Senate remained cool to the effort and chose instead to continue to deny WPA employment to non-citizens. 2

With the intensification of the nation's war effort, not only the President but other high federal officials appealed repeatedly to the employers of the nation not to discriminate against aliens. Noteworthy among these were Attorney General Biddle, William Knudsen, and Sidney Hillman (then director and associate director, respectively, of the Office of Production Management).

"There is no legal barrier to the employment of aliens in any factories having war contracts," said these two OPM officials, adding:

Thousands of British, Norwegian, French, Polish, Dutch and other nationals of the United Nations and of neutral countries are currently employed in plants turning out war materials. There are likewise thousands of able alien workers whose loyalty to the United States is without question.

The aims of democracy and the needs for efficiency alike demand that this ability and loyalty shall not go to waste. . . . 3

1 Ibid., p. 261.
2 In the House an amendment (presented by Representative Maciora of Connecticut) to permit the employment of aliens was defeated by a vote of 71 to 15, without debate. A year previous, again without discussion, the House had voted down a much less sweeping proposal by Representative Jerry Voorhis of California, which would have permitted the employment of aliens who had declared their intent of becoming citizens and had "made every effort to obtain citizenship" provided there was no citizen locally available for employment.—Congressional Record, May 23, 1940, p. 6748.

317
Nevertheless, so far as the WPA was concerned, aliens' abilities and loyalties continued to be wasted—as they had been for the past several years—as a result of congressional action.

Branding the denial of employment to aliens as “stupid” and “unjust,” the President declared early in 1942:

Remember the Nazi technique: “Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer!”

We must not let that happen here. We must not forget what we are defending: Liberty, decency, justice.

I urge all private employers to adopt a sane policy regarding aliens and foreign-born citizens, and to remember that the sons of the “foreigners” they discharged may be among those who fought and are fighting so valiantly at Pearl Harbor or in the Philippines.¹

Congressmen and senators hearing this plea may well have been reminded that the sons of “foreigners” they had barred from WPA employment might also have been among the defenders of Pearl Harbor and the Philippines.

**Allegedly Subversive Activity**

Closely linked with discriminatory treatment accorded to aliens is the ban on giving WPA employment to persons engaging in allegedly subversive activity. Since 1939 Congress has placed restrictions upon the payment of WPA funds to persons who advocate or are members of organizations that advocate overthrow of the government of the United States.

Although it was not until 1939 that Congress tried its hand at stopping the employment of “Communists” and “Nazis,” the WPA was confronted with “Red” troubles almost from its inception. In New York City, for example, General Hugh S. Johnson, while serving as WPA administrator in that city, early instituted a “Red hunt.” A high WPA official was reported to have declared that Communists and leaders of Communist “cells” found on the rolls would be dismissed. The hunt was soon dropped, however, after the head of the WPA’s Division of Investigation again emphasized the fact that “the national administration is not interested in the political credos of those on work relief as long as they do their jobs.”²

The interest Congress showed in 1939 in the employment of

Eligibility

Communists and "Reds" on WPA projects was largely attributable to the work of two House Committees, that to Investigate Un-American Activities—the so-called Dies Committee—and the Committee Investigating the WPA which unearthed a number of allegations that the WPA (in New York City and on arts projects particularly) was employing "Communists" and that the Workers Alliance of America was "Communist" dominated. To curb these alleged abuses Congress in 1939 and again in 1940 prescribed that no "compensation" could be paid from WPA funds to persons who advocated (or belonged to organizations which advocated) overthrow of the government. Although laws enacted in 1941 and 1942 provided only that no WPA funds could be used to pay to such persons "salary or wages," rather than "compensation," which might have been paid to dealers in building supplies, for example, it was made a felony punishable by a fine of not more than $1,000 or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both, for them to accept employment, the salary or wages for which were paid from WPA funds.

Application of prohibitions of this type has usually been limited to persons who advocate or who are members of organizations which advocate overthrow of the government by force or violence. In 1940, however, Congress said nothing of force or violence and appeared to strike at those who advocated overthrow of the government whether by force or violence or not. To the New York Sun this seemed to be an improvement since it hit "agitators who foment destruction of authority by word as well as against those who counsel bomb throwing."\(^1\)

In explanation of the futility of these restrictions, Colonel Harrington declared to a House Committee in 1940 that he had been unable to discover a single organization that advocated forceful overthrow of the government. The law could not be applied even to members of the Communist party, he said, since careful reading of the 1936 platform of that party and of statements of the Communist position on public issues failed to show that it advocated overthrow of the government by force.\(^2\) If Congress in-

\(^1\) June 26, 1940.

\(^2\) Although in line with a long series of court decisions this decision with respect to the Communist party is the direct opposite of two important decisions by administrative officials. One of these was that reached by the Secretary of Labor in 1920, when it was ruled that all aliens in the Communist party were ipso facto liable to deportation as members of or affiliated with an organization that advocated the
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

tended to forbid WPA employment of Communists as such, Colonel Harrington told the Committee, this intent should be made clear. According to his interpretation of existing law such restrictions were not required. It was to plug this hole in the dike against subversive activities, therefore, that Congress in 1940 tightened the screws by declaring that “No Communist, and no member of any Nazi Bund Organization” could be employed on a WPA project. Congress further prescribed that no funds appropriated for the WPA could be used to pay any person who did not make affidavit that he was not “a Communist and not a member of any Nazi Bund Organization.” These restrictions, obviously, do not apply to Nazi or Fascist sympathizers as such. “Communists” are barred from employment, however, whether they are members of recognized (or alleged) Communist organizations or not.

To simplify administration of legal provisions aimed at aliens and members of allegedly subversive organizations, the WPA prescribed a single affidavit which by law was made prima facie evidence of citizenship and of status with respect to being a Communist or a member of a Nazi organization.

Stiff penalties were prescribed for persons who “knowingly and with intent to defraud the United States” made false statements in connection with applications for employment.

Of approximately 1,665,000 workers employed by the WPA when prohibitions against the employment of Communists and members of Nazi Bund organizations came into effect, only 429—a minute fraction of the total—were discharged for failure to sign the required affidavits. Among these 429 workers, however, were some who were wholly eligible, but who were discharged simply because they failed to return their affidavits prior to the prescribed deadline. Upon meeting the requirements of the law,

overthrow by force or violence of the government of the United States. The second was that of Attorney General Biddle, who in his ruling on the deportation of Harry Bridges in 1942 declared that evidence presented during the hearing of this case established the fact that the Communist party was “an organization that advises, advocates and teaches the overthrow, by force and violence, of the Government of the United States.” As quoted in the New York Times, May 29, 1942.

1 ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 15(f); ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 10(f). Affidavits workers were actually required to sign went somewhat further than the law required, specifying not only that they were neither Communists nor members of Nazi Bund Organizations but affirming that they would not become such during any time they might “be paid from funds appropriated to the Work Projects Administration.”—Federal Works Agency, WPA Form 610.
Eligibility

such workers were eligible for re-employment. On the other hand, however—as Colonel Harrington pointed out—some persons may have left the rolls for other reasons, knowing that they could not sign the prescribed affidavit, and some false affidavits may have been filed. From eight states (Rhode Island, Delaware, Maryland, South Carolina, Mississippi, Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming) no releases were reported and in a number of states there were only one or two.²

Subsequent to the dismissals because of failure to sign required affidavits, WPA officials began to scrutinize some of the affidavits presented. As a result, a few scattered dismissals were ordered in various sections of the country. These releases were prompted by such considerations as the fact that a worker had once signed a petition to place a nominee on a ticket of the Communist party, had once registered as a Communist, had belonged to a Communist organization, or was thought by responsible WPA officials to have done something that branded him as a Communist, a member of a Nazi Bund organization, or as otherwise "subversive."³

By May, 1941, there had been reported to the WPA a total of 461 cases of alleged falsification of affidavits with respect to Communism and membership in Nazi Bund organizations. Field investigations were made and final action taken in 192 of these cases. In 115 cases the allegation was said to have been unsubstantiated. In the remaining 77 cases (all but three of which involved alleged Communists) the complaint was said to have been substantiated.

Because so many questions were raised about the justifiability of discharging some 365 workers in New York City on account of

1 When Mr. Hunter reported to a House Committee in May, 1941, he said the total number released for failure to submit affidavits by the required time was only 317.
2 Of the 429 dismissals, the largest numbers were in Louisiana (49), New York City (46), Oklahoma (43), Iowa (41), California (33), and North Dakota (30).
3 That provisions against persons engaging in allegedly subversive activity were subject to a wide variety of interpretations is clear. In New York City, for example, a WPA official, according to the New York Times, in 1940 declared that "the purge, under the law, would affect not only Nazis and Communists but all who believe in unconstitutional procedure against the government."—June 25, 1940.

Inquiries made by the WPA to ascertain why members of Nazi Bund organizations comprised so small a proportion of those released because of allegedly subversive activity led to the conclusion that this was primarily due to the fact that the Nazi appeal is directed to the middle and upper classes rather than to workers and disadvantaged persons such as most of those on the WPA rolls.

321
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

alleged subversive activity, a federal WPA official was sent to review the situation. By January, 1941, this study had resulted in the reinstatement of 218 of the 235 cases reviewed by that time.\(^1\)

When the ERA Act passed in June, 1941, again required the signing of affidavits, only 16 of the 1,368,000 workers then employed did not sign them and were therefore discharged by the WPA. During the first nine months of fiscal year 1942 there were 394 complaints charging that affidavits were falsely signed. Upon investigation 233 of these were found not to be substantiated.

Workers found guilty of falsifying affidavits declaring that they were not Communists nor members of a Nazi Bund organization have not, except in one instance, been prosecuted under federal law which prescribes that persons found guilty of such an offense may be imprisoned for as much as one year, fined as much as $1,000, or both. The single exception to this generalization was the prosecution of a worker accused before the federal courts of the District of New Jersey of being a Communist. In this action the court in 1942 sustained the demurrer to an indictment charging a WPA worker with feloniously filing an affidavit that he was not a Communist when he “then and there well knew” that he was a Communist. In sustaining this demurrer the court (relying upon the cases of Lanzetta v. New Jersey, 306 U.S. 451 and Connally v. General Construction Company, 269 U.S. 385) ruled:

That the terms of a penal statute creating a new offense must be sufficiently explicit to inform those who are subject to it what conduct on their part will render them liable to its penalties is a well-recognized requirement, consonant alike with ordinary notions of fair play and the settled rules of law; and a statute which either forbids or requires the doing of an act in terms so vague that men of common intelligence must necessarily guess at its meaning and differ as to its application violates the first essential of due process of law.

Enlarging upon this position, the court quoted from Stuart Chase’s Tyranny of Words to show how little agreement there

\(^1\)Workers who were reinstated were given opportunity to make up time lost while the review of their suspension was in progress. The “militancy and solidarity” of the suspended workers were said to have “wrung” from the WPA the concession that in the future there would be no suspending first and investigating afterward. Thus, workers were to be spared “agonizing months on home relief or worse, because of an anonymous letter or other irresponsible accusation.”—Joint Committee to Defend W.P.A. Workers, Terror against the People: The Story of the WPA Witch Hunt. New York, n.d., p. 12.
Eligibility

was as to the meaning of the word "Communism," and then added: "Resort to dictionary definitions is unsatisfactory, in that none of them cure the vagueness we are endeavoring to avoid." Finally, declared the court:

The time honored rule of construction as announced by the courts from an early day, is that words are to be given their usual and generally accepted meaning. In endeavoring to ascertain whether there is now any unity of thought bearing on the word Communist, I have made inquiries of men of reasonable intelligence. I asked whether those who believe in and advocate government ownership of irrigation projects and government dams erected for the sale of water power by the government could reasonably be classified as Communists. In some instances the answer was No, in others, Yes, and in others, Yes, they are Communistic to the extent that they believe in such ownership and operation, but not to the extent that they might be classified as all out Communists. It is my own view that the word has that vagueness and uncertainty in it which Chase expounds in his book, and that the minds of men do not meet in a general acceptation of its import. Therefore, the defendant in this indictment is found in a position of doubt as to what the charge against him is and can not be called on to defend himself. Moreover, the Court also finds itself in a position where it can not give a reasonably certain inclusive and exclusive definition of the word.\footnote{1}^ United States of America v. William Hautau. 43 F. Supp. 507.

This ruling was not appealed and, for the present at least, appears likely to forestall further prosecutions of this type. Nevertheless, even though the term "Communist" was regarded as too indefinite to serve as grounds for criminal prosecution, being a Communist continues to be sufficient grounds upon which to deny a man employment.

Unlike WPA policies permitting the employment of a citizen-member of an alien's family, WPA rulings forbid the employment of another member of a family if the usual worker is disqualified on the ground that he is (or refuses to sign an affidavit declaring he is not) a Communist, a member of a Nazi Bund organization, or advocates the overthrow of the government.\footnote{2}^ WPA, Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.006, [January, 1942].

Although congressional restrictions against those engaged in allegedly subversive activity—which were first enacted in 1940 when the world was still agog over the alleged success of "fifth column" activities in Norway, France, and Belgium—are understandable, there were, nevertheless, those who feared that these restrictions would prove ineffectual. Among these was Dorothy
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Thompson, who wrote in the New York Herald Tribune, July 1, 1940:

We should make it clear that the Communist party will be outlawed under our administration, because it is an instrument of a foreign government; and that the Bund will be outlawed for the same reason. But we should deal with this problem at the source, and not by persecuting deluded W.P.A. workers. . . .

Further criticism of the restrictions Congress placed on WPA jobs to Communists and members of Nazi Bund organizations has come from the Congress of Industrial Organizations which in its national convention in 1940 demanded the repeal of these restrictions.

When Congress in 1941 was considering new WPA legislation there appeared before a House Committee a representative of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties which was said to be "a federation of organizations" with which other organizations in 30 states were cooperating. The Federation's position, declared the witness, was that "a person's right to live . . . should not be determined on the basis of his opinions. That decision must be made on the basis of overt, illegal acts." 1

When, under the ever-changing fortunes of World War II, the United States found itself an ally of the Soviet Union, bans on employing "Reds" and Communists on WPA jobs began to appear as anomalous vestiges of already outmoded ante-bellum prejudices.

Unfortunately for those who might be interested in the legal restrictions against aliens and persons suspected of allegedly subversive activity, discussion by the House Committee of proposed legal changes suggested by the Bureau of the Budget was "off the record." Provisions enacted in 1942, however, were substantially the same as had been written into the two previous laws.

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 411.
CHAPTER XIII
ELIGIBILITY: MILITARY SERVICE, RESIDENCE, 
AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

MILITARY SERVICE

IN SHARP CONTRAST with the growing severity of legal restrictions against aliens, Communists, and other allegedly subversive elements has been the increasing liberality of the preferential treatment accorded by Congress to veterans and certain members of veterans' families. That Congress has not gone even farther is not due to any want of suggestions on the subject or to any lack of pressure. For, ever since the WPA was first launched, various attempts have been made to have veterans declared eligible for employment without respect to their economic need.

No less striking than the new types of preference granted to veterans from year to year has been the steady inclusion of new groups within the circle of those to whom special consideration was given. Veteran preference, voted by Congress in 1937, for example, applied only to needy veterans of World War I and of the Spanish-American War. The next year preference was also given to veterans of any campaign or expedition in which the United States has been engaged (as determined on the basis of the laws administered by the Veterans' Administration). In 1940 applicability of veteran preference was materially broadened by congressional action extending it to unmarried widows of veterans and to the wives of unemployable veterans.

Despite this gradual widening of the circles, Congress in 1940 narrowed somewhat the group to whom preferences had previously been applied: discharged draft enrollees (other than those

1 Expeditions and campaigns falling within this category included the Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, Boxer Rebellion, Cuban Pacification, Nicaraguan Campaign, Vera Cruz Expedition, Punitive Expedition into Mexico, and World War I. Preference was limited in 1938, however, to veterans who were American citizens.

2 These extensions of veteran preference, it was estimated, would make it applicable to some 20,000 wives, 100,000 widows, and half a million veterans of whom as many as 300,000 might be expected to want WPA employment. Veteran groups were not satisfied with giving preferential treatment only to wives of unemployable veterans, and asked that it be extended to wives of unemployed veterans.
having service-connected disabilities who continued to be given the consideration accorded veterans) were denied further preferential treatment with respect to employment though they were, apparently, permitted continued exemption from automatic discharge after eighteen months' continuous employment.1 This constriction of the circle had been suggested by the legislative representative of the Veterans of Foreign Wars who, in testimony before a House Committee, had urged that veteran preference be limited to those who had had "active service." Supporters of veteran preference, he said, had not intended that the WPA, acting under its interpretation of prevailing law, should give discharged draftees the same advantages as veterans.2

A counter-proposal—to extend preference to some 2,000,000 "peacetime veterans" (discharged sailors, soldiers, marines, and coast guardsmen with peacetime service) was suggested in 1941 but received almost no support.

When Congress, in 1942, began consideration of new legislation for the WPA, officials of that agency suggested and Congress approved extension to veterans of World War II (and to unmarried widows of such veterans as well as to the wives of such veterans as might be unemployable) of the preferences previously granted to veterans of previous wars and campaigns.

Again, veterans' organizations urged extension of preference to the so-called peacetime or "regular" veterans and to the wives of unemployed veterans rather than to the wives of unemployable veterans as already prescribed by law. WPA officials suggested that Congress might want to extend to the parents and wives "of those in the present war" the special consideration accorded to veterans. None of these suggested liberalizations of existing provisions was adopted, however.

Broadening of veteran preference provisions since 1939 has been due in large part to claims that the morale of the nation's armed forces and trainees newly brought into service first by the

1 See chap. 21.
2 Prevailing law had been interpreted by WPA officials as giving preference to some 300,000 men drafted during World War I but who, as Representative Van Zandt of Pennsylvania said, "never wore the uniform of our country."— U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1940, p. 884.
Eligibility

defense and then by the war program would suffer unless Congress made it clear that it was willing to stand by them.¹

Some indication of the objectives sought by veteran groups is suggested by a veteran leader’s declaration in 1941 that “In the final analysis veterans must have either jobs or pensions. To this end we believe that definite effective preference in the W.P.A. Act is entirely justified.”² Speaking of veterans’ activity to secure preferential consideration for WPA jobs, another leader admitted that although this action might appear to be selfish, it was “in line with the traditions of this Nation.” So long as employment is not provided for all who are in need and willing to work, he declared, “needy veterans should be given the first preference.”³

Types of Preference Granted Veterans

The first special consideration formally given veterans under the WPA program was that prescribed by Congress in 1936 when officials charged with responsibility for determining whether or not veterans were in need of WPA employment were directed not to take into account any adjusted-service bonds (or payment of adjusted-compensation certificates) any veteran might have received. Similar provisions were incorporated in the next two ERA acts but were omitted in 1939 and thereafter.

Elimination of this provision in 1938 meant that receipt of the so-called soldiers’ bonus was taken into account in determining need for WPA employment. This drew from veterans’ organizations sharp protests and repeated appeals to Congress again to write into law language which would not only require relief and WPA officials to disregard “the fact that a person is entitled to, or has received, either adjusted-service bonds, or a treasury check

¹ See, for example, the contention of Philip A. Mathews, then state WPA administrator of Pennsylvania, that “if proper provision is made to care for our unemployed veterans it will have a very decided effect in raising the morale of the young men who are now being inducted into the Army and Navy. If the veterans of the last war are not taken care of, the possible veterans of the next war may think our country an ungrateful master.” According to Representative Edmiston of West Virginia, preferences granted in 1941 would contribute to the national defense “by showing our new Army that America always has and always will give her veterans justice.”—Congressional Record, June 13, 1941, pp. 5260, 5257.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 941.
³ Idem (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 327-328.
in payment of an adjusted-compensation certificate,” but would also require officials who were responsible for determining need to disregard the further fact that an applicant “has an insurance policy with the United States Government.”

A second type of preference that was early accorded to veterans was exemption from discharge when WPA rolls were sharply reduced during 1936. Though not required by law, exemptions of this type were granted in various parts of the country. Where they were given they were sometimes accorded only if the veterans concerned were at least as well qualified for the job in hand as non-veterans. In other instances, however, the question of qualifications does not appear to have weighed too heavily.

The third type of preferential treatment accorded veterans was that prescribed in 1938 when, pursuant to congressional action, first preference among needy persons qualified by training, experience, and ability, was given to veterans, second preference to other citizens, and third preference to eligible aliens. This type of preference was modified in 1939 to apply not only to employment but also to “retaining in employment.”

Even this kind of special consideration did not go far enough for certain veterans’ groups, however, and further effort was made to persuade Congress to write into law a provision requiring the WPA to transfer to other jobs veterans employed on completed or discontinued projects. When asked how this was to be accomplished in case there was no available job (unless one were created by firing some other worker to make room for a veteran), a spokesman for the veterans replied: “If I were forced to make a decision, I would make a decision . . . that a man who has been called upon to render service during time of war, or in a campaign or expedition, ought to be entitled to any employment that the Government can furnish him.” To this he added, however, “I do not believe it is necessary to make such a harsh choice. I think there should be enough W.P.A. funds to provide employment for those who actually need it.”

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 382.
For further discussion of veteran preference upon the determination of need, see chap. 15.

2ERA Act of 1939, sec. 16(a). In some jurisdictions this was done even before it was required by law.

3U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 383.
Eligibility

When Congress in 1939 required that workers continuously employed for eighteen months be automatically discharged for at least thirty days it exempted veterans altogether from this severe requirement.\(^1\)

Again, when WPA employment (in 1939) was premised not only on need but on “relative need,”\(^2\) Congress also prescribed that veterans be given priority over other workers whose need was relatively the same. However, if a non-veteran was in greater need than a veteran, he was to be given prior consideration for whatever employment was available. As a result of this policy veterans with small disability pensions were sometimes placed in deferred categories and available jobs given to non-veterans who did not have even a small pension. This result was bitterly condemned by various groups of veterans who claimed that it denied them the type of preference which, in their opinion at least, Congress had intended.\(^3\)

As a result Congress in 1941 granted “full preference” to veterans without respect to their relative need. Furthermore, veterans, veterans’ widows, and the wives of unemployable veterans were to be regarded as in need if their income was less than what they would earn if employed by the WPA.\(^4\) Congress has also prescribed that if relief agencies responsible for co-operating in the selection of workers refused to accept this standard of need for veterans, the WPA itself must assume responsibility for determining need.\(^5\)

\(^1\) For further discussion of discharges after eighteen months’ employment, see chap. 21.
\(^2\) For further discussion of the practice of awarding jobs on the basis of relative need, see chap. 16.
\(^3\) See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 557-558.
\(^4\) It was also held that the congressional requirement that the WPA, in hiring workers, should give preference to those living near the project vitiated veteran preference provisions.
\(^5\) When a question was raised as to how many more veterans might be rendered eligible for employment by this latter provision a spokesman for the veterans estimated the number would be somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000. For further discussion of preferential treatment accorded to veterans through application of this policy see chaps. 15 and 16.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Employment of Veterans

Little is known about the extent to which veterans have been employed on WPA projects. It is known, however, that among those certified (in February, 1939) for continued employment there were 247,000 who reported themselves as veterans. These represented approximately 9 per cent of all workers employed at the time. Among workers reporting themselves as veterans there was a slightly higher proportion (14 per cent) of single persons than among WPA workers as a whole (11 per cent). Even in 1940—more than twenty years after World War I—veteran preference was believed to be applicable to some 620,000 workers had they chosen to seek WPA employment.

In February, 1942, when WPA employment totaled only about 996,000, the WPA was giving employment to no fewer than 108,000 veterans and widows of veterans. These represented approximately 11 per cent of the total number employed. In view of the sharply reduced WPA program envisaged for fiscal year 1943—when employment is expected to average only about 400,000—retention in employment of anything like 100,000 workers who must be given preference would mean that this group would constitute something like 25 per cent of the total.

To continue, after the present war, practically to guarantee jobs to unemployed veterans, to widows of veterans, and to the wives of unemployable veterans meeting relatively liberal standards of need would in itself require a sizable work program.

Reinstatement of Inducted Workers

To workers inducted into military service the WPA in 1940 promised special consideration. First, such workers were assured that (if they applied within forty days following termination of their military service and were in need) “every effort” would be made to reassign them “as soon as possible” to positions of the “same type and earning capacity” as those previously held.

Second, upon the induction of a WPA worker, employment of another member of the same family was permitted provided the family continued to be in need despite receipt of part of the military pay of the inducted worker. 1

1 See WPA General Letter No. 325, rev. October 30, 1940.
Eligibility

Possibility of Discrimination Against Veterans

While giving veterans a number of concessions, Congress in at least one instance has opened the door to the possibility of prejudicial treatment. This was the action taken in 1941 and 1942 which required the WPA to employ veterans, and veterans' widows and the wives of unemployable veterans only long enough during a month to bring their total income to "approximately" what they might earn on their WPA job if employed full time.\(^1\) Thus, a non-veteran having an income of say $10 a month would be entitled, if employed by the WPA, to earn a full month's pay. Under prevailing law, however, the WPA earnings of a veteran having a similar income are supposed to be restricted so that his total income would approximate the pay he might earn if he were employed full time by the WPA.\(^2\)

Recruiting Among WPA Workers

Having considered the various ways in which military service entitled workers to special consideration for WPA employment, there should be mention of various attempts that have been made to press able-bodied WPA workers into military service. Among the first of these moves was that made in New York as early as 1938. "The idea" of this proposal, said a recruiting officer of the Second Corps Area, "was to purge the WPA rolls of those who could easily serve in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps and transfer them to doing something productive for the government." In this way WPA jobs could be made available to relief recipients who could not qualify for military service. If men eligible for military service did not volunteer they were to be denied relief. In New York City project bulletin boards were posted with notices extolling the advantages of military service. In upstate New York the WPA administrator sent a letter to local public welfare officials, reporting that recruiting officers had requested lists of potential candidates, and suggested that this might "be a means of reducing relief costs."\(^3\)

\(^1\)This policy has already been described in chap. 6.
\(^2\)As shown already in chap. 6, the WPA had not (prior to July, 1942, at least) put this policy into effect.
\(^3\)As quoted in the New York Times, February 25, 1938.

This policy of attempting to force needy workers into military service contrasts sharply with early American poor-relief policies under which "paupers" were
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

To some observers the possibility of pressing WPA workers into the nation's armed forces looked like a move in the right direction. Among these was Mark Sullivan who (in 1940) wrote:

Why take men out of private jobs, by conscription, if there are enough unemployed who could enlist if they would? It is important, for war, that we keep the personnel of our industrial organizations intact. . . .

On W.P.A. presumably not a great many could pass the Army tests. But some undoubtedly could. The government pays W.P.A. workers from $31.20 a month up to $94.90 for what amounts to part-time work. That is all they get—no lodging, meals or clothing. The Army is a better job for such as can qualify.

As to none of these groups can we say that a man getting largess from the government must join the Army—that would be compulsion. But in every case the reason the government gives the largess is that the man cannot get a job. And here is the government itself offering a million jobs. Certainly there is a position proper for the government to take: a man qualified for a job in the Army is by that fact debarred from saying that he cannot get a job—and therefore is barred from C.C.C., N.Y.A., or W.P.A.1

The WPA, however, took a different view. Scotching the idea, Colonel Harrington (in 1940) declared that it was not the policy of the WPA to discriminate against needy persons merely because they may be capable of military service. “A person’s being in economic distress,” he continued, “is not the proper reason for forcing him into military service.” 2 This same attitude has been maintained by WPA officials in the face of attempts made by local and state relief authorities to enforce “work or fight” policies under which employable persons have been denied relief and, except for influence exerted by WPA officials, would also be denied the right to apply for WPA jobs.

Residence

Questions as to where a person lives and how long he has lived there are not supposed to affect his eligibility for WPA employment. According to federal policy prescribed in 1939: “Persons otherwise eligible shall not be refused certification because legal

exempted from military duty probably on the ground that those who owned almost no property or were poor enough to qualify for pauper relief might prove to be only half-hearted fighters. As late as January, 1939, there were eight states (Maine, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Tennessee, Georgia, Arkansas, Nebraska, and Arizona) in which paupers were still exempted from military duty.

1 New York Herald Tribune, August 8, 1940.
Eligibility

settlement or residence has not been established within the state or a political subdivision thereof." However, the lack of a job near a worker's home frequently affects his chances for employment.

In support of federal policy regarding residence, an official Michigan release once declared: "In times of unemployment, if people move about trying to better themselves and to take care of their families, their motives should receive consideration and provisions made for their employment on the Works Program." Clear as statements of federal policy with respect to residence have been, they have never been completely unqualified. There has been, for example, a federal ruling that persons who move into a state (or from one political subdivision to another) "for the sole purpose of obtaining employment on WPA projects shall not be eligible for certification." WPA policy has also denied employment to workers who move from one area to another merely to receive a higher WPA wage.

Although WPA restrictions on residence generally have been supposed to apply only to those who move from one place to another for the sole purpose of getting WPA employment or to take advantage of higher wage rates, state and local relief agencies co-operating in the selection of workers have frequently established such elaborate procedures for the transfer of workers' records from one state or county to another that the mobility of workers is seriously affected. Typical of arrangements of this kind are those which prescribe that public welfare or relief officials in the county from which a worker decides to move must secure the consent of officials in the county to which the worker intends to go before any transfer can be effected. Requests for transfer to any point outside a state frequently must be cleared through designated state or public welfare agencies.

No less complicated than procedures for transferring workers from one place to another have been those relating to the acceptance in one locality of certifications made somewhere else. Normally, certifications made elsewhere have no validity in a new

1 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 7, July 31, 1939.
2 See chap. 10.
4 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 7, July 31, 1939. Attempts to prove that a person's sole purpose in moving was to get a WPA job obviously are fraught with great difficulty.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

locality. Eligibility, therefore, must be determined de novo by the responsible agency in the locality to which a worker moves. The reason for this was once stated (in a Michigan ruling) as follows: "Because of widely differing situations in various states, persons certified by other states will not be assigned to work; only certifications made by the Michigan Emergency Relief Administration will be accepted."^1

Although the intent of federal policy with respect to residence is clear, the open flouting of this policy has often been frankly acknowledged. Colonel Harrington himself, in testimony before a House Committee in 1940, admitted that even in the District of Columbia—the federal government's own front yard—workers were being refused employment because they were not residents of the District. Unfortunately for non-residents, in general, the practice followed in the District has been far more typical of practices throughout the United States than has been the prescribed federal policy.² Early in 1939 Colonel Harrington told a Senate Committee: "In general the States do not certify people to us until a certain period of residence has been complied with."³

In many states relief agencies co-operating in the selection of WPA workers have insisted that applicants who have lived in the state for less than a year and in the county for less than six months—or in some instances sixty days—are ineligible for employment.⁴ Prescribed residence requirements have sometimes allowed for exceptions in the case of families that might reasonably be expected to become self-supporting.

Conversely, even where there were supposed to be no residence

^2 In discussions of residence as a condition of eligibility for WPA employment the term "non-resident" usually does not refer to one who lives outside a given area but rather to one who lives within a specified jurisdiction but has not lived there a prescribed length of time—usually a year.
^3 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 245.
^4 A comprehensive study of relief and WPA employment policies throughout the United States late in 1938 revealed that eligibility for WPA employment in Montana and Idaho was conditioned upon residence of one year in the state and six months in the county. One year's residence in the township, community, county, or state was required in a number of other states such as Indiana, Kentucky, Iowa, and New Mexico. In Delaware, it was reported, non-residents were not eligible for WPA employment. Though general practice in Illinois was to limit employment to those who had lived in the state at least a year, provision was sometimes made for employing non-residents.—Social Work Year Book, 1939. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, Part II.
Eligibility

requirements, various qualifications have frequently negated the official position on this issue. In Ohio and Wisconsin, for example, the general policy of referring non-residents for employment has been limited by the requirement that consideration be given to the best interests of workers and to the likelihood of their finding private employment in the new county. In both states it has been prescribed that in the case of non-residents who intended to establish residence in a new community but fell into need before residence was established, certification should not be withheld because of residence alone.

Most important, perhaps, of all practices which have militated against operation of the federal policy with respect to residence have been those pursued in a number of areas (such as New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California) where applicants for WPA employment were normally required to receive, or only perhaps to qualify, for relief before they became eligible for WPA jobs. Inasmuch as relief is usually denied to persons who do not meet prescribed residence requirements, inability to qualify for relief has frequently proved an automatic bar to WPA employment.

To overcome this difficulty various practices have been developed. In Illinois, for example, it has been ruled that, although applicants for WPA jobs normally had to be referred by local relief authorities, applicants who could not meet prescribed residence requirements might be referred directly by representatives of the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission which was responsible for supervising local relief operations. Referrals of non-residents by the Commission were said in 1941 to have been "very, very few." In Pennsylvania the Department of Public

1 An Ohio ruling of 1938 stated the case thus: "Legal residence is not a requirement of certification. Non-residents should be certified when the occupation of the usual wage earner is such that they may reasonably be expected to find normal industrial opportunity in the community in which he now lives."—Ohio WPA, Employment Division Handbook of Procedures and Manual, E-122. Columbus, chap. 2, p. 9, rev. June 18, 1938.

A similar ruling, made in Wisconsin in 1939, prescribed that referral for WPA employment could not be withheld "where careful investigation reveals that it is for the best interest of such families or persons to take up residence in a county other than the one in which they happen to have legal settlement. Non-residents," the ruling continued, "shall be referred when the occupation of the usual wage earner is such that he may reasonably be expected to find normal employment opportunities in the community in which he lives."—Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration. Madison, sec. 4, p. 406, rev. September 29, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Assistance in 1940 ruled that its employes might refer to the WPA employable persons who were ineligible for relief solely because of inadequate residence or because they lacked settlement in that state. Non-residents who were denied relief because they refused to return to their state of residence were not eligible under this ruling since their ineligibility was attributable to refusal to leave the state rather than to the question of residence alone. Once non-residents became eligible for referral for WPA jobs, the WPA (in some counties at least) gave them preference over residents in making assignments. This was done on the theory that relief was available to meet the needs of residents whereas WPA employment was the only resource available to aid non-residents.

In New York and California, where WPA jobs have normally been given only to relief recipients, those who were unable to qualify for relief (whether because of lack of residence or other considerations) were generally barred also from WPA employment.

Less direct methods of limiting WPA employment to persons who have lived in a given community a specified length of time include deliberate delays in investigating and acting upon applications filed by non-residents, and the unwillingness of project sponsors to permit the employment of “outsiders” on projects to which they make a financial contribution. Especially in small communities sponsors have been reported as resenting the employment of people from outside their bailiwicks, particularly if eligible local residents remained unemployed.

A still more subtle limitation upon the mobility of workers is to remind them that though they might be able to qualify for WPA employment in some new community to which they contemplate moving, they could not receive relief if for any reason they could not be assigned immediately to work or if their wages proved inadequate to their needs, or if they lost their jobs either temporarily or for some considerable period of time.

Objection to employment of “outsiders” is said in various parts of the country to have diminished as the WPA has placed greater emphasis on the work as opposed to the relief aspects of its program. Where helping needy people has been stressed, local (especially town and township) authorities have insisted that their people be helped. Where greater stress is laid upon doing
Eligibility

a good job on worth-while projects, even local authorities are said to raise relatively little objection to "outsiders." In many states it has been reported, however, that the only reason why there has not been more discrimination against outsiders is because WPA officials have not permitted it. If federal control over the WPA program were to be lessened, discrimination against non-residents would undoubtedly increase.

That sponsors should resent the employment of "outsiders" while "old-timers" go without jobs is understandable. So is the attitude of state and local relief authorities who do all they can to limit WPA employment to "residents" who, if not employed by the WPA, might have to be granted relief whereas needy "non-residents" would in all probability be denied relief. Thus, discrimination against those who have lived in a given community for relatively short periods may be attributed in large measure to the inadequacy of the number of available jobs.

A further factor, however, which has given rise to limitations on the employment of non-residents by the WPA is that such employment frequently gives newcomers in a community opportunity to establish residence, and thus to qualify for relief should they at some future date lose their WPA jobs and fall into need.1

As protection against such occurrences, laws in at least two states (New York and Wisconsin) prescribe that periods of employment on WPA projects shall not be counted toward the period required in order to become eligible for relief.2 Even in the absence of laws of this kind the same result has been achieved by administrative rulings or opinions of attorneys general which have interpreted WPA employment as being relief the receipt of which precludes or postpones the possibility of establishing residence to qualify for other types of aid.

1 It is not governmental authorities alone who are responsible for observed resistance to employing non-residents on WPA jobs. The opposition frequently is ably abetted by civic groups of one kind and another. In California in 1938, for example, the California Citizens' Association in Bakersfield (said to have originated as the "Committee of 60") started by an official of the Bank of America, was reported to be "especially anxious to frustrate moves of the WPA and FSA to lend too much support and encouragement to migrant labor."—Sidel, James E., Pick for Your Supper. National Child Labor Committee, Publication no. 378, New York, June, 1939, p. 53.

2 See, for example, Digest of Relief Settlement Laws for Wisconsin, May, 1939, pp. 4-5; and New York State Public Welfare Law, Laws 1929, chap. 565 (as amended to May 15, 1940), Art. 7, par. 56(d).
Distribution of Workers by Type of Community

The proportion of WPA workers employed in communities of various sizes is shown in Table 20 which presents also the distribution of gainful workers in the total population in 1930. From this table it may be seen that counties in which the largest city had a population of 100,000 or more have had (as of the dates specified) from 36.9 to 47.4 per cent of all WPA employment. Counties of this type in 1930 included approximately 43 per cent of all gainful workers.

Counties in which the largest city had a population of fewer than 25,000 included (in 1930) approximately 42 per cent of the nation's gainful workers. Except during the earlier periods reported, counties of this class received more than their proportionate share of WPA jobs. Similarly, counties in which the largest city ranged from 25,000 to 100,000 in population, have fared relatively well.

Work Camps

To provide jobs for unattached or non-resident persons aided under the federal transient program in 1935, the WPA established work camps. In March, 1936, these numbered 190 and included nearly 40,000 employees engaged on flood control, public buildings, roads, and other projects in 41 states. After March, 1936, however, the number of workers in camps declined largely because of the decision to discontinue work camps as a separate phase of WPA activity and to attempt to give those employed in camps the same treatment accorded to other workers. During the two and one-half years ending with June, 1942, WPA camp employment ranged from 23,857 in February, 1941, to only 9,975 in March, 1942.

Upon abandonment (in 1935) of the federal government's special provision for workers who had no established residence, these people were subjected to all kinds of vicissitudes. Reluctance on the part of local authorities and relief officials to see newcomers in a community employed by the WPA has been aggravated, of course, by the federal government's refusal to share in any way responsibility for their relief in case they fell into need upon loss of their WPA employment. Thus, despite its many efforts to prevent discrimination against non-residents, the
TABLE 20.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY CLASS OF COUNTY OF ALL GAINFUL WORKERS AND OF WORKERS EMPLOYED BY WPA, SPECIFIED MONTHS, 1937 TO 1941 a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of county b (Population of largest city)</th>
<th>All gainful workers, 1930</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100,000 or over</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000- 99,999</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000- 24,999</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5,000</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Source of data: WPA, Report on Progress of the WPA program, June, 1940, p. 46; June, 1941, p. 40.
b Counties are classified by size of their largest city, according to 1930 population data for all months except June, 1941, for which 1940 population data are used.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

federal government has by its own actions (and inaction) invited the very discrimination it sought to prevent. Furthermore, through policies requiring sponsors to initiate projects and to contribute to their cost the door to discriminatory treatment of non-residents has been opened even wider.

Confinement in Penal or Correctional Institutions

At the very outset of the Works Program the President prescribed that “no person currently serving sentence to a penal or correctional institution shall be employed on any work project.”\(^1\) This prohibition was later amended to the effect that it was “not to be interpreted to include persons on probation or parole.”\(^2\) In its amended form this restriction continued to appear in rulings of the federal WPA until April, 1937, after which it has appeared less and less frequently in state and local statements of conditions of eligibility for WPA jobs. This prohibition appears to be another of the many obstructions public opinion and legislators have long placed in the road of developing constructive programs for the employment and social rehabilitation of prisoners. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that almost simultaneously with the dropping of the restriction upon employing inmates of penal institutions on WPA projects (whether within or outside prison walls) there was written into law a prohibition against the use of WPA funds “for the purpose of carrying out or assisting in carrying out any program or project of constructing, rebuilding, repairing, or replanning its penal or reformatory institutions,” \(\text{unless}\) the President should find that the proposed project “will not cause or promote competition of the products of convict labor with the products of free labor.”\(^3\) Under federal laws and regulations which went into effect in 1937, therefore, persons serving sentences to penal or correctional institutions might be employed on WPA projects found by the President to meet the above-mentioned conditions prescribed by Congress.

Although federal regulations during the latter part of the WPA program have not barred from employment persons con-

---

\(^1\) Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935.
\(^2\) WPA Administrative Order No. 44, July 11, 1936.
\(^3\) ERA Act of 1937, sec. 15; ERA Act of 1938, sec. 22; ERA Act of 1939, sec. 36; ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 35; ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 30.
Eligibility

fined in penal and correctional institutions, there have been a number of states (including Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, and Georgia) in which as late as 1939 and 1940 such persons (exclusive of those on probation or parole) have been ruled ineligible for certification for WPA jobs.

Family Status and Responsibilities

A worker's family status has been an important consideration with respect to his employment by the WPA, since only one worker per family may be employed and since the number of persons dependent upon a worker not infrequently affects the likelihood of his getting a job.

One Job per Family

Only one member of "a family group" may be employed by the WPA at any one time. This restriction applies not only to workers certified as in need but to non-certified workers as well. In case a choice must be made between a certified and non-certified member of the same family, preference is supposed to be given the certified worker. In some states this policy of restricting WPA employment to one person in a family group is not limited to employment on projects but is applied also to administrative jobs. Preference in such cases is usually given to the worker qualifying for the administrative rather than for the project job.

Limiting employment to one member of a family group has applied not only to WPA jobs but also to those of other federal agencies which have co-operated, from time to time, in the federal Works Program. One important exception to this generalization is that a youth could be employed by the NYA or, during its lifetime, enrolled in the CCC, even though some other member of his family group was employed by the WPA or some other federal agency.

Although the policy of restricting employment on the federal Works Program to one job per family group was among the earliest policies prescribed when the program was launched, there was then somewhat more flexibility in the policy than was later retained.

An early deviation from the general rule limiting WPA jobs to one worker in each family was that permitting exceptions upon the specific authority of the federal WPA administrator. In the
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

state of Washington, for instance, employment of a second member of a family group was permissible, but only in instances where security earnings did not "equal the amount received by persons on relief." By and large, however, the power to employ more than one worker per family was seldom used and soon abandoned. This meant the scuttling of one of the devices once considered a necessary means (and widely advertised as such) of protecting large families against hardship resulting from the inadequacy of security wage rates.

Restricting employment to one member per family has sometimes been found in practice to be difficult to control. This was true especially during the earlier years of the WPA program and when members of the same family sought employment with different agencies. Nevertheless, in April, 1936, only 4 per cent of some 6,300 cases studied by the WPA in 13 cities were found to have two members employed on Works Program projects. In 1 per cent of the cases the second member of the family was employed by the CCC and in 3 per cent of the cases by the NYA. Less than 0.5 per cent of the cases had more than two members employed.

Enforcement of restrictions limiting WPA or Works Program jobs to one person in a family has been complicated by a number of factors. First was the sheer administrative difficulty of maintaining controls. This was especially difficult when employment was provided by more than a single federal agency, and the WPA (which was supposed to co-ordinate the activities of all) had no adequate machinery by which to exercise its responsibilities. A second factor was the policy which permitted employment of some other member of a family if the usual wage-earner was injured, fell sick, or in a variety of other ways was rendered unavailable for employment. Upon the return of the first worker, existing controls frequently did not lead automatically to the discharge of the second. A third difficulty encountered was the definition of such terms as "family," "family group," and "household." Variations in definition from one jurisdiction to another necessarily gave rise to diversity in practice.


2 Just how complicated all this can be is illustrated by definitions used in a number of states in the South (including Louisiana and Georgia) where more or less uniformity of practice was achieved relatively early in the WPA's history. Here, a
Eligibility

Among conflicting aims confronting WPA and relief authorities has been the desire to make the relatively few available jobs go as far as possible. Still, they have not wanted families to stretch the security wage too far. To safeguard against this latter danger, federal policy in 1939 prescribed that “Family groups living in one household shall be treated in such a manner as to assure the certification of each natural family unit, if otherwise eligible.” ¹

Although federal policy has sought as a general rule to provide a job for each family unit within a composite family, this policy has sometimes been considerably circumscribed. In Wisconsin in 1939, for example, it was ruled that “Two referrals within a household group should be considered only when the family units have no legal responsibility for each other, or unless the combined needs of the family units making up the household are in excess of the WPA wage.” ² Certifying agencies in Michigan in 1939 were urged to assure the certification of the head of each natural family group but only “if WPA earnings are necessary

family group has been interpreted as consisting of “the members of the household related by blood or bound by legal ties, subsisting from a common table.” Thus, if a husband and wife were living together and maintaining “a common home” only one might be employed. However, if they were legally separated, living apart, and maintaining “separate households” both might be employed. In households where a single son or daughter was living with a father, or in those where single brothers and sisters were living together, only one could be employed.—Louisiana WPA, Manual of Procedure for Certification to Works Progress Administration, [New Orleans], sec. 1, pp. 10-11, [November, 1937]; Georgia WPA, Manual of Procedure for Certification to Works Progress Administration, Atlanta, sec. 1, pp. 3-4, August, 1938.

Florida had a somewhat similar ruling but allowed a certain administrative discretion in permitting the employment of a husband and wife who were not legally separated.—Florida WPA, GB-121. Jacksonville, pp. 1-2, July 25, 1936.

Under these regulations, two persons related by blood or marriage who were heads of two separate families (as a parent and a married son or daughter or two married brothers or two married sisters) if living together were both eligible for WPA employment. Similarly, persons bearing the relationship of nephew, niece, aunt, uncle, cousin, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, or brother-in-law were not construed to be ineligible for WPA employment because another person within the specified degree of relationship (and living in the same household) was employed on a WPA job. However, a modification of policy in Louisiana in 1940 extended the one-job-per-family rule to apply to nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, cousins, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and brothers-in-law if the employed relative had “previously supported the person seeking employment and could be expected to continue doing so.”—Louisiana WPA, Manual of Procedure for Referral to Work Projects Administration, sec. 2, pp. 10-11, March 1, 1940.

¹ WPA, Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 12, July 31, 1939.

343
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

for the self-support of the group." This same practice has long been followed in Illinois, where, as early as 1937, it was ruled that if two or more families were living together "only one member of the total group" could be certified for WPA employment "if one wage will care for the joint family needs." Again, federal officials have not wanted to encourage the breaking up of natural family groupings just for the sake of getting additional jobs. Yet they have wanted to facilitate the establishment of separate households, especially where families had doubled up or had deferred normal separations because of inadequate resources.

Lest the general policy of giving only one job to a family perpetuate artificial or unsatisfactory living arrangements, or "doubling up," necessitated only by unemployment and a family's economic need, statements of policy not infrequently have directed responsible officials to take into account the arrangements families might normally make. This emphasis was well illustrated by an Ohio ruling which prescribed that "The history of the composite family shall be taken into consideration to ascertain whether the composite group has lived as one family prior to the application for certification. Living arrangements and financial responsibility assumed by the various units during normal employment shall be considered." In several states it has been ruled that when a household consists of more than one family unit "which would ordinarily have separate living arrangements," a separate certification of eligibility for employment should be provided for each of the family units included in the household. In explanation of Michigan policy on this question it was stated that "it is important to consider the extent to which under-employment as well as total unemployment has affected the needs of workers, resulting in two or more family units living together as one household for economic reasons."

2 Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Official Memorandum. [Chicago], October 14, 1937.
Eligibility

In instances where a new family is established, the almost universal practice is to consider the new family as a separate unit, certifying it, if eligible, for WPA employment.

Among the most difficult problems confronted in determining what is a single family unit is the question of what to do about single adults. Single sons or daughters “who have always lived at home” have, under policies prescribed in various states, almost invariably been considered part of the family group and not eligible for separate certification. Unmarried adults who maintain separate households frequently may be certified for employment if they can show evidence that their establishing separate living arrangements was for a bona fide reason—such as nearness to former employment, inability to continue living in or to return to the parental home because of economic or personal reasons. In Idaho single persons residing in the same county as their parents have been ineligible for WPA employment.

Appraisals of Federal Policy

Restricting WPA jobs to one person in a family appears to many observers to be a reasonable practice. In fact, a number of organizations which are usually thought of as “liberal” have proposed that a fair objective for a federal work program would be the provision of one job for every family in which no member is otherwise employed.

On the other hand, there are those who look upon the “one job per family” rule as an outworn vestige of the hated pauper laws, as one more device arbitrarily to compel one member of a family to support another, and as an incentive to the break-up of families merely for the purpose of qualifying for WPA employment. Persons holding these views maintain that jobs should be made available to workers only on the basis of merit and ability efficiently to do the work prescribed. Limiting these jobs to one per family, proponents of these views contend, automatically removes them from the category of genuine work and obviously characterizes them as relief, and in some instances at least, imposes upon workers whose wages are none too high, responsibility

1 See, for example, Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration, sec. 4, pp. 413-414, rev. September 29, 1939; also Ohio WPA, Rules and Regulations Governing Employment Based on Operating Procedure No. E-9, Part II, sec. 17, p. 6, September 6, 1939.

345
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

for supporting more people than the limited security wage can provide for properly.

With respect to the effect which allowing only one WPA job per family is thought to have on the break-up of natural family units, a Pennsylvania social worker once wrote: “Because of the WPA set-up, families are breaking up. Sit in an . . . application office and you will surely hear with astounding frequency the statement, ‘I want my own case number so I can get a job.’ . . . The process tends to counteract the efforts of the emergency relief office both to encourage family solidarity and to pursue the possibility of help normally expected from relatives.”

One Worker per Family—but Which?

Having determined how many workers in a given household may be employed by the WPA, there has ever been the further question as to which person or persons should be put to work. So far as possible, the person employed by the WPA has usually been the one designated (in WPA parlance) as the “first priority worker.” Responsibility for determining the priority of the several members of a family usually rested, during the earlier years of the WPA’s history, upon public relief officials rather than upon WPA authorities. However, the more the WPA has exercised control over the selection of its own employes the less relief authorities have had to say as to which member of a family unit should be employed by the WPA.

Under policies prescribed in July, 1939, the WPA was wholly responsible for the selection of all certified persons for assignment to projects. Within the WPA it was the social work personnel which was responsible for saying which member of a family should be given work when a job was available. Although referral agencies might recommend to the WPA changes in priority, final authority for effecting changes was vested in the WPA. This was just the reverse of earlier practice under which changes in priority were the responsibility of the relief agency although the WPA might make recommendations.

Important in the determination of priorities have been con-

1 The Dole Is the Goal, unpublished manuscript by F. V. Grayson, then area supervisor, Pennsylvania State Emergency Relief Board, March 30, 1937, p. 7. See also Dorothy G. Bird’s article, “How Relief Affects Parent-Child Relationships,” in the Family, vol. 22, no. 4, June, 1941, p. 120.
Eligibility

siderations with respect to which member of a family might be considered its economic head and usual wage-earner. A further consideration has been the question as to which worker would be most likely to use his earnings for the family’s benefit. Additional social considerations which were supposed to be taken into account early in the WPA’s history—though little has been heard of them since—included such imponderables as the need and desirability of employment in terms of preserving work skills and morale.

Priorities once established are not unchangeable. They may be—and frequently are—modified either permanently (as when a worker dies or leaves home) or temporarily (as when he is injured, falls sick, or is incarcerated). Changes of priority may not be effected when the employed member of a family is discharged because of eighteen months’ continuous employment.

Policies regarding changes in priority of workers in a family unit when the working member leaves WPA rolls to accept private employment are affected by a number of considerations. Primary among these is the locally prevailing policy with respect to permitting families to have both private and WPA employment at the same time. In Illinois, in 1937, for example, it was ruled that substitutions were not permissible in instances where the usual wage-earner had secured private employment. In Indiana, on the other hand, a secondary wage-earner might be employed by the WPA but only if the usual wage-earner had part-time employment, if the WPA wage was needed to meet the family’s budget deficit, and if the secondary wage-earner agreed to contribute his entire earnings to the family’s use.

Family Responsibilities

The size and make-up of a worker’s family frequently have an important bearing on his eligibility for a WPA job and upon the likelihood of his getting an assignment even when he is certified as eligible.

Workers with relatively large families often stand a better chance than those with smaller families. This is particularly true of large families to which relief agencies are already giving sizable grants. In keeping with the policy of awarding WPA jobs

1 This subject has already been alluded to in chap. 11 and is further discussed in chap. 19.

347
on the basis of relative need, workers with dependents are often shown preference over single persons or others without dependents. The House of Representatives has made several attempts to go even farther in granting special consideration to family heads, by exempting them (provided they are forty-five years of age or older) from arbitrary discharge after continuous employment for a specified period. Since the Senate has never concurred in this arrangement it has never been put into practice.

A concomitant of the general policy of giving preference to workers with large families and relatively greater needs, is a much less general policy of requiring project employes to use their WPA earnings to meet the needs of their families. As already noted, the question of which among several possible persons in a household should be employed by the WPA sometimes turns on the question of which one would be most likely to use his earnings for the benefit of the family. Moreover, if the worker finally selected for employment fails to use his WPA pay to meet his family’s need, he may lose his job. In Ohio, for example, it was ruled (in 1939) that:

A condition of eligibility for employment is that a person shall be the usual wage earner of the family and implies that WPA earnings shall be used for the support of the family for which the WPA worker is certified as the usual wage earner. In instances in which the priority worker changes his status of usual wage earner by not contributing to the support of his family, creating need in that family, his certification may be cancelled upon recommendation from the relief agency concerned.

Similar provisions have been put into effect at one time or another in a number of states, including New York, Indiana, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Washington. A comparable policy, prescribed in Illinois in 1940, was somewhat narrower in scope, applying only to cases in which non-support made it necessary to grant relief or to increase the amount of supplementary relief already being given a family. A small study of 131 relief cases in Chicago, in 1936, revealed that no fewer than 14 cases had been returned to relief from WPA rolls because workers had not used their wages to support their families.

Further concomitants of the policy of insisting that WPA
Eligibility

earnings be used to meet the needs of the families for which they are intended are the various formal and informal devices attempted at various times and places to prohibit use of WPA pay for liquor and other purposes frowned upon by public opinion.¹

Though denial of employment to workers who refuse to support their families has been a common practice, it has not been universal. In Michigan, for example, it was prescribed (in 1939) that:

Every person working on WPA is entitled to receive the pay for the work which he has performed. No person can be removed because they fail to use that money as they should. If the certifying agency wishes to initiate non-support procedure against WPA workers who do not take care of their dependents, the District WPA Office will furnish the necessary evidence required by law that the person concerned is employed.²

While workers with relatively heavy family responsibilities usually receive preferential consideration for WPA employment, there is a point beyond which family responsibilities become a handicap rather than an aid inasmuch as policies in a number of states prohibit the employment of "adults," "women," "housewives," "mothers," or "mothers of dependent children," needed at home to care for "children," "for the home," for "young children," or "invalids."³

When WPA employment is refused to potential workers because "they are needed at home" to care for children or invalids, it is noteworthy that (unless they happen to qualify for some form of special assistance such as aid to dependent children) these persons lose all claim to aid in which there is federal participation.

¹ See chap. 6.
³ See, for example, the following: Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance, Employees' Manual, [Harrisburg], Sec. VII, Part 1, p. 4, rev. April 9, 1941; Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Revised Manual on Certification of Eligibility for Employment, Madison, p. B-3, August 1, 1936; Missouri State Social Security Commission, Manual, [Jefferson City], p. 120, [1938]; Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, KERC-351, Topeka, July 28, 1936; Louisiana WPA, Manual of Procedure for Certification to Works Progress Administration, [New Orleans], sec. 4, p. 28, March 15, 1939; and California State Relief Administration, Manual, [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 240.4, rev. May 12, 1941.

The importance of this factor was clearly revealed in an Illinois study which disclosed that there were in that state during the fall of 1939 some 79,956 general relief cases classed as unemployable. The major cause of unemployment in 15,090 cases (or 21.3 per cent of the total) was reported as responsibility for caring for family.

349
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Thus, since the federal government has refused to take any part in any program of general assistance that might benefit these families, the government is often left in the anomalous position of doing nothing to help meet the very responsibilities which, because of their social importance, constituted a bar to WPA employment.

Instead of refusing employment to mothers of young children the WPA in various sections of the country has established projects for the care of working mothers—including among others, mothers employed on WPA projects! If, under a more comprehensive and better co-ordinated national relief program than the United States can yet boast, families might be given the kind of aid they really need, it is not improbable that provision could be made for children to remain with their own mothers rather than to employ on one work project someone to take care of the children of women employed on another.
CHAPTER XIV
ELIGIBILITY: NEED

NEED, A PRIME CONSIDERATION

WITH BUT FEW exceptions, employable persons must be in need in order to secure WPA jobs. This requirement, among the earliest prescribed for WPA employment,\(^1\) has probably given rise to more criticism, difference of opinion, administrative and legislative changes in policy, and divergence in practice, than any other aspect of the WPA program.\(^2\)

Although federal policy (at the insistence of Congress) has been, increasingly, to restrict WPA employment to needy persons, many organizations and many individuals, both within and without the WPA, have advocated abolition of the needs test as a prerequisite to getting a WPA job.

Restricting WPA employment to needy workers is usually justified on the ground that the number of jobs the federal government could afford to provide has never been enough to go around, so should go first to needy workers whose families might otherwise suffer or have to apply for help from local and state relief funds. Proponents of this view do not usually appear to realize that the issue of what the nation can or cannot afford is far from being a closed question—as war expenditures in 1941 and 1942 have clearly shown.

The President, in 1939, put the case thus: “In meeting the problem of need within the limits of the funds which can reasonably be made available for the purpose, the emphasis must necessarily be placed upon the number of unemployed individuals who are actually in need of wages in order to secure the necessities of life.”\(^3\)

\(^1\) Even before the Works Program was born, the President's Committee on Economic Security (early in 1935) strongly implied that the jobs provided under the “employment assurance” program which it recommended should be awarded on the basis of need—together with “apparent ability to do the work offered.”—Report to the President. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1935, p. 9.

\(^2\) This is not the only arena in which the question of means tests is bitterly fought. For distinguished analysis of this issue in relation to certain British social services see British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938, by Eveline M. Burns. Social Science Research Council, Washington, 1941, pp. 226-227, 238 ff.

\(^3\) As quoted in the New York Times, April 28, 1939. The close relationship between limiting jobs to needy workers on the one hand and the number of jobs pro-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Beyond this position, defenders of the needs test seldom go. Nevertheless, further considerations have sometimes been advanced. For example, in 1940 Senator Adams of Colorado who for a number of years was chairman of the Senate Committee which was in charge of the various ERA acts considered by the Senate maintained: "There is not any obligation on the Government to take care of unemployed who are not in need." ¹

Then, too, there have been those who because of their particular concern for economically and socially disadvantaged persons have urged that Works Program employment should not be divorced from some sort of means tests since this separation would be likely to result in denying jobs to large numbers of workers for whom they feel special concern. This position was well stated by Edith Abbott, dean of the School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago, when she declared: "... we may believe in theory, in abolishing the means test—I certainly do ... but in practice we must ... concern ourselves about the millions who are at the bottom of the ladder and who will not get any work under any program which employs those who are not in need and sets up a work program solely on an efficiency basis." ²

One further consideration advanced, particularly during the early years of the WPA program, has been that if work-relief earnings are to be effective in stimulating economic recovery they must be paid to those most likely to spend them quickly, thus assuring rapid turnover.

The administration's policy of limiting jobs to needy workers and its inability to provide work "for all the unemployed" was attributed by Aubrey Williams to "the incomplete education of the American people" as to the full significance of a work program. The program of the Civil Works Administration in 1933-1934, he explained, had been intended to effectuate "the right to

¹ Congressional Record, June 15, 1940, p. 8313.
Eligibility

work.” Widespread opposition to this program, however, made it clear, he said, that it would be necessary to “make haste slowly.”

Speaking of public opinion on this question of who should be given WPA jobs, Senator Hayden of Arizona, during discussion of WPA legislation in 1936, observed that the administration was criticized when men who did not need jobs were given WPA employment. “That is true in every community,” added Senator Byrnes of South Carolina. “Everywhere,” corroborated Senator McKellar of Tennessee.

It is probably safe to say that the most potent argument in favor of restricting WPA employment to needy workers has been the conviction of the citizenry at large that this is the course that should be pursued. This does not mean, of course, that public opinion might not accept a public employment program on something other than a needs basis if there were enough jobs to go around. However, so long as the number of available jobs falls far short of the demand, the public is likely to insist that needy workers be given first chance at what jobs there are.

Among the staunchest supporters of the means test for WPA employment, the number of jobs being what they have been, has been the United States Conference of Mayors. In season and out these mayors have urged Congress to limit WPA employment to needy persons lest, otherwise, the cities be overwhelmed by demands for relief that would be sure to follow.

Arrayed against the means test for WPA employment have been a number of high officials of the WPA itself, administration leaders in Congress, labor organizations and their leaders, the American Association of Social Workers, and a wide variety of other organizations and individuals.

Although the President’s Committee on Economic Security (in

1 As quoted by Craig Thompson in the New York Times, July 2, 1938.
4 In passing, it is significant to note that demands for abolition of the needs test almost invariably are accompanied by demands for enlargement of the WPA program. A CIO proposal (made in 1940) to eliminate the means test, for example, was coupled with a recommendation that 3,000,000 jobs be provided. It is far from clear, therefore, whether all who favor giving WPA jobs without respect to economic need would do so if (as in the past) the number of jobs made available continued to fall far below the number of workers without jobs.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

1935) appears to have favored limiting employment under its proposed employment assurance program to needy workers, the Advisory Council (comprising some of the nation’s leading authorities on social security and public welfare measures) in its report to the President’s Committee declared:

Unless work is separated from relief it loses most of its social values to the worker. Therefore the Government employment program should be divorced completely from relief, and should be set up separately from the public-assistance program. . . .

Candidates for employment should be selected on the basis of their ability, not their need, but as there probably will not be sufficient Government work to give employment to everyone not now employed, applicants should be required to show that they are dependent on their own earnings and that they have had previous regular-work experience.¹

In support of abolishing the needs test for WPA employment it has been held that such limitation is unfair to workers who somehow manage by hook or by crook to maintain themselves, though on an insufficient basis;² and that tests of need are considered to be humiliating,³ degrading,⁴ and likely to destroy initiative and thrift.⁵

² Early in 1937, for example, Ernest K. Lindley reported to the New York Herald Tribune that “some of the President’s advisers” regarded the needs test for WPA employment as operating “unfairly against employed persons with small savings.”—February 3, 1937.
³ Nels Anderson, director of the Section on Labor Relations of the Works Progress Administration, for example, wrote in 1938 that the means test, which, like the paupers’ oath was an outmoded device intended “to humiliate the poor,” was “not necessary” and might in fact be harmful.—The Right to Work. Modern Age Books, Inc., New York, 1938, p. 147.
⁴ The American Federation of Labor has often urged public employment for unemployed workers “without the humiliation of joining the relief roll,” as it was once put in the organization’s publication, Monthly Survey of Business.—No. 85, December, 1936-January, 1937, p. 3.
⁵ Unemployed workers should be given jobs, declared John L. Lewis before the First Constitutional Convention of the CIO “without requiring honest, decent, unemployed workers to degrade themselves as paupers.”—Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. [Washington], 1938, p. 50.
⁶ The Advisory Council appointed by the WPA administrator for New York City in 1939 agreed that “conditions of eligibility and the amount of relief should not tend to destroy the morale of recipients who have exhibited thrift in the past, by compelling them to exhaust family assets completely and sink to the level of destitution. . . . As a condition of eligibility for work relief, the present means test should be liberalized so as not to require complete exhaustion of family assets.”—New York City WPA (letter), March 14, 1939. As Ralph Hetzel, Jr., an official of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, once put it, workers are “really put through the wringer” before they are considered eligible for WPA jobs.

354
Eligibility

After his extensive study of unemployment in New Haven, E. Wight Bakke reported "the greater the extent to which assistance is given on proof of complete lack of resources from self-support the greater the stimulus to the development of techniques and skill in proving destitution. . . . Preoccupation with such an endeavor cannot encourage self-reliance. . . ."

"Any degree to which qualifications for work relief can increase the emphasis on skill and competence to do the job in hand, and continuation on the job [be] made to depend on the same conditions will also promote the incentive to display the qualities usually consistent with self-reliance rather than with dependence," and, as he says, "the ability to 'talk poor mouth.' "

Finally, it has been pointed out that so far as WPA employment is intended to preserve working habits, skills and morale, to facilitate workers' return to private employment, and to capitalize on the skills and services of unemployed workers, the means test offers no suitable basis for selecting persons who can either profit most by or contribute most to these aims.

Noteworthy among attacks upon the needs test for WPA employment is that once delivered by Senator La Follette who in debate on a pending WPA measure in 1940 declared:

There was never anything more preposterous than that we should expand the old English common-law concept of poor relief in an effort to meet a cataclysmic economic crisis; the proposition, in other words, that a man and his family must be stripped of everything they have before they are entitled to consideration for employment or assistance from government.

It is a great tribute to the people of the United States, to their stamina, their morale, and their character, that this cruel process of pauperization has worn away so little of their morale and their character. I know of nothing worse that can happen to a family than to have to go down through that cruel process of pauperization, the loss of home, the loss of savings, the loss of their life insurance, the loss of all those things which they have held dear until finally, stripped and destitute, they come under the eligibility rules which have been established by the Federal Government and by governments at other levels.

Despite such criticism from many sources, the "needs" requirement has been consistently maintained.

2 Congressional Record, June 22, 1940, p. 8927.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Exceptions to General Policy

From the beginning of the WPA program, however, provision has been made for employing a small number of workers who could not qualify on a needs basis. Ten per cent was the figure at first set; this was cut to 5 per cent in 1937. Even these limitations have given the WPA more leeway than it chose to take advantage of. As a result, the proportion of WPA workers who, on selected dates for which data are reported, were certified as in need has never been less than 94 per cent of the total. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1940, workers who had been certified as being in need constituted about 97 per cent of the total number employed.

These proportions do not, of course, apply equally to all parts of the country or even within a given state. Differences have resulted from varying types of projects undertaken, and from differences in the extent to which special skills (such as those needed in supervising project operations or in construction work) are available among workers certified as in need, or in the willing-

1 The process of ascertaining whether applicants are in need is termed a "social study" or "investigation." The formality of declaring workers to be in need and otherwise eligible, and of validating a host of prescribed forms evidencing this fact, is termed "certification." A "referral" is a recommendation (usually made by a relief agency and based, presumably, on investigation) that a given worker be certified or denied certification by the responsible certifying agency, which may or may not investigate the facts further before final action. Once an applicant has been certified, the process of ascertaining, periodically, whether he is still in need and otherwise eligible is known as "reinvestigation" or "review of eligibility." The formal action evidencing continued eligibility is termed "continuing certification." The process of formally declaring that workers are no longer in need or that they are ineligible for further employment because of some other reason is termed "canceling certification." Formal action evidencing the fact that a worker is again eligible after a cancellation of eligibility is known as "recertification."

2 The earliest limitation upon the employment of workers was established by executive order of the President as early as May, 1935. Since this applied to that period when employment was conditioned upon receipt of relief rather than certified need, merely, the order prescribed that "at least 90 per cent of all persons working on a work project shall have been taken from the public relief rolls." Exemptions from this ruling might be made by the federal WPA administrator.—Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935.

When the basis of eligibility was changed from receipt of relief to need for relief, regulations regarding limitations upon employment were, of course, modified to apply to the new base.—See, for example, WPA Administrative Order No. 44, July 11, 1936.

3 For a statement of the proportion of certified and non-certified workers employed on a number of specified dates see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, p. 1256.
Eligibility

Flexibility necessary to meet these various vicissitudes has been effected by the allowance, made since the beginning of the program, for exempting certain projects from the necessity of drawing the prescribed number of workers from certified lists.\(^1\) Thus, although regulations issued in July, 1939, prescribed that "at least 95% of the employees on an official project shall be certified as in need," the commissioner of the WPA or his authorized representative was permitted to make any exceptions deemed necessary.\(^2\) Prescribed regulations also gave state WPA administrators some leeway in exempting individual projects "provided that the number of non-certified persons allowed by such exemptions shall not exceed 10 per cent of the persons employed on a project and that at least 95 per cent of all persons employed on all projects, including Federal agency projects within the state, shall be persons certified as in need." State administrators were also authorized to make exemptions "for a period of not to exceed one full pay-roll period, in order to permit the assignment of supervisory personnel for the purpose of planning, scheduling and completing project operations, provided that such exemption authority shall not allow the assignment of project supervisory employees in excess of the normal needs of full-time project operations."\(^3\)

Provision for these exemptions—notwithstanding all that partisan critics of the WPA have claimed with respect to making room for patronage appointments and "gravy jobs"—has been authorized primarily to permit employment of key workers who were not available from certified lists or relief rolls, and who were essential to the operation of a project and possibly, there-

\(^1\) One such project, New York City's North Beach airport, on which the number of non-certified workers during a period of over two years averaged more than 25 per cent of the total workers employed has been widely publicized by critics of the administration.

\(^2\) By the middle of 1941 this power had been used but sparingly. Even on defense projects "almost no" exemptions had been granted, according to WPA officials. Late in 1941 seven nationwide projects (such as defense vocational training, teaching Spanish to Army and Navy personnel, and others related to the nation's war effort) were excluded from operation of the 95:5 rule.

\(^3\) WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 37, July 31, 1939. These provisions were reauthorized in substance in 1940. See Operating Procedure Memorandum No. 130, December 16, 1940.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

fore, to the employment of large numbers of certified or relief workers.¹

Although much has been made of the distinction between “certified”² as opposed to “uncertified” workers, differences between the two have frequently been more fictitious than real. Changes in definitions of these two categories (and differences in interpretation of definitions current at any moment) have sometimes resulted in shifting a worker from one classification to the other almost without regard to changes in his economic status. Workers paid in excess of the monthly security wage, those paid $100 a month or more, or those employed as foremen or in supervisory capacities³ have frequently been regarded as “non-certified” workers even though they were originally selected from among those certified as in need or in receipt of relief.

Conversely, when local officials have been under pressure to increase the proportion of certified workers employed, procedures have sometimes been devised by which previously non-certified workers might be certified, even though there was no material change in their circumstances. When this practice has been followed it has sometimes been justified on the ground that

¹ One official statement of conditions that might warrant requests for exemptions enumerated the following:

“A. Sufficient skilled persons who are certified as in need of relief are no longer available for employment at the schedule of monthly earnings to insure completion of a project.

“B. A small number of skilled persons essential to the operation of the project must be employed and paid in excess of the schedule of monthly earnings in order to provide suitable, worthwhile projects upon which a large number of certified persons may be employed.

“C. In rare cases to facilitate the operation of work camps at a distance from the residence of certified persons.

“D. Qualified supervision cannot be provided from persons certified as in need of relief and paid in accordance with the schedule of monthly earnings.”—WPA, Handbook of Procedures Letter No. 38, March 19, 1937, p. 4.

² Certified workers have been known by various designations such as “relievers” and “relief-rollers.” By contrast, workers who had not been certified as in need have been termed “patronage appointees,” “non-relievers,” “non-relief-rollers,” and “ten percenters,” or, more recently, “five percenters.”

³ This practice was protested to Fred R. Rauch, assistant administrator of the WPA, by a delegation of labor representatives from New York City. Of their protests Mr. Rauch said to a House Committee: “The complaint about . . . [withdrawing relief status from former relief workers who are now administrative workers] was that the administrative worker works a minimum of 39 hours a week, and if the workers that come from the relief rolls are put on that basis, and lose their relief status, when administrative reductions are made they are laid off, and they are just out of a job.”—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, p. 339.
the workers whose classifications were changed would probably have been in need except for their WPA employment and, if released, might have had to apply for relief. Certified workers automatically classed as "non-certified" because of being employed in supervisory capacities have, upon loss of this status, usually been permitted, within a prescribed period and with a minimum of red tape, to return to their previous status.

A second method of decreasing the proportion of non-certified workers on a project is, of course, to increase the number of certified workers employed, without increasing commensurately the number of non-certified employes. When this alternative has been chosen, it has sometimes contributed to the overmanning of projects.

The success attained in taking from certified lists an even larger proportion of WPA workers than has been required is not accidental. It is the result of repeated official insistence upon the importance of employing certified as opposed to uncertified workers whenever possible, whether the opening in question is a project job or a supervisory position. Federal regulations in July, 1939, for example, prescribed that "in no case shall non-certified persons be assigned to work on projects when there are certified persons available who are qualified to perform the duties required." Similarly, it was required that "no non-certified project supervisory employee may be assigned to a project if equally qualified certified persons are available."^2

Responsibility for Certification of Workers

Since so much is made of employing workers who are in need, great importance attaches to two major questions: how is need defined,^3 and who makes this determination?

During the first few months of the WPA program, before the federal government abandoned the field of general relief and withdrew federal funds and support from state relief administrations, these agencies comprised a more or less uniform

^1 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 42, pp. 1-2, July 31, 1939.

^2 Ibid., sec. 44, July 31, 1939. Typical of efforts made by officials to have as large a proportion of workers taken from certified lists or relief rolls as possible was an Ohio ruling which specified that the prescribed limitation was not a maximum but "definitely the minimum" and that "100% certified labor shall be employed wherever possible."—Ohio WPA, Employment Division Handbook of Procedures and Manual, E-81. Columbus, p. 8, rev. December 1, 1936.

^3 This is discussed in some detail in chap. 15.
and federally supervised system for the investigation of applications and the certifying of workers for WPA employment. With the extinction of the FERA at the end of 1935 this relative uniformity vanished. Since then as a general rule and wherever possible, the WPA has turned over to state and local relief agencies responsibility for making investigations and reinvestigations of need.

Designation of agencies to co-operate in the certification of workers is not permanent or irrevocable. From time to time the WPA has withdrawn for longer or shorter periods its approval of certifying agencies. When this has occurred, localities or even states have been deprived of the opportunity to certify workers to jobs until the offending agencies have remedied their shortcomings or until the WPA itself assumed responsibility for the necessary investigations. Failure of certifying agencies to maintain required standards, and disputes over responsibility for certifications and over the question of who should pay the bills have, at one time or another, resulted in suspension of the certifying function in Oklahoma and in at least some sections of a number of states, including Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, and Texas.

During the past several years, however, the WPA has shown increasing reluctance to relieve state and local agencies of responsibility for co-operating in the selection of its project employes.\(^1\) In fact, this attitude by 1941 had become so extreme that Howard Hunter asked a House Committee to write into law a provision prohibiting the employment of any worker until after a public agency, approved by the WPA, had determined his need and had referred him for employment.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Reluctance on the part of the WPA to relieve state and local authorities of their responsibilities for making investigation of need for WPA employment is largely attributable to two factors: first, the increasingly severe limitations Congress has put on funds for administration costs; and second, refusal of Congress to follow the recommendation of WPA officials that the federal government share the cost of making investigations. This unwillingness to share these costs was interpreted by WPA officials to mean that Congress wanted the WPA to keep aloof from activities of this kind.

\(^2\) Such a prohibition was necessary, he said, because "certain States . . . have been reluctant to assume or continue the responsibility for the work of investigating applicants because of the expense. These States point to the clause . . . which permits the Work Projects Administration to handle the certification. Back of this there is sometimes an unwillingness to assume responsibility for referred persons in the event that the W.P.A. does not have sufficient quota to hire them or finds they cannot do project work.

"I think," he continued, "this loophole should be closed and that our act should not provide the possibility of the W.P.A. doing these investigations."—U. S. House
Eligibility

Although the WPA in the past few years has shown increasing reluctance to permit state and local agencies to escape responsibility for the determination of the need of workers for WPA employment, the WPA has exercised increasing vigilance in checking up on and attempting to influence state and local agencies' methods and standards of referring and certifying workers. This tendency is largely explained by two considerations: (a) the growing number of eligibility requirements (prescribed by Congress) that needed to be taken into account in selecting employes for WPA jobs, and (b) a growing feeling (particularly evident during and since 1939) on the part of high WPA officials that a greater degree of "national uniformity" of practice was desirable.

The first legal requirement that certifications of workers' need had to be made either by the WPA or a public relief agency authorized by the WPA to perform this function, was that written into the ERA Act of 1939. This provision grew out of grave concern caused in Congress by the discovery that in New York City the International Ladies Garment Workers Union had been authorized in 1938 to refer for WPA employment its members who were thought to be in need. This device had been adopted in an effort quickly to provide temporary work during a period of severe unemployment for needle trades workers and to spare them the embarrassment of applying to local public relief offices though many were said to be receiving relief from the union. Although referral by the union was not formally regarded as "certification" of need, it permitted workers to secure employment while regular investigations made by the Department of Welfare were in progress. Even though some union workers were ultimately found not to have been in need, many had been able to secure two or three weeks' employment before they were declared ineligible.\(^1\)

Reluctance on the part of responsible WPA officials to have that agency assume full responsibility for investigating the needs

---

\(^1\) For extensive discussion of this issue and correspondence regarding it see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, pp. 990-995, 1162-1168.
and eligibility of workers may be attributed to at least nine consider-
ations: the cost of employing personnel necessary to perform these functions creditably; fear that even if Congress appropriated funds for this purpose these might prove insufficient to offset the loss of state and local relief personnel already doing the job; lack of sympathy with the requirement that workers must be in need before they are eligible for employment; the political advantage of being able to disclaim responsibility for the selection of workers actually given jobs; the desire to escape public criticism for employing "chiselers" who, for one reason or another, might at any given time be ineligible for employment; an interest in avoiding (and, it might be added, in turning upon some other agency) the "heat" and pressure to give some kind of assistance to those who have been found to be in need but for whom no jobs are immediately available; the feeling that the legal basis of WPA was so unsure (because Congress has always viewed it as a temporary organization) that it was unsound policy to appear to take over from state and local authorities all responsibility for needy employable persons; the belief that, the WPA organization and personnel being what it was in some areas, it was just as well to have a check upon the degree to which WPA officials might be swayed by political or other ulterior considerations; and finally, the fact that most state and local relief agencies already have administrative personnel (inadequate as this frequently has been) doing the same kind of work as that required in referring or certifying workers to the WPA. Overeagerness to emphasize the fact that decisions were made by local relief agencies, and not by the WPA itself, has sometimes led certain WPA officials to understate the degree to which the WPA was in fact responsible for the selection of its workers.

Prior to July, 1939, the federal WPA (as noted already) supervised the certification work of co-operating relief agencies much less closely than was subsequently the case. To be sure, certification from the beginning was permitted only by agencies approved by the WPA, and members of the WPA field staff suggested modifications of policy here, and changes of procedure

---

3 One instance of this occurred in 1941 when friends of the administration replied to its critics (who complained that standards of need for WPA had been relaxed) that agencies responsible for applying these standards were mostly under the jurisdiction of Republican-controlled county boards.
there. Nevertheless, high federal officials assumed the position that certification was "the state's job" and took no very effective steps to control state policies and practices. Within recent years, particularly during and since 1939, all this has been changed.

One result of this change of front was that state relief or public welfare agencies assuming responsibility for making referrals or certifications were required to sign an agreement, outlining the plan to be followed and consenting to submit for WPA approval rules and regulations affecting the determination of eligibility. Short of threatening to suspend acceptance of applications or to take over the certification job itself, however, the WPA has had few effective devices for controlling state and local practice. Thus the WPA, in many jurisdictions, was still confronted—as it had been ever since the liquidation of state emergency relief agencies under supervision of the FERA—with what a high official once termed "a beggar's choice." As late as 1940, Colonel Harrington told a House Committee that the services of these co-operating agencies were "reasonably adequate" in only "about one-half of the States." ¹

A second change in federal policy (effected in 1939) was that co-operating relief and welfare agencies were thereafter to be regarded as merely referral rather than certifying agencies. Tied up with this change in nomenclature was an attempt to shift from local and state relief agencies to the WPA final responsibility for determining a worker's eligibility. Co-operating agencies were asked merely to refer to the WPA applicants who were thought likely to qualify for WPA jobs. Applications thus referred to the WPA might be accepted, rejected as ineligible, or held pending further information from the local referral agency.² Review of referrals made by co-operating agencies in a few states has some-

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 715.
² The official ruling on the scrutiny that should be given applications was as follows: "The degree of control which the Work Projects Administration shall exercise in reviewing referrals shall depend upon the willingness and ability of the local referral agency to make referrals in conformity with standards of eligibility established by the Work Projects Administration. . . . Where it is deemed necessary or advisable the person seeking certification for employment should be requested to report at the local office of the Division of Employment for interview. When the information regarding eligibility received from the local referral agency is considered sufficient upon which to base a decision, the interview may be waived. Where necessary, the Division of Employment shall obtain information from collateral sources and shall make a complete investigation and also where deemed necessary, a home visit."—WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 16, p. 1, rev. March 29, 1940.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

times resulted in the rejection of as many as half of those referred for WPA employment. "Rejection," said Colonel Harrington in 1940, was "quite a widespread process; because there are some States in which the local certifying officers—which in those cases are generally county officers—certify almost anybody who comes and makes a reasonable case as being in need." 

In a majority of states, however, rejections during recent years have fallen below 10 per cent of the number of referrals.

Changing the name by which agencies co-operating in the selection of WPA workers were known meant little in actual practice. In jurisdictions where the WPA had confidence in the relief agencies, "referrals" were accepted with no more question than had previously attended acceptance of certifications. Here, then, the only change was that the final bit of paper involved in the certifying process was filled out in the WPA office instead of in that of the relief agency. In fact, co-operating agencies in a number of areas were soon being called certifying agencies as they had been before.

Conversely, where WPA officials (even before 1939) were skeptical of the methods or standards of relief agencies, they had already assumed responsibility for checking certifications and even for supplementing investigations made by co-operating agencies. WPA "co-operation" in this area was sometimes so complete that it amounted almost to a duplication of the work done by relief agencies. In New York State, exclusive of New York City, for example, WPA investigators in 1937 and 1938 checked (through interviews or by consulting records in the offices of local authorities) the eligibility of all persons certified by authorized certifying agents. In Arkansas, although certifications were supposed to be made by the State Department of Public Welfare, the WPA demanded detailed information, amounting in some instances to a transcript of the case record, of every worker certified.

Divisions of responsibility, by which one agency makes investigations and "referrals" and another formally "certifies" eligi-

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 715.
2 Confusion over the distinction between certifying and referral agencies has been heightened by provisions of the ERA acts of 1939 and subsequent years which have referred to the co-operating relief agencies as certifying agencies. For discussion of this see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 17.
Eligibility

have been said by officials concerned with these processes to affect adversely the quality of the work done. Relief officials responsible only for "referring" workers, it is said, have sometimes taken this task lightly, on the theory that ultimate responsibility rested with the WPA; while WPA officials sometimes assumed that these investigations of eligibility had been competently handled.

Agencies Co-operating in the Selection of WPA Workers

The type of agency which, as of specified dates, has been responsible for certifying (or referring) workers for WPA employment in the several states and the District of Columbia has changed somewhat with the passage of time. Early in 1940, for example, the agency responsible for co-operating in the making of certifications in 36 states was a state relief or public welfare agency. In only two jurisdictions (the District of Columbia and New Mexico) as opposed to nine the previous year did the WPA do its own certifying. In nine states the co-operating agencies were local relief authorities which may have been town, township, city, or county authorities. In South Carolina and Oklahoma there was no co-operating agency at the time to which the report applied.

In most instances state and local co-operating agencies were substantially the same as they had been for some three years. In 13 states, however, shifts may be noted. In five states (all in New England) local relief agencies were co-operating with the WPA in 1940 whereas a state agency had previously done so in New Hampshire and Connecticut, and the WPA had previously done its own certifying in Maine and Vermont. In two states (New York and Maryland) by 1940 state agencies had finally assumed some responsibility with respect to certifications whereas this had previously been left wholly to local agencies co-operating with the WPA. In the remaining six states (New Jersey, South Carolina, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and New Mexico) various types of changes of responsibility occurred.

State agencies co-operating in the making of referrals or certifi-

^ Some idea of the tremendous administrative problem posed by the necessity of maintaining working relationships with the large number of co-operating local bodies is illustrated by the fact that in New Jersey this involved contacts with some 360 different municipalities.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

cations, have been of three types: the first, those which (as in Pennsylvania and, as was once the case, in California) have made referrals or certifications themselves through local units of their own organizations; the second, those which (as in Michigan and Colorado) supervised semi-autonomous local agencies which actually made referrals or certifications.

Supervision by agencies of the latter type has been of varying degrees of effectiveness. Where the state agency chose to exercise control and paid part of the salaries of the administrative personnel engaged in this service, control has been relatively effective. On the other hand, when the state has borne none of the cost of making referrals or certifications (even though it has helped pay the salaries of personnel administering one or more of several different forms of relief) control has proved extremely difficult. In some instances local agencies have been requested to enter into written agreements with a supervising state agency, such agreements being similar to those that responsible state agencies have been expected to enter into with the WPA.

The third type of state certifying agency is that which (as in Indiana and Illinois) receives referrals from other agencies, and either gives or withholds its approval before forwarding them to the WPA. In Indiana, for example, the Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief (in 1941) accepted referrals from township relief authorities and, in turn, referred to WPA those found eligible according to the Commission's standards. In Illinois the Emergency Relief Commission (IERC) which was supplanted in 1941 by the Illinois Public Aid Commission was long responsible for reviewing and approving referrals from local relief authorities before forwarding them to the WPA.

1 See, for example, Michigan WPA, Manual of Procedure for Certification, Lansing, Part I, sec. 2, p. 3, 1939; also, Ohio WPA, Rules and Regulations Governing Employment Based on Operating Procedure No. E-9, Columbus, Part II, sec. 5, September 6, 1939.

2 One result of this dual process of referring and then re-referring workers in Illinois was that (in December, 1939) the IERC rejected no fewer than 5,545 of 19,248 referrals received from local relief authorities. A total of 16,216 referrals were accepted, leaving a balance of 4,702 cases pending at the close of the month. Among those rejected, a large proportion (4,274) were returned to relief authorities for further information. During the month a total of 10,317 cases were forwarded to the WPA which accepted 3,092, rejected 401 (of which 316 were returned to the IERC for further information), leaving a total of 6,824 pending at the end of the month.—Summary of Operations Affecting Persons Certified as Available for WPA Employment in Illinois, for the Month of December, 1939. [Chicago], pp. 4, 6, January 18, 1940.
Eligibility

Public relief or welfare agencies at either the state or local level, responsible for certifying workers to the WPA, may or may not have further responsibilities (such as granting relief) toward employable persons whether they are denied or given WPA employment. In at least 13 states local and state agencies co-operating in the referral of workers in 1939 had little or nothing to do with granting relief to employable persons, because in these states, either “no relief” or “practically no relief” was available for such persons. In Indiana although some township relief was available to employable persons, the state agency responsible for making referrals to the WPA had nothing to do with the administration of this aid. On the other hand, many state agencies responsible for co-operating in the certification of WPA workers were also responsible for administering (as in Pennsylvania and California) or for supervising (as in New York, Illinois, and Wisconsin) administration of relief to employable persons.

Sometimes responsibility for certifying workers has been divided among several agencies. In Michigan, for example, both county boards of social welfare and county bureaus of social aid have had concurrent local jurisdiction in their respective fields. In Wisconsin referrals for certification, under an agreement reached late in 1939, might be made either by a local relief agency or a separate referral agency.

Designated agencies have not always been exclusively responsible for certifications in their territories. In the “drought areas” designated in 1936, for example, county farm agents and the federal Resettlement Administration co-operated in certifying farmers for WPA jobs.

Regardless of what agency was normally responsible for making WPA certifications, veterans’ relief organizations have sometimes, as in Pennsylvania and Minnesota at various periods, been authorized to certify veterans for WPA jobs. Veterans participating in the “bonus march” on Washington in 1936, if certified as in need by the relief agency in Washington and as veterans by the United States Veterans Administration were, upon return to their homes, eligible for WPA employment there.

Congress in 1941 opened up the possibility of having the WPA certify veterans if the relief agency responsible for co-operating

1 South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona, and Nevada.

367
in the selection of WPA workers refused to refer veterans in accordance with policies laid down. By July, 1942, the WPA had not had to assume this responsibility anywhere.

Responsibility for Reviews of Eligibility and Cancellation of Certification

Just as there has been wide variation in the administrative arrangements made for the referral and selection of workers for WPA employment, so also has there been great diversity from state to state and from time to time in the division of responsibility between the state WPA on one hand and the co-operating relief agency on the other for the review, cancellation, and recertification of workers' eligibility after they have once been certified.

According to plans worked out at various times and places, the WPA has frequently assumed responsibility for the review of the eligibility of workers already employed, leaving to relief agencies responsibility for those who have been certified but not assigned. Generally speaking, the WPA itself has been more willing to accept responsibility for reviewing (and either continuing or canceling) the eligibility of workers already certified than to assume responsibility for original investigations of eligibility prior to certification. Although Congress has stated only that the WPA shall see that periodic reviews of eligibility are made, and has said nothing as to who should make them, the House Committee on Appropriations in 1939 made it clear that it expected the semi-annual reviews "by a Federal agency" to have a salutary effect.

Divisions of labor between the WPA and relief agencies have sometimes been determined by the reason for changing a worker's status. In these instances the WPA has usually been responsible for cancellations necessitated because workers are not employable or "adaptable to a work program" while relief agencies, as a rule, have been responsible for canceling the eligibility of workers no longer regarded as being in need. Regardless of the grounds on

---

1 These are discussed in chap. 15.
2 Results of a number of reviews of eligibility are presented in chap. 17.
3 Typical of divisions of labor sometimes effected was that prescribed in Wisconsin early in 1940. Here cancellations were to be made by relief agencies (subject to WPA approval, however) when:
   a. The family income is sufficient for its self-support.
   b. The person certified is not available for assignment.
   c. The certification previously made does not conform to the present eligibility regulations.
Eligibility

which an agency's responsibility for reviewing and canceling certifications is based, provision is almost always made for obtaining from referral agencies recommendations as to workers' continued eligibility and the advisability of canceling certifications.

Under the complex arrangements effected, a worker might be referred in the first instance by a relief agency. After getting a WPA job, he might find his certification formally continued by the WPA at the time of its periodic review of need. If he were released by the WPA because of ineligibility (since he had had eighteen months' continuous employment or had left the WPA voluntarily to take private employment which he subsequently lost) he would probably be required to re-apply to the relief agency for a determination of need. When to these complications are added the likelihood that the WPA and relief agencies use different measures for determining need, the bewilderment of workers over the complexities of the total process is understandable.

Methods and Standards of Investigation and Review

Methods used by the WPA and relief agencies to determine eligibility have ranged all the way from the thorough and comprehensive individual investigations which well-organized public relief agencies use in determining eligibility for relief, to the opposite extreme of so-called "door-step" or "desk" certifications based only upon office interviews and statements signed by applicants. The fact that home investigations are usually required by public welfare agencies in determining eligibility for assistance does not necessarily mean that these are indispensable to the

d. Persons who move from one county to another unless to accept temporary assignment.

e. The certified person neglects to renew his employment registration.

f. Persons waiting assignment fail to notify the referral agency of their continued need and availability."

Cancellations were to be made by the WPA, on the other hand, if the only certified member of the family:

"1. Is not occupationally adapted to the WPA program.

2. Presents physical limitations which make his employment dangerous to his health or safety or to the health or safety of others.

3. Is discharged for cause and no change in priority is deemed advisable.

4. Is not reviewed by the referral agency within the specified three or six month period."

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

proper determination of eligibility for WPA employment. Investigations of eligibility for assistance are frequently directed as much at ascertaining need for medical and dental care, vocational training or placement, case-work or other social services, as at the need for relief. Investigations of WPA eligibility, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with the application of needs and means tests. Though statements or evidence which applicants may present in support of their declarations of need for WPA employment may be subjected to verification in a number of ways (as are income tax statements and declarations made to customs officials), routine home investigations do not appear to be any more necessary than in checking such things as income tax reports regarding income and dependents. In fact, several recent British reports suggest that one of the most obnoxious aspects of the means test for unemployment assistance has been the routine home investigation which implies that applicants' statements, by and large, are not to be trusted and must, therefore, be verified by home visits. The necessity of careful checking through home visits of statements which can be verified in no other way or about which there is reason for some doubt is freely admitted. What appears to be most resented is the implication that statements of applicants for public assistance services as a class are so untrustworthy as to require routine double checking whereas comparable statements (such as those relating to family composition and income) made to various governmental agencies by other classes of people are not normally viewed with the same suspicion.

In its attempts to improve the quality of investigations the federal WPA has resorted to a number of devices (already briefly mentioned) including participation in the cost of making investigations and the requirement that co-operating agencies negotiate agreements outlining methods they expect to follow in making determinations of eligibility.

Agreements in many states prescribe that referrals should be made only after interviews with applicants in their own homes. In Ohio, for example, it was ruled (in September, 1939) that "The referral agency will refer persons in need after investigation which shall include a home visit and recommend the removal of such persons when it becomes evident that they are no longer eligible for employment, according to standards of the Work Projects Administration."—Ohio WPA, Rules and Regulations Governing Employment Based on Operating Procedure No. E-9. Columbus, Part II, sec. 5, September 6, 1939.

370
Eligibility

In some areas though the policy of making home visits has long been urged by the WPA, it is still far from being realized.

Less ambitious agreements (like that reached in Missouri early in 1940) specify that home visits and visits to other possible sources of information regarding a worker’s eligibility shall be made only “when necessary.” This emphasis upon home visits is in sharp contrast to the WPA’s own normal procedure in making reviews of eligibility in certain areas where decisions have been based almost exclusively upon interviews held with workers “on the job.”

Going beyond minimum standards referral agencies are expected to maintain, the Wisconsin State Department of Public Welfare in September, 1939, declared that local referral agencies “must be so organized that applicants may apply without embarrassment and receive prompt and courteous attention.”

Despite efforts of the WPA to safeguard standards of investigation and to secure the appointment by state and local agencies of adequate personnel, the controls established in many states have never been particularly effective. Among numerous evidences of the failure of relief agencies to maintain good standards of investigation, none has proved more exasperating than delays involved in securing any kind of action on applications. In some areas applicants have had to wait from two to six or more weeks—and in some instances from two to six months!—before their eligibility was investigated and a decision given.

Worse still has been the absolute refusal of relief agencies to investigate new applications under any circumstances. When relief agencies take this extreme position they usually attribute it to the fact that they have already certified far more workers than the WPA has any prospect of employing. In Massachusetts, in 1939, however, it was the state WPA administrator himself who urged that certifications be halted—on the ground that it would

---

1 A description of methods used in one of these reviews is conveniently available in U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 629 ff.
3 In August, 1939, when Governor Townsend of Indiana appointed a new commission to co-operate in the selection of workers to be employed by the WPA, 60,000 certifications and reinvestigations were pending. Distress among unemployed workers was widespread. It was not until five months later (and after increasing from 85 to 200 the number of visitors employed) that the 60,000 investigations were completed.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

be "unfair" to applicants to lead them to think they might soon be employed whereas in fact almost no assignments were being made. In Illinois, too, certifications were said to have been temporarily discontinued at the recommendation of WPA officials.

Federal policy (such as that prescribed in 1939) has frequently emphasized the importance of not discontinuing certification even though assignments at any given time might not appear to warrant continuance of the process. Elaborating upon this ruling a statement of policy made in Minnesota declared: "By not certifying eligible persons even when quotas are filled or are being reduced, the counties penalize themselves as well as eligible persons, as the WPA estimates its need for quota to a large extent on the basis of its Awaiting Assignment File." 1

Even after this pronouncement was made, relief agencies in different parts of the country continued to adopt various devices to protect themselves against undue inroads upon their time and activities by requests for investigations for the WPA. Noteworthy among these was a clause written into an agreement negotiated with the North Carolina Board of Charities and Public Welfare in October, 1939, specifying:

That the referral agency will consume approximately 30% of the working time of its staff on all aspects of the referral service. This will include time spent in the first interview, the investigation, including calls on references, preparation of the record and of the referral, contacts with the client and with the public on any and all aspects of WPA referrals.2

Costs of Investigations

Just as the WPA has frequently evinced dissatisfaction with the performance of co-operating relief agencies in many areas, so also have many relief agencies expressed displeasure over burdens they have had to assume in conjunction with the selection of WPA workers. Chief among the complaints of relief officials are (a) that demands made upon them from time to time by the WPA with little or no forewarning 3 frequently upset what little routine and order they manage to work into their operations which, by

3 As employment quotas are suddenly increased and new workers must be certified or as reinvestigations must be made of batches of workers suddenly released for one reason or another.
Eligibility

their very nature, are highly seasonal; (b) that the WPA has (by threatening to "close certifications" or, as in the earliest stages of the program, to employ needy workers not actually granted relief) sometimes "high pressured" them into accepting responsibilities they are reluctant to assume; (c) that services rendered in connection with the WPA program impose upon them costs they should not be asked to bear—or at least, not to bear alone.

When it is recalled that the number of persons employed on WPA projects in some states has amounted to a hundred thousand or more and that costs of investigations frequently have been estimated at anywhere from $2.00 to $4.00 each (and reinvestigations at $1.25 to $3.00), depending upon completeness and by whom they were made, it may be seen that the total financial burden is considerable.\(^1\) When Colonel Harrington in 1939 asked Congress to foot part of the bill for investigations and reviews of eligibility, he estimated the total cost of these functions during the ensuing year at 10 million dollars. In 1941 federal officials estimated that (during the fiscal year 1942 when WPA employment levels were expected to be materially below those of 1939) the extra cost of investigation incurred in the course of referring applicants for WPA employment would be 10 million dollars. Of this amount it was estimated that 2.5 million dollars might be needed for reinvestigating and referring for continued employment workers already employed.

Costs of the semi-annual reviews of eligibility made in 1940 were estimated at six million dollars. Similar reviews covering the same number of workers in 1941, according to official estimates, might cost somewhat less (5.75 million dollars) because of experience already gained. A single annual review, it was thought, might cost only 3.75 million dollars.

Costs and burdens imposed upon specific relief agencies have been revealed time and again in reports of their activities. In New York City the unit within the Department of Welfare engaged in investigating and certifying workers to WPA jobs was reported in 1939 to consist of 80 employes and to cost over $10,000 per month.

\(^1\) Costs vary greatly from time to time and place to place. Colonel Harrington in 1939 told a House Committee that 2,000 reinvestigations made in New York City had cost approximately $9.00 each.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In North Carolina in 1938, 20 counties reported that each referral to the WPA required an average of six hours' time on the part of employes of relief and welfare agencies, five of these six hours being consumed in investigatory work and one in clerical work. Referrals made in July, 1938, were estimated to have consumed 32,064 hours of the time of welfare workers in addition to that devoted to investigation and action on applications which were not accepted. The average cost per referral was reported to have been about $4.20, the total cost to local welfare departments in July, 1938, amounting to over $22,000, exclusive of costs to the state department and its field staff.

From Florida in 1940 it was reported that the cost of original certifications alone was approximately $60,000 a year.

Work done in connection with the WPA program frequently has been said to consume "a heavy percentage," "a large proportion," or "a significant portion" of the work of various relief and public welfare agencies. In some areas this work has been said to take as much as 20 to 50 per cent of the working time of the administrative personnel. From other areas it has been reported that investigations for the WPA consumed so many work hours that other responsibilities of relief agencies were neglected or could be met only through long hours of overtime. This inability to give to certain responsibilities the time necessary to their proper handling has been thought to increase relief costs because of failure to weed out ineligible recipients.

In justification of imposing costs of investigation and certification upon relief agencies, WPA officials frequently have held that these costs ultimately result in savings since, by spending a few dollars for an investigation and certification, they may avoid the necessity of granting an applicant relief. This argument carries little weight, however, in those many areas where no relief is available to employable persons or where need for WPA employment is measured by a more liberal standard than is need for relief. In


2 See, for example, Iowa Emergency Relief Administration, Iowa Relief Statistics, February, 1937, p. 3; and Baltimore Sun, July 15, 1939.
Eligibility

these same areas the second consideration urged in support of WPA policy—namely, that the work involved is but little more than the agencies would have to do in any event—also lacks validity. Even where investigations and certifications are restricted to persons already known to relief agencies, the extra cost is not inconsiderable.

In criticism of the present division of the cost of sifting out eligible from ineligible applicants for WPA jobs it has, as noted already,¹ been urged that this division not only clouds the true cost of administering the WPA program but imposes upon relief agencies a dual handicap since the expenditures of agencies for “administration” are frequently computed as a ratio to their expenditures for relief.

To mollify critics and, what was usually more important, to induce relief authorities to undertake the task of making investigations for the WPA rather than to compel the WPA to do the job itself, arrangements were made to utilize for this purpose balances remaining from FERA funds previously granted to the states. Another device has been to “lend” WPA personnel for longer or shorter periods of time to help relief agencies keep abreast of the work involved in making investigations, referrals or certifications.

So serious had relationships between the WPA and relief agencies grown by 1940 that Colonel Harrington asked Congress to authorize the WPA to share the cost of investigating and certifying applications for WPA employment. He suggested that the federal government pay one-third of these costs, but not to exceed five million dollars, provided cooperating agencies met prescribed standards of operation.² Participation of this kind, he declared, would also give the WPA more effective control over

¹ See chap. 4.
² The requirements suggested by Colonel Harrington were as follows:

“(1) The assurance of adequate State-wide service in determining the need and eligibility of persons who apply for project employment.
(2) The maintenance of a reasonably uniform level of certification standards throughout the country, with such variations as may be necessary to meet local differences in costs and standards of living.
(3) The simplification and acceleration of the procedures for investigating the need of persons, referring them to the Work Projects Administration, and certifying them as eligible for employment.”

—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 443.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

the agencies co-operating in the selection of workers—the very heart of the WPA program. Although some progress had been made in the past, there still remained, he said, "great room for improvement." This recommendation (which, incidentally, was not wholly unprecedented) failed of acceptance by Congress.

Not long after the defeat of this proposal, federal officials began work on another proposition which would permit the Social Security Board to reimburse state and local agencies for part of the cost of their service in selecting youths for NYA and CCC benefits and certifying families for surplus commodities, as well as for selecting workers for WPA employment.

The importance of some such step toward sharing costs of this kind has been emphasized by Jane Perry Clark. While pointing out the advantages to the federal government of utilizing state organization and personnel Professor Clark has made clear the necessity for underpinning with federal funds co-operation given by the states.

Cooperation [she writes] is likely to exist in name only if the help given is costly either in time or in equipment and no provision is made for sharing costs. Furthermore, cooperation is likely to develop feelings of obligation which may foster far-reaching political attachments, causing the thread of a governmental program to become lost in the maze of party practice. Payment to the states by the federal government and vice versa for work done is a sine qua non in all but the most temporary and emergency situations. Only by division of costs can already burdened executives be prevented from becoming more harassed by additional responsibilities without additional personnel, and by an increased load of political obligations.

To many observers even a sharing by the federal government of costs of investigating and certifying applications for WPA employment does not go far enough. They want the WPA itself to do the job. Among these may be mentioned Representative Jerry Voorhis and a number of senators. Another staunch supporter of

1 Ibid., p. 481.
2 When the Works Program first got under way certifications were made by state emergency relief administrations which, of course, received varying proportions of their funds from the federal government. Not long after the federal government discontinued these grants to states high federal officials were said to have approved the idea that investigations should be made by relief and welfare agencies and that payment of extra administrative costs involved should be met from WPA funds.
3 Up to this writing, no formal congressional action has been take on this proposal.
Eligibility

This view has been Monsignor John O'Grady, secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, who, in 1939, testified before a House Committee that after visiting "a hundred counties in four states" he was convinced that the "W.P.A. ought to have its own certification. I think that is all-important." To this Representative Woodrum replied that the WPA had been prevented from making certifications "because of the fact that localities wanted to do their own certifying because they felt they were better acquainted with the needs of the local people than some bureau in Washington."

"I do not believe it is sound," replied Monsignor O'Grady, adding, "... in local relief you have had politics from time immemorial, and favoritism, and you still have it in most of the counties I have visited."

The American Association of Social Workers, too, has consistently urged that the WPA rather than relief agencies take over responsibility for selecting its own workers. Better still, according to the Association's platform, would be the selection of such workers by public employment offices.

Representatives of veterans' organizations repeatedly have complained about treatment accorded their members by relief and welfare agencies and have urged that Congress prescribe that veterans, at least, should be certified by the WPA itself. This proposition was relatively modest compared with an earlier request that Congress permit "any duly constituted governmental agency, or ... any charitable, service, veteran, or patriotic organization" to certify veterans as in need and eligible for WPA employment. This suggestion grew out of the reported refusal of relief agencies to disregard receipt of adjusted service bonds in determining veterans' need for WPA employment.

Early disaffection with certification procedures was voiced by the American Federation of Labor when, in 1936, in its 56th Annual Convention it unanimously recommended to Harry Hopkins, administrator of the WPA, "that the system of administering work relief be revised to provide for representation of labor

3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, pp. 1208-1209.

377
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

unions locally organized on all boards determining eligibility for public relief." ¹

APPEALS FROM DECISIONS MADE BY CO-OPERATING AGENCIES WITH RESPECT TO NEED

Because applicants for WPA jobs cannot, as a rule, apply directly to the WPA, failure or refusal of co-operating relief agencies to refer them to the WPA automatically deprives them of possible employment. Thus, though workers may be denied their true rights as defined in federal law and policy, they have no effective method of appeal. In a few isolated instances where established machinery for appeals has been available to persons applying for general relief this same machinery has also been available to persons applying for WPA jobs. Under such circumstances appeals with respect to eligibility for WPA employment are not, of course, made to federal officials or agencies. Neither are they granted because federal legislation or the WPA required it, but rather in spite of the fact that they did not. This lack is all the more noteworthy in view of the lengths to which the Social Security Act (and the Social Security Board in effectuating that act) have gone to assure “fair hearings” to persons who feel they have not been given all the benefits to which they are entitled under the special assistance programs.

Veterans, admitting that they were concerned primarily with how federal policies affected them, have repeatedly proposed that a series of local, state, and federal boards be established to hear appeals by workers who thought they had been denied the consideration due them. Although some earlier proposals provided only for appeals made by workers who were entitled to veteran preference, more recent recommendations have applied to appeals

¹ This recommendation grew out of and was accompanied by a “vigorous” protest against an action of the director of public welfare in Weld County, Colorado, a beet-sugar-growing county. This official, according to the report, issued a statement to beet laborers in his county reminding them that the county welfare board was responsible for “determining who shall go on WPA in the future.” To this he added, “You may rest assured no one will be considered unless their case is worthy. When you must have relief, bring your contract and a statement from your farmer showing how much he paid you both for beets and other labor and whether or not he thinks you should be considered a relief responsibility of Weld County.”—American Federation of Labor, Report of the Proceedings of the Fifty-sixth Annual Convention. Washington, 1936, pp. 645-646.
Eligibility

by any workers who might think themselves aggrieved.\(^1\) Congress has turned a deaf ear to propositions of this kind, however. Thus, workers barred from WPA jobs by the action (or inaction) of co-operating relief agencies continue to have no effective appeal from their decisions.\(^2\)

\(^1\) See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1941, p. 953.

\(^2\) Court action is, of course, open to such workers since the various ERA acts have made it an actionable offense to deprive or threaten to deprive persons of benefits to which they were entitled under these acts. Discussion of this issue is included in chap. II.
CHAPTER XV
ELIGIBILITY: MEASURING NEED

Federal policy with respect to standards for determining need, as defined by Congress, has been stated only in the broadest terms. Regulations issued by the WPA from time to time have defined need somewhat more in detail. Those issued in July, 1939, for example, prescribed that "need shall be said to exist where the resources of a family or unattached individual are insufficient to provide a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health." Another statement of policy issued in February of the same year, when the needs of all project workers were reviewed, was that:

No one should have his eligibility cancelled whose income from other than WPA sources is insufficient to assure him a subsistence compatible with decency and health, and no one shall be removed from WPA employment as ineligible as to need who in the absence of such employment would have to seek assistance from a public relief agency.

Within limits as broad as these, obviously, almost anything can (and does) happen. The range of possibilities was once stated "conservatively" by Colonel Harrington who declared that a person in one community might be regarded as in need if his monthly income fell below $25, whereas in another community he might not be regarded as in need unless he had no income at all and was on the verge of going into the fields to starve to death.

The degree of influence exercised by the WPA to make sure that standards established by responsible state or local certifying agencies are neither unduly harsh and restrictive nor too liberal and flexible, has increased with the passage of the years. Earlier reluctance on the part of the WPA to exert more control over standards of need, as well as over other phases of the process of

---

1 Congress has specified only that WPA employment shall be made available to "needy persons" or to "persons in need." In a few instances Congress has specified that they must be "in actual need." In 1940 Colonel Harrington suggested that Congress make employment available to persons "in need of employment." He did not specify, however, how such a standard might differ from that already prescribed.
2 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 9, July 31, 1939. This followed almost verbatim a standard prescribed in July, 1938.—WPA Administrative Order No. 65.
Eligibility

selecting workers, arose in part from the desire of WPA officials to operate a work program in which the less said about relief and standards of need the better. Furthermore, since the army of those clamoring for WPA employment so greatly exceeded the number of jobs that could be provided, it appeared to some officials that nice distinctions and refined definitions were of little value since it made no great difference which workers, from the vast reservoir of available persons, were selected for employment. Especially in the South, WPA and relief officials have said that so large a proportion of the population was in really dire straits that carefully defined standards were superfluous. "Almost anyone we could hire," one southern WPA official once told the writer, "would need the work."

Under policies prescribed from time to time, standards of need used by agencies in making investigations for and referrals to the WPA have been subject to the approval of state and regional WPA officials.

Need Considered on a Family Basis

Regulations established to control the certification of workers usually make it clear that need is to be computed on a family basis, except in the case of unattached individuals living alone. This is in part due to the fact that the whole WPA program is on a family basis, with employment restricted to one job per family. Moreover, since the WPA is a relief program, it naturally follows the accepted tradition of relief, which is computed on a family basis. This practice has been bitterly condemned as a throwback to outmoded and repressive concepts of family responsibility.

There has, however, been a difference. The generally prevailing practice in determining eligibility for WPA employment has been to disregard the financial aid that might be given a needy person by even a responsible relative unless he was in the same

---


2 See chap. 13.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

household. Furthermore, WPA policy has repeatedly placed great emphasis upon considering separately the needs of the various family units even though they may be living together as one household.

Though these practices may leave much to be desired they represent considerable advance over household needs tests which have been in effect in some areas in this country (as in Baltimore) and which in Great Britain were so violently opposed that it was recently found necessary to modify them and establish in their stead policies which correspond closely to those the WPA has attempted to put into effect.

The Security Wage as a Measure of Need

Perhaps the simplest measure of need for WPA employment has been the security wage itself. Especially during the earlier years of the WPA program, families whose incomes and resources fell below the monthly security wage were frequently regarded as ipso facto in need of WPA jobs. The wage rate by which need was measured was usually the lowest paid in the county in which an applicant lived. Exceptions to this practice were occasionally

There have, however, been important exceptions to the general policies prescribed. These have occurred primarily in areas where workers must actually qualify for if not receive relief before they can be given WPA employment. Thus, in Pennsylvania unless applicants are in need, notwithstanding contributions of prescribed amounts from responsible relatives to their needy kin, they could not be assigned to WPA jobs. Under a schedule prescribed in 1941 the head of a family of four would be expected to contribute to a needy relative $8.00 a month if his monthly income was from $145 to $154. If his income was from $195 to $204 he would be expected to contribute $100; if his income ranged from $285 to $294 he would be expected to pay $180. Thus, if a person's needy relative or relatives needed as much as these expected contributions, a responsible relative whose income fell in the limits specified above might have to contribute from about 6 to very nearly 50 per cent of this income to help his needy kin!

The result of such practices, it is reported, "is to force non-responsible relatives and even non-relatives to assume the full burden of support for individuals and families whom they have, in many instances, out of sheer kindness, taken into their homes, supposedly for temporary periods."—Baltimore Department of Public Welfare, Fourth Annual Report, 1938, p. 22.

See, for example, Burns, Eveline M., British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938. Social Science Research Council, Washington, 1941, pp. 238-252.

See also, Great Britain Assistance Board, Determination of Needs Bill, Memorandum presented to Parliament by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1941.

For detailed discussion of security wage rates see chap. 6.

In July, 1938, for example, the administrator of the WPA in New Jersey ruled that persons might be regarded as in need of WPA employment if their monthly income was less than the lowest security wage paid by the WPA.
Eligibility

made (as in Virginia and North and South Carolina) in the case of "very large families." When the lowest WPA wage was taken as the standard, an applicant whose income exceeded this limit was ordinarily regarded as ineligible for employment even though he might have been entitled to a higher rate of pay if he had been hired. Sometimes, however, applicants were regarded as in need and eligible for assignment if their incomes were less than the monthly wages they themselves might earn if assigned to WPA jobs.

Regardless of which of these measures was used in determining need for initial employment, the yardstick for measuring need for continued employment of workers already employed was usually the wage they were currently receiving.

Use of the security wage as the measure of need has usually been a liberalizing device, permitting the employment of many indubitably needy persons who could not have secured WPA jobs if eligibility for relief in those jurisdictions had been the criterion demanded.

Though used much more widely during the earlier years of the WPA program, 1941 saw an interesting recrudescence of the use of the security wage as a measure of need when Congress prescribed that veterans, unmarried widows of veterans, and wives of unemployable veterans should be regarded as in need unless their income was "approximately" what they might earn if employed by the WPA. Regulations issued by the WPA in conformity with this provision prescribed that it should be assumed that applicants covered by the provision, if employed, would be employed at the higher grade of unskilled work. Thus, in practice, the measure of need for veterans and others entitled to veteran preference is the next to the lowest rate paid by the WPA.

In instances where veteran preference was accorded the wife of an unemployable veteran, it was prescribed that need should be presumed to exist if the total combined monthly income of the veteran and his wife fell below the stipulated amount.

Policies prescribed by the WPA to carry out the law specified clearly that income alone was to be taken into account. Other resources such as savings, real or personal property owned, life insurance, or home-grown foods were not to be considered in any way. However, the WPA also ruled that "resources which are in cash or readily convertible into cash and which are appreciable in amount shall be considered."—WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.3.016, [January, 1942].

This ruling has been interpreted in at least two states—Illinois and Michigan—to mean that resources in excess of $1,000, if readily convertible into cash, shall be taken into account in determining the need of applicants entitled to the preferential consideration accorded veterans.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

When Congress in 1942 again took up discussion of WPA legislation, leaders of veterans' organizations asked that the new law include a provision specifying that applicants to be given veteran preference be considered to be in need if their income fell below what they could earn if they were "suitably" employed on a WPA job. Thus, the standard of need would have varied depending upon whether a worker could qualify for unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled, or professional and technical work. This policy change was not, however, accepted by Congress.

When new WPA legislation was being discussed in 1942 veterans' organizations asked Congress to require that, in the determination of the need of veterans, income "derived from any governmental agency (such as compensation for a service connected disability, disability allowance, pension, ... or insurance benefits) shall not be considered in determining ... monthly income."  

The principle of using the security wage (rather than the variety of standards in effect in various parts of the country) as a measure for determining need has commended itself to various groups and individuals as desirable not only for veterans but for any workers needing WPA employment. In fact, when in 1939 Senator Murray presented an amendment to eliminate the means test for WPA jobs, he included a provision giving preference in employment to workers whose incomes fell below the wage they might earn if employed.

Family Budgets as Measures of Need

Increasingly during recent years, WPA officials have emphasized the importance of measuring family resources and incomes against "family budgets." These are constructed so as to show the needs of families of various sizes and, therefore, provide a more delicate and flexible scale than the security wage. Budgets used by relief authorities in determining need in relation to WPA jobs must have the prior approval of WPA officials.

The simplest form of budgetary standard in use consists of a schedule of flat sums thought necessary to maintain families of various sizes. Possession of income or assets in excess of specified

Eligibility

amounts disqualifies a family for certification to WPA.\(^1\) Somewhat more elaborate budgets specify for families of various sizes amounts thought necessary for specified essential items such as food, milk, special diets, ice, clothing, shelter (including for home owners an allowance for taxes, interest, and repairs), fuel, lighting, incidental household expenses, transportation, and medical care, not otherwise available to a family.\(^2\) Instead of prescribing actual amounts for each permissible item, budgets sometimes prescribe maximum amounts that may not be exceeded but need not be used in assessing need. Whether specified in detail or in general terms, specific amounts allowable for various budgeted items are subject to approval by WPA officials. Allowances for prescribed items, if specified, may apply to an entire state\(^3\) or, different amounts may be prescribed for different cities or counties.\(^4\)

\(^1\) One such schedule promulgated by the WPA in New Jersey in 1939 prescribed for families of two, $50 a month, for families of four, $70, and for families of ten, $140. Budgets of this type have also been used in Massachusetts, Maryland, and New Mexico.

\(^2\) While in some states essential items are listed in no greater detail than this, the practice in other areas (as in Indiana and, for a time, in Ohio) has been to specify the number of garments of various kinds and the quantities of different types of food needed by various members of the family depending on their age and sex. When this is done, these lists are usually priced locally and the sum of all the prices of the several permissible items used as the measure of need in that area. The budget used in Indiana, in 1940, to determine need for WPA employment was of this type. It prescribed in detail the quantities of various kinds of food, clothes, and fuel needed by families of different size. Prices for the food and fuel items were then collected locally while clothing allowances were based on mail-order prices of the articles specified. When added together these represented the amounts allowable for these budget items. Estimates for shelter allowances were based on an analysis of 70,000 actual rents. Allowances for gas and electricity and water were “as paid,” but could not exceed prescribed maxima. Specific amounts were prescribed for household supplies. One of the biggest budgets in effect in Indiana in October, 1940, allowed for a family of four $56.25 a month plus allowable provision for medical care, transportation, insurance, and limited indebtedness for needed articles.

\(^3\) A budget of this type has been used in Ohio. For a family of four it prescribed (in 1939) a budget standard of $51.80 and, in addition, necessary provision for a number of supplementary items. Of the $51.80, $30.40 was for food, $11.85 for clothing, $3.50 for lunches, $1.75 for household supplies, $8.50 for gas, and $1.80 for light. In addition, the family of four, living in furnished rooms, might have been allowed $18 a month for rent. If living in unfurnished quarters, full rent was allowable up to a maximum of $30 a month. Provision for carfare and for fuel for heating might also be made as needed. A “reasonable” amount of insurance, not to exceed $500 on the head or heads of the family or weekly payments of 10 or 15 cents a week for children was also allowable. Allowance for back debts, when contracted for “household items necessary for the adequate living arrangements of the family and for which no other provision can be made” was also permissible. In no instance, however, were allowances for back debts supposed to exceed $2.00 per month. —Ohio WPA, Rules and Regulations Governing Employment Based on Operating Procedure No. E-9. Columbus, Part II, sec. 17, pp. 1-4 and Form E 214-F, September 6, 1939.

\(^4\) As has been done in Michigan and Missouri.
Budgets sometimes limit (within prescribed maxima, as a rule) allowances for certain items, such as rent, light and heat, to the actual cost of these items to the family in question. This practice frequently results in disqualifying some persons (such as Negroes in the South and Spanish-Americans and Mexican-Americans in the West and Southwest who are obliged to live in low-rent districts) when with the same income they would be certified as in need if they paid a higher rental.

According to budget standards in effect in New York City in 1938, a family of four (including an unemployed man, a wife, a boy aged thirteen, and a girl of nine) might be regarded as in need of relief (and, therefore, of WPA employment) if its resources for food, gas for cooking, light, rent, and household supplies fell below $61.10 a month. This standard allowed $29.70 for food, $27.50 for rent of a multiple dwelling with central heat and a private toilet, $1.70 (or, perhaps, more depending upon where the worker lived) for gas for cooking, $1.40 for light, and 80 cents for household supplies. Although relief grants in New York City are normally restricted to these basic items, additional allowances may be made as needed for special diets, codliver oil, clothing, shoe repairs, medical and nursing care, medication and sick room supplies, medical appliances, eyeglasses, abdominal supports, corsets and orthopedic shoes, carfares to clinics, household furniture replacements, or dental care.

Standards of need in New York City, as prescribed by relief authorities, might also be liberalized if the father of this hypothetical family were employed, for he might then be allowed a working allowance of $4.80 a month, an extra 60 cents a month for food and, having some income, his maximum monthly allowance for rent might be increased by $5.00. He would also be allowed carfare to and from work and 15 cents a day for lunches.

Budget standards prescribed in Illinois late in 1939 established as the measure of need for a family of four (a man, woman, boy of thirteen, and girl of nine) a monthly amount of $51.15 for food, clothing, gas, electricity, water, household incidentals, and insurance in addition to what it needed for “adequate shelter,” special diets prescribed by a physician, fuel for heating, ice, medical care, and transportation if needed by working members of the family, children attending school, or any member of the family needing clinical care.
Eligibility

Even in Mississippi, with its traditionally low standards of living and its notoriously low relief standards, a family of four (in 1941) was considered as being in need of WPA employment if its resources fell below $75.21 a month.¹

Widely as WPA budgets vary in character, many have in common one striking trait. They assess family needs at levels which are far in excess of what families can provide for themselves if they are wholly dependent upon security wages. In Mississippi, for example, where families of four were thought (in 1941) to need at least $75 a month, the security wage ranged from only $31.20 to a maximum of $75.40 a month.

A second characteristic that many budgets used in measuring eligibility for WPA employment have in common is that they gauge need by much more liberal standards than are used in the same jurisdictions in determining eligibility for relief.

Differences Between Standards of Need for Relief and for WPA Employment

In Boston, early in 1941, for example, standards of need for WPA employment were estimated to be approximately 50 per cent higher than those used in measuring need for relief. To illustrate, a Boston family of three having an income of more than $8.63 a week would not have been regarded as in need of relief, but could have been certified as in need of a WPA job so long as its income did not exceed approximately $12 a week. In Cleveland, at about the same time, the margin was estimated at approximately 10 per cent.

In Indianapolis in 1941, when a family of four having an income of less than $50 a month might easily qualify for WPA employment, relief standards then in effect would have allowed it only $3.00 a week for food (with extra provision for milk prescribed by a physician). Clothing might have been provided (in kind) if desperately needed. Provision for shelter was made for only about 10 per cent of the families given aid.

¹ Of this amount $29.51 was for food; $18.75 for shelter; $12 for clothing; $5.00 for fuel; $2.00 for electricity; $2.20 for household supplies; $1.50 for church, recreation, and education; $2.00 (if necessary) for payment of debt for essential household equipment; $1.00 for medical care; and $1.25 for personal incidentals. In addition, allowance might be made for water, expenditures necessary to permit children to attend school, and transportation of working members of the family contributing to its support.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Though public officials in some areas tend to be apologetic about such dual standards, formal statements of policy have frequently made no bones about them. A Georgia regulation of 1938, for example, prescribed that the WPA would accept certifications of need "based on the minimum standard budget prepared by the State Department of Public Welfare" regardless of whether county departments of public welfare were able "to make grants to . . . families for the full amount of the deficiency shown in the budget. . . ." 1

Even in Wisconsin, with its relatively more adequate welfare programs, a policy established early in the history of the WPA provided that "because of the wide variation in local relief standards," need of relief for purposes of certification for WPA employment was to be determined in accordance with a state standard which might be higher than that used locally "in determining eligibility for relief or in making relief grants." 2

In some states where it has been specifically ruled that need for relief and need for WPA employment shall be measured by the same yardstick, it has not always followed that relief given to those who could qualify for it under this single standard was computed in accordance with that standard. In Chicago, for example, even when a single standard was presumed to be in effect, relief granted (after determination of need by the single standard) has sometimes approximated only 65 or 80 per cent of the amount recipients were entitled to by that standard.


2 For another example of policies of this type, see Virginia Department of Public Welfare, Manual of Procedure. Richmond, chap. 9, p. 94, n.d.

Of these dual standards Benjamin Glassberg, superintendent of the Department of Out-Door Relief, Milwaukee, wrote in 1938: "The budget applied in the case of applications for certification to W. P. A. is somewhat more liberal than that applied to families receiving relief, the difference being that an allowance for payments of interest on mortgages and taxes is included in the budgets of the former, but excluded in the case of the latter."—Across the Desk of a Relief Administrator. American Public Welfare Association, Chicago, 1938, p. 45.

Eligibility

Again, although need for WPA employment and for relief may be measured by the same standard, further modifications of policy frequently result in the virtual negation of this single standard. In Illinois, for example, even though a single standard was supposed to be in effect, a family might qualify for relief if its resources fell short, by as little as 10 per cent, of its needs. The same family might be declared ineligible for WPA employment on the other hand unless its resources fell short of its needs by at least 40 or 50 per cent.¹

One effect of using “double standards” for the measurement of need for relief and for WPA employment, respectively, is that when WPA employment increases, relief rolls often do not show a shrinkage commensurate with the WPA increase since people who may qualify for the WPA jobs may not necessarily be regarded as needy enough to be eligible for relief. Conversely, when quotas are cut and WPA workers discharged, not all of them are found sufficiently destitute to go back on to the relief rolls. Critics of the WPA program pounce upon both of these facts as evidence that the WPA employs workers who are not really in need. The real explanation, however, is that “need”—admittedly a variable concept—is being measured in two different ways.

Considerable attention was paid to the existence of these dual standards when Senator Lodge of Massachusetts read before a Senate Committee a letter in which an official of “quite a large city in Massachusetts” complained that “twenty-five percent of the persons on W.P.A. today would not apply for or be eligible for public welfare relief if W.P.A. should cease to function.” Leaping to the defense of the higher WPA standards, Harry Hopkins told the Committee: “That letter is merely a reflection on the way the relief office is administered in that city. No doubt it is true. Probably in other cases the relief standards are inadequate. We do not like to have people crawl on their hands and knees.”²

Success in getting local and state authorities to liberalize standards of need when applying them to WPA employment have been

¹ This policy of limiting WPA employment to those in greatest need is further discussed in the succeeding chapter.
² U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 2, p. 1368.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

a source of keen satisfaction to state, regional, and federal WPA officials. It has also been said that state relief authorities have welcomed these higher standards as aids to the improvement of local standards for relief.

Though dual standards have prevailed in many areas, there have been others in which need for WPA jobs and that for relief were gauged by the same criteria. This has been particularly true, of course, in states having comparatively decent general relief programs and in those where only relief recipients may be certified to WPA.

Flexibility of Budget Standards

Budget standards used in determining need for WPA employment are no more inflexible than those of most relief agencies. Adjustments have sometimes been made to raise budgetary limitations in the case of white-collar, professional, and technical workers, or others with relatively high living standards.

Conversely, prescribed budgets have sometimes been lowered when applied to persons having comparatively low living standards. In many parts of the South, for example, and in spite of the opposition exerted by the WPA against the practice, Negro workers are disqualified for WPA employment at income levels far below those which would still permit white workers to be certified. In some instances allowances for food for Negro families have been 25 per cent below those for white families.

A typical statement of the WPA's position on this issue is that released in Mississippi, which declared: "In some racial groups traditionally low earnings may have necessitated adjustments through inadequate diet. Discrimination against such groups or individuals on the basis of established habits is not an acceptable interpretation of flexibility. Minimum requirements for health protection and proper growth should always be met."¹ Budget "adjustments," as suggested already, have been applied not only to Negroes but also to other groups having comparatively low living standards. In the West and Southwest Spanish-Americans and Mexican-Americans have sometimes felt victimized in this way.

Standards of need frequently are subject to modification as

Eligibility

WPA employment levels are raised or lowered, requiring more stringent tests of need as jobs become scarcer and permitting certification according to relatively liberal standards when jobs are comparatively plentiful.

Further adjustments frequently made in measures of need have resulted in applying to workers already employed by the WPA more liberal standards than are applied to workers not yet employed. Sometimes this is due to the fact that the agency conducting reviews of eligibility is not the same as that making original investigations of need and makes these reviews in accordance with higher budget standards than those used in the first instance. Sometimes, however, standards of measuring the need of workers already employed are liberalized even though there is no split jurisdiction. In these instances liberalization has usually been due to allowing workers to retain more assets (such as savings and small insurance policies) than were permissible in the case of applicants for jobs.

In view of all that has been said on Capitol Hill from time to time, about how “local people know best who should be employed by the WPA” and in view, too, of the refusal of Congress to appropriate funds to help state and local relief agencies do a better job of investigating applications for WPA employment, it is remarkable that the House Committee on Appropriations in 1939 reported not only that “the determination of what constitutes ‘need’ has so varied a meaning in the different parts of the country” that a periodic review “by a Federal agency” would

---

1 A WPA report from Nebraska (in 1936) declared: “More careful attention was given to the question of eligibility for certification during this month than previously, since the urgent demand for additional certified persons was past.”—Memo

2 One such liberalization of standards occurred in up-state New York in 1941, and though condemned by certain critics, was defended on the ground that since those in greatest need had been provided for, the number of jobs available made it possible “to take care of needy persons” for whom it had not been possible to provide jobs while there were other persons in greater relative need. A Washington State ruling (of 1936) prescribed that “Until the WPA quota for the state is increased . . . families who have income or its equivalent to meet the first four items in the budget, that is, housing, food, light and water, and fuel, will not be deemed eligible for immediate certification. Where the family income or resources is less than enough to meet the first four items they may be certified immediately for consideration for WPA work.”—Washington State Department of Public Welfare, Bulletin E-R-245. Olympia, October 20, 1936.

3 The opposite has been true, however, in a few isolated instances where WPA officials have had difficulty in getting reviews made in accordance with as liberal standards as those governing administration of relief.

4 This issue is discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

391
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

have a salutary effect, but also that the "disparity in the methods of determining and investigating need by the various local certifying agencies should be studied by the Work Projects Administration from the standpoint of endeavoring to bring about strict and uniform procedure to be followed in arriving at a conclusion as to needs and eligibility for certification." Thus, with respect to the selection of workers for employment (as in the wages paid for work done), it appears that Congress is becoming increasingly interested in national uniformity. Still, for reasons already noted, both Congress and the administration have been opposed to "going the whole hog" on this issue and requiring the WPA to assume complete responsibility for the selection of those to be given employment—a step which (as already noted) has frequently been urged by labor organizations, various congressional leaders, and other organizations including the American Association of Social Workers.

**TREATMENT OF INCOME**

In determining need in accordance with a prescribed budget, whatever it may be, it is necessary to deduct from the standard applicable to a given family whatever it may possess in the way of income, home-grown food, or other available assets.

In some areas families are said to be in need if their income falls below their budgeted needs by any margin, however slight. This practice, however, has not been universal. Sometimes it has been prescribed, as in New York City and Wisconsin, that a family's income must fall below its budget needs by a specified amount, or by a fixed proportion of its allowable budget standard.

---

2 This was the policy prescribed in a Florida regulation which declared "need . . . exists where income of the economic unit is less than 100% of the budget needs. . . ."
3 In New York City this amount normally is $2.50 for a half month. In New Jersey it has ranged from $5.00 to $10 a month. In Wisconsin in 1939 it was ruled that "a deficiency of less than $10.00" would not "ordinarily" be considered as establishing need for WPA employment unless this represented "only a temporary situation, and the income . . . [was] usually less." Conversely, it was ruled that income of approximately $10 in excess of budget needs should also be "given careful consideration."—Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration. Madison, sec. 5, p. 508, October 30, 1939.
4 This policy has been followed in Illinois where families whose incomes were more than 50 per cent (or, as was later the case, more than 90 per cent) of their
Eligibility

Although customary practice has required that a family's need must be assessed on the basis of the relationship between its needs and its resources as of the time of investigation, policy in a few states has permitted some flexibility, allowing the certification of families whose incomes exceeded their estimated needs by only a slight margin or whose income (or resources) in excess of their needs seemed unlikely to last long.¹

Treatment of income received by any member of a family usually depends upon the recipient's relationship to others in the household. The head of a family is normally expected to apply all his earnings to the family's support. A minor, or an adult who is not the family head, however, is usually expected to contribute less—perhaps only 40 or 60 per cent of his earnings.

CCC allotments to families were almost invariably applied in full to meet the needs of enrollees' families. In some instances, however, family budgets had been liberalized when CCC allotments were available, thus enabling youths to feel that their work was giving their families a somewhat higher standard of living and not merely serving to conserve relief funds.

Benefits paid youths under the NYA program have been treated in various ways. Sometimes they have been disregarded, sometimes treated as other earnings, and sometimes applied against the family budget in toto. When this last is done the family is frequently allowed a somewhat more liberal budget than if no contribution were made by the NYA beneficiary. Treatment of NYA benefit has differed not only from place to place but also from time to time in the same place, and has varied depending on whether decisions at a given time and place are made by the WPA or by a local or state relief agency.

¹ In Wisconsin, for example, "A family having no budgetary deficiency in the month of application should be considered for referral if it is found that income in that month is temporary and non-recurring, or if assets and resources readily available to the family would not provide basic subsistence need for a period of more than 60 days."—Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration, sec. 5, p. 505, rev. September 29, 1939.

A similar course was advised early in the program in the state of Washington where it was suggested that in the case of workers reapplying for WPA employment after temporary private employment, certification should not be delayed "until the family applying has exhausted its last dollar." Since it then required some two weeks to be assigned to a WPA job and since another two weeks would probably
Sometimes working members have been permitted to keep part of their earnings for their own use. This practice is designed to help workers cover the extra expenses incurred on the job for lunches, transportation, and working clothes; also to reduce the possibility that younger members of the family might be tempted to leave home and withdraw their support entirely if compelled to give up their entire earnings. As an encouragement particularly to young working members to continue their work and family support some agencies increase the family budget for families of such workers. The budget increases may be a flat amount (sometimes termed a "working allowance") or a specified percentage of the total budget.

Contributions that employed workers are expected to make toward their families' needs in New York City depend not only upon who the earner is but also upon how much he makes. Workers earning less than $4.50 a week, for example, are allowed to retain the full amount for their own use. Those earning between $5.00 and $11 a week are allowed to retain $4.50, while those earning in excess of $20 are allowed to retain $8.00. Those earning between $11 and $20 are expected to contribute in accordance with a prescribed schedule.

Policies with respect to giving WPA jobs to members of families in which one or more persons are already receiving wages from other employment vary considerably from state to state. In some instances (as in Ohio, Indiana, and Georgia) if the earnings of a family head were insufficient for the family's needs, another member might be employed by the WPA provided the total WPA wage was necessary to meet the family's minimum budget. Employment of a secondary wage-earner has been permitted in some areas if as much as 60 per cent of the security wage was needed in addition to other available resources to meet the family's requirements.

Prescribed policy in Illinois in 1938 permitted the employment of workers employed in industry part-time provided they were earning "50% or less of their budgetary needs" and provided that

close before receipt of a pay check, it was suggested that families should be certified for work if they were likely to be in need "in four weeks or less."—Washington State Department of Public Welfare, Bulletin E-R-159. Olympia, November 8, 1935.

An earlier Ohio policy provided that members of families having some income might be assigned to WPA jobs provided at least two-thirds of the security wage was necessary to meet budgetary requirements of their families.
Eligibility

this employment permitted them to work on WPA projects for at least three-quarters of the scheduled operating hours. An earlier Illinois policy permitted individuals or families with partial income to be referred for WPA employment only if they were receiving relief in addition to their partial income and if the partial income was less than two-thirds of the budget needs. A Wisconsin regulation issued in September, 1939, provided that if the head of a family was privately employed but earning less than enough to meet the family's budgetary needs, another member of the family might be referred for WPA employment.1

Policies in effect in up-state New York received considerable publicity when two employes of local village boards (in 1939) pleaded for pay reductions of $120 a year because the $300 they were receiving was a bar to their employment by the WPA whereas outside income of only $180 a year would not have precluded such employment.

Once workers have been given WPA employment, policies with respect to permitting them to accept other employment have varied from state to state and from time to time. National policy on this question prescribed that workers were ineligible for WPA employment only when their earnings were sufficient to disqualify them on the ground that they were no longer in need or when they remained away from their WPA jobs too long.

A relatively early statement of policy on this issue was that other employment "on holidays and after working hours" need "not necessarily . . . endanger" a worker's WPA job. The crux of the matter was said to be how much the worker earned and whether or not acceptance of the pay interfered with "opportunities of other workers." 2 In fact, WPA officials in many sections of the country, but particularly in the South, have admitted that they encouraged workers to find outside employment during their free time because the wages paid by the WPA were admittedly insufficient to meet the needs of many families.

Late in 1936 Mr. Hopkins was reported as agreeing to the release of workers "whose incomes from other sources equaled their W.P.A. wage." He gave assurances, however, that no

1 Discussion of the extent to which WPA families have received other earnings may be found in chap. 7.

395
needy worker would be removed from the WPA rolls. Although this policy was widely followed, there were all sorts of variations from it. In California, for example, the State Relief Administration late in 1936 ruled that discharge of workers employed by the WPA should be recommended only when outside earnings exceeded the workers' family budget standard by more than 25 per cent. From New Mexico it was reported (in 1937) that separations from WPA jobs because of outside earnings should be made only after consideration of individual circumstances, but would not ordinarily be considered unless a family's income from outside sources exceeded $25 a month.

More stringent policies were, however, sometimes applied. Colonel Somervell, in New York City, for example, tried to reduce what he called "two-timing" by strict enforcement of limitations on workers' absence from their WPA jobs. When the state WPA administrator of Pennsylvania appeared before a Senate Committee he testified that whenever the WPA heard of any skilled worker's getting outside work "we always investigate it, and they know if they are found out that they are working on two jobs, we will drop them."^1

Administrators from Ohio and Illinois, however, reported meeting the issue in a somewhat different way. Carl Watson of Ohio declared that there was not much he could do about the matter, since telling workers "to choose partners" (as Senator Byrnes put it) involved a question of policy which was "Hopkins' business." Nevertheless, Mr. Watson stated that when a worker was known to be supplementing his WPA earnings he was reported to the local relief agency. If the outside earnings without WPA employment were regarded as sufficient to meet the worker's need, he might be denied further employment on the ground that he was no longer in need, but not on the ground of his holding two jobs. The administrator for Illinois reported following this same practice.

To remedy the alleged evil of WPA workers' accepting outside employment, the Senate Committee recommended (and Congress later approved) procedures for securing quarterly statements of workers' outside earnings and urged that these be taken into

^1 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session, 1938, vol. 1, p. 660.
Eligibility

account in determining their eligibility for continued employment. Subsequent legislation placed even more stringent limitations on the outside earnings of WPA workers. Further provisions giving preference in WPA employment to workers in relatively greater need than others have also helped to preclude employment by the WPA of workers having other income.

TREATMENT OF ASSETS

Assets most frequently encountered in determining eligibility for WPA employment include ownership of real property, savings, insurance, and automobiles.

Families owning their own homes are almost never denied certification for WPA employment on this ground alone. Families owning other real estate frequently have been expected to dispose of it. However, if the property produced income, this was sometimes treated as any other income and the family allowed to retain the property.

Families applying for (or given) WPA employment are usually permitted to retain small savings accounts without affecting their eligibility. In some instances these may be sufficient to meet the family's budgeted needs for one, two, or even three months. An

1 Discussed in some detail in chap. 17.
2 Discussed in chap. 16.
3 In Ohio, for example, non-income producing real estate other than a homestead owned and occupied by an applicant for a WPA job was supposed (under policies announced in 1939) to be listed "with a reputable real estate broker" for sale.
   In New York City applicants for WPA employment owning real property (other than their own homes) not producing any income were expected to list it for sale "with at least three licensed real estate brokers."
   In Michigan in 1938 it was ruled that "the real thing" to be taken into consideration with respect to property was the income derived from it. Ownership of small amounts of unproductive property was not supposed to preclude certification for WPA employment. "Conditions at present are such," it was ruled, "that it would be unfair to insist on the sale of small amounts of property."
4 In adjacent Indiana policies in effect in 1939 permitted certification of families whose "liquidable personal property, including savings" did not exceed the budgetary needs for a period of two months, plus an allowance of an additional $100 if the family had no other savings or insurance for the legally responsible head.
   Under a Louisiana ruling of 1940, a family might be certified even if its savings were enough to support it for a period of three months. If the head of the family had no protective insurance, additional savings of $200 were permissible.
   Illinois, too, has permitted savings enough to support a family three months.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

early Minnesota WPA policy (in effect in 1936 and 1937) permitted workers to retain their WPA jobs even if their resources were sufficient to take care of their families "for a continuous period of about six months." Workers already employed frequently have been permitted to retain more savings than have workers applying for jobs.¹

As a part of the national drive to raise funds for the war the Michigan WPA in 1942 prescribed that "Savings in the form of war savings bonds or stamps shall not be considered in determining eligibility . . ."²

Possession of small life insurance policies has not as a rule affected eligibility for WPA employment, particularly when these applied to the head of a family. Fairly typical of state policies regarding insurance was that prescribed in Ohio (in 1939) requiring workers to "cash in" convertible life insurance in excess of $500 straight life policies for family heads and "limited life insurance" (involving payments of only 10 or 15 cents a week) for other members of families. However, it was expected that "consideration should be given to the age and health of the insured person."³

A unique turn has been given to policies regarding life insurance holdings in New York City where recipients of relief (and, therefore, workers seeking WPA employment) were, in accordance with policies prescribed in 1938, supposed "generally" to be limited to "the whole life" (straight life) type of insurance in amounts not to exceed $500 on adults and $300 on minors. How-

¹ This was clearly stated in Michigan, for example, where applicants whose savings were more than enough to meet their families' basic needs for one month, as a general rule, were not eligible for certification, whereas workers already employed might retain their WPA employment if their savings were not more than twice their budgeted monthly needs. In New York City WPA workers having small nest eggs have not been deprived of their employment unless these were more than three times their security wage (or, as was later the case, three times the monthly relief grant for which they might qualify if they lost their WPA jobs). Workers applying for WPA employment, however, were required to use up savings or bank deposits before they could qualify for jobs. Limitations on savings in California have been scaled in accordance with the size of a family, families of from one to three members being allowed $100 (in savings, postal savings, building and loan certificates, stocks, bonds, and the like), families of four to six members being allowed $150, families of seven or eight, $200, and those of more than eight, $300.


398
Eligibility

ever, money realized upon adjustment of life insurance policies need not necessarily be expended for budgeted needs but, upon authority of specified officials, might be used to meet special needs (such as dentures, clothing, or urgent household replacements) not otherwise provided for.

The greater liberality of federal as opposed to state and local policies which is so often apparent is particularly evident in regulations prescribed by the federal WPA early in 1942 permitting family heads applying for WPA employment to retain straight life policies not exceeding $1,500 in value. Even this limitation was subject to increase if “general standards of relief and public assistance” in a state justified such action, continuance of policies valued at more than the prescribed limit being conditioned upon such considerations as “age, responsibilities of the insured person, health conditions in the family and related factors.” What are termed “limited amounts” of life insurance held by members of the family other than its head may, under federal policy, be left in force without affecting eligibility for WPA employment.

Furthermore, families are not supposed to be required, as a prelude to qualifying for a WPA job, to cash in or borrow on life insurance policies in excess of allowable limits unless the cash or loan value in excess of this limit is more than enough to provide a three-month budget for the family plus an amount sufficient to pay the premiums on the insurance for a period of two years.¹

Largely because of widespread public interest in automobiles owned by WPA workers, but partly because of their questionable economic value and maintenance costs, policies with respect to auto ownership have, with the passage of time, been defined with increasing care. As a general rule, ownership of an automobile is not supposed necessarily to preclude certification of workers as needing WPA employment. Among the states that have adopted this policy are New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Louisiana. In Michigan, the automobile’s native habitat, this policy, interestingly enough, was justified in 1938 on the ground that dumping used cars “on the market at this time is undesirable both from a social and economic standpoint.” ² Even in states where automobile ownership has not automatically precluded

¹ WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.016, [January, 1942].
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA employment, there have been certain limitations on such ownership.\(^1\)

One type of resource which, in determining need for WPA employment, frequently has not been treated in the same manner as other resources is benefits paid to veterans. When Congress voted in January, 1936, to give veterans the "bonus" due them, agitation was immediately begun to exempt this benefit from consideration in determining need for WPA employment. In fact, there had been an unsuccessful effort to amend the "bonus bill" itself to provide that no person should be declared ineligible for employment under the ERA Act of 1935 by reason of receiving a bonus.

Even before veterans received their compensation bonds (or checks) there were complaints that WPA authorities were casting about to see who might be dropped from the rolls because of receiving the bonus.\(^2\) This practice was condemned as "absolutely unfair" since payment of the bonds had been contracted in 1917 and 1918. It was also argued that it was in conflict with advice being given by the Treasury Department, the Veterans' Administration and veterans' organizations which were urging veterans not to cash their bonds until absolutely necessary; that prohibiting WPA employment to bond recipients would be "very

---

\(^1\) In New Jersey, for example, workers who, after employment by the WPA, purchased an automobile (or made any other substantial purchase, for that matter) were likely, under policies in effect in 1939, to be "investigated" on the ground that they might have, in addition to their WPA wages, other income. After "careful inquiry" eligibility was supposed to be canceled "if warranted." In Ohio no allowance was supposed to be made (in computing family needs) for the car's upkeep except where its use was proved to be necessary or contributed to the family income. Essentially the same principles were supposed to be in effect in Louisiana in 1940. In Wisconsin policies regarding automobile ownership (in 1939) were hedged about with the qualification that it should not preclude WPA employment if the applicant lived "at a distance from lines of transportation to work or stores, or if it contributes to the family support in addition to its cost of upkeep."—Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration, sec. 5, p. 505, September, 1939.

In Indiana automobiles were supposed to be treated like "any personal property reasonably essential to living or to his [the worker's] employment."—Indiana Unemployment Relief Commission, Handbook. [Indianapolis], Part I, chap. 2, p. 15, September 20, 1939.

\(^2\) Senator Schwellenbach, for example, told a Senate Committee in May, 1936, that "after the bonus bill was passed, within a month, in California, Michigan, and New York, the W.P.A. authorities started to make surveys to find out who were going to receive the bonus. Of course it has not been effective at all as yet, but they started to make their surveys to see who were eligible for a bonus in order that they might be dropped."—U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 221.
Eligibility

bad psychology," "bad policy," "poor economy," and might affect some veterans so adversely that they would be worse rather than better off as a result of receiving bonds; and that since a substantial part of those receiving the bonds had already "borrowed very largely," on them, the actual amounts of money retained by them were likely to be "comparatively small." ¹

Estimates of numbers likely to be affected by policies relating to the bonus indicated that these would not be large. One study, conducted in 13 cities, indicated that only 5 per cent of 6,158 former urban relief cases having Works Program employment in June, 1936, had received adjusted compensation certificates.²

The upshot of discussion on the subject was that an amendment suggested by the legislative representative of the Veterans of Foreign Wars was written into the ERA Act of 1936 almost verbatim.³ Comparable provisions were also written into the ERA Acts of 1937 and 1938, but were not included in those subsequently enacted. This was no mere oversight but deliberate refusal again to sanction the earlier provision.⁴

As a result of these omissions in later years policies with respect to the treatment of benefits to veterans have varied from place to place. In some areas the original policy of Congress has been continued, as it was in Pennsylvania, where receipt of bonds or a check in payment of an adjusted-compensation benefit was not, under a policy prescribed in 1940 in accordance with state law, supposed to be considered in determining need for WPA employment. In other jurisdictions, however, the earlier declared policy of Congress has been reversed and (as in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) both "veterans' bonuses and pensions" were supposed to be considered as income or savings.

Even when federal law required that receipt of bonds or payment for adjusted certificates was not supposed to be taken into consideration in determining need for WPA employment, receipt of these bonds or certificates sometimes did preclude such employ-

¹ For a comprehensive statement of these objections, see testimony of Millard W. Rice, *ibid.*, p. 262.
² WPA Release 4-1277, August 13, 1936.
³ This provision (which had first been accepted by the Senate and later approved by House and Senate conferees) specified that "the fact that a person is entitled to or has received either adjusted-service bonds or a Treasury check in payment of an adjusted-compensation certificate shall not be considered in determining actual need of employment [provided under the Act]."—ERA Act of 1936, par. 7.
⁴ See, for example, Congressional Record, May 23, 1940, p. 6749.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ment. This occurred, for example, in those jurisdictions where WPA employment was conditioned upon previous receipt of relief, since eligibility for such aid was often affected by receipt of the "bonus." In some areas (such as California and Washington) it was specifically ruled that although receipt of the bonus was not to be considered in determining need for WPA employment it might bar receipt of relief. Policies of this kind obviously represented but another phase of the dual standards of need already alluded to.

Having succeeded once in getting certain types of income of veterans exempted from consideration in determining need for WPA employment, veterans' organizations and their representatives subsequently have won from Congress certain further concessions with respect to the certification of veterans' needs. These concessions (as already shown in an earlier section of this chapter) meant that the need of applicants entitled to the preferential consideration accorded veterans was to be measured in terms of "income" rather than in terms of such assets (including savings, insurance, and property) as they might possess.

In passing, it may be noted that the amount of assets WPA workers may retain and yet be classed as "in need" is in excess of what many families dependent upon WPA wages could acquire. As already noted,¹ the emergency standard of living which called for a larger monthly income than most WPA workers received made no provision for such "luxuries" as insurance, small savings, or automobile ownership which workers are admitted (by relief and WPA officials) often to need so badly that their possession does not constitute a bar to WPA employment.

As already noted at several points, the treatment of both income and assets (no less than standards of need) in determining need for WPA employment are frequently more liberal than policies pursued in determining need for direct relief. Similarly, treatment of assets and income of workers already employed by the WPA is usually more liberal than that accorded applicants for WPA jobs.² An employed worker, for example, is not infrequently allowed to have both a savings account (of, perhaps,

¹ See chap. 6.
² These variations, it may be noted, produce exactly the same results in relation to relief rolls as do the dual policies regarding standards of need which were earlier discussed, and lead to the same popular criticisms of the WPA program.
Eligibility

$100, or enough to meet his family’s needs for possibly three months) and a small amount of insurance. Applicants for relief, by contrast, are normally required to cash in on such assets. This would usually be true also of applicants for WPA employment even in those areas where there was a single standard of need for both relief and WPA employment.

Vicissitudes arising from these differences confuse even the most level headed. Found to be eligible for employment in accordance with a given relief standard, the applicant may, after employment, find that his wages fall far short of enough to provide the standard of living which, in determining his eligibility, he was presumed to need. On the other hand, if his wages were sufficient he might be able to take out a modest amount of insurance or lay by savings of $100 or so without risking loss of his job even after a “review of eligibility.” However, if he left his WPA job to take temporary private employment or was automatically released after eighteen months’ continuous WPA employment, he would probably be eligible for reinstatement only if he divested himself of these assets and returned to the condition in which his need had originally been determined! This is what WPA workers mean when they talk about being put through the wringer. The policy is a standing invitation to them to spend as they go.
CHAPTER XVI
ELIGIBILITY: RELATIVE NEED

In order to get or to hold a WPA job it is not enough that a worker be in need. He must also, as a rule, be in greater need than someone else. Considerations with respect to relative need and the resources available to one worker as opposed to another have been taken into account not only in the appraisal of an applicant's eligibility but also in the selection from among the large number of workers certified of those who were to be assigned jobs or those who were to be discharged when employment levels were being reduced.

An early emphasis on relative need came during the WPA's first period of retrenchment, in the spring of 1936, when dismissals in many jurisdictions were made on this basis. This fact was admitted in an official report which declared in October, 1936, that "where normal separations did not lower the employment totals sufficiently, personnel was reduced by dismissals [among others] of . . . workers without dependents . . . and, in a few instances, dismissal on the basis of relative economic need." An earlier report declared that reductions had been made, in part, through release of "those without dependents."

Something over a year later a high WPA official declared that when the peak in employment was passed reductions would be made by not filling jobs voluntarily vacated and by transferring workers to private jobs. "We shall try," declared the official, "to keep the workers who are in greatest need, particularly those with dependents." States in which workers early in 1936 were released on the basis of relative need included New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Washington.

Still, it is not only in the discharge of workers that relative need has long been taken into account. In Virginia and North Carolina in 1937, for example, it was reported that so far as possible assignments were made on the basis of greatest need. In North Carolina in July, 1936, it was ruled that when a relief agency knew 50 workers who were in need and the WPA could

1 WPA Weekly Progress Report, October 5-10, 1936.
Eligibility

employ but to the agency would be expected to refer to the WPA those workers who were “most desperately in need of relief and who are capable of performing a creditable job.”

Except for workers needed in Louisiana “to maintain the efficiency of the projects” in 1936, the certifying agency was asked to make recommendation as to “relative need” to serve as a guide when reductions were contemplated. Under a drastic policy (also prescribed in 1936) no new assignment was permissible unless a vacancy had been created by the discharge of some worker whose need was less emergent and who otherwise would not have left WPA rolls.

A statement of policy issued in 1936 by the Florida WPA put the issue in a nutshell: “Need is always relative; and those in greatest need, who are at the same time able to do their work well, must be selected if we are to carry out the two-fold principle of taking care of needy people and doing an efficient job at the same time.”

To facilitate assignment on the basis of relative need, during the first several years of the WPA program, official record forms relating to individual workers in Georgia showed both the amount needed to maintain the family and the resources available. Similarly, official documents relating to individual workers in Ohio, as early as 1936, were supposed to show whether or not a family had any income or to indicate “the degree of need, so that judgment may be exercised . . . in making assignment.” In 1938 assignments in Ohio were still supposed to be made on the basis of relative need and the size of a worker’s family. Furthermore, the facts as to whether an applicant was receiving full relief or whether only one-third or two-thirds of his budget deficit, were taken into consideration. Similar information has also been included on record forms used in states including, among others, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Wash-

2 Florida WPA, GB-140. Jacksonville, October 19, 1936.
4 The recently abandoned Illinois practice of using relief funds for financing WPA projects on which employment might be given to former relief recipients automatically led to referring for such employment only those families whose monthly relief grants amounted to at least $13.08, or, as was later the case, $16, the amount of the man-month contribution.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The Needy Versus Recipients of Relief

The outstanding result of this general practice of limiting WPA employment to those in relatively greatest need was the early restriction of WPA employment to those who had already received relief. At the outset and until November, 1935, workers could not, as a general rule, be assigned unless they had received relief in the preceding May.

This policy was bitterly assailed as being unfair to workers who had somehow managed to get along without relief, and particularly to those who, during the early spring of 1935 (prior to May), had left the relief rolls to find private employment. The date line for the receipt of relief was accordingly changed—first to permit employment of those who had received relief prior to November, 1935, then of those who had received relief subsequent to that time.

After the federal government withdrew from the general relief field, employable workers in many sections of the country were given no relief. This made it necessary to waive the requirement limiting WPA jobs to relief recipients.

The first legal step to "unfreeze" the WPA rolls and to eliminate possible discrimination against needy employable persons who had not actually received relief was an amendment written into the ERA Act of 1936. This provision, as finally adopted, prescribed that "in the employment of persons, applicants in actual need whose names have not heretofore been placed on relief rolls shall be given the same eligibility for employment as applicants whose names have heretofore appeared on such rolls."¹ Almost identical provisions were incorporated in the ERA Acts of 1937 and 1938, but have not been included in subsequent measures. Nevertheless, the WPA, in language strongly reminiscent of the earlier acts, has continued the policy of not discriminating against applicants not actually granted relief.

Despite these steps, workers in certain areas have, even since it has been contrary to announced federal policy, been barred

¹ ERA Act of 1936, par. 7.
from WPA employment because they had not previously been given relief. This is attributable to the fact that WPA and relief officials in a number of areas refused to go along with the changed national policy, and have authorized practices which have been more or less openly at variance with it.

In New York City, for example, within two months after Congress had enacted the ERA Act of 1936, Colonel Somervell, the WPA administrator, announced that only those who received relief would be eligible for employment on WPA projects under his jurisdiction. Since that time WPA employment in New York City has, at various times, been restricted to persons who were currently receiving relief, had received relief for at least ninety days, or had received at least one relief check.

In New York State (exclusive of New York City) it has also been prescribed that consideration for WPA employment could be given only to those who had received relief subsequent to a specified date which was sometimes one month, and sometimes as much as four months, previous to the date of application for employment.

In Pennsylvania, too, similar policies have been maintained and eligibility for WPA employment has been tied up with authorization for or actual receipt of relief.

1 This fact has occasioned no little surprise even in informed quarters. Senators Byrnes and Adams (who, while serving in Congress, were probably as closely identified with WPA legislation as any two leaders there) could hardly believe their ears when they heard that this was the case. "You do not mean," Senator Byrnes said to an informant, "that they are not certified unless they are getting relief... Mr. Hopkins... has been telling us that if they are found to be in need that that is sufficient."—U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 679), Work Relief and Public Works Appropriations Act of 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938, p. 207.


3 See, for example, New York (City) Department of Welfare, Manual of Policies Relating to Eligibility for Relief, chap. 5, sec. 34, April 27, 1938. Also Idem, Informational No. 41-132, August 7, 1941.

4 As late as August, 1941, the policy in effect in New York City prescribed that "No non-recipient of relief other than the Veteran, the wife of an unemployable Veteran, and the unmarried widow of a Veteran is eligible for such WPA employment."—Idem, Procedural No. 41-56, August 18, 1941.

5 When Representative Taber (Republican, of New York) in 1941 accused the WPA of employing workers who had not received relief, the WPA administrator for upstate New York replied that the number of jobs then available had made it possible to broaden eligibility requirements to permit employment of needy persons not actually granted a relief order.

6 When the state WPA administrator of Pennsylvania (in 1941) urged Congress to liberalize measures for determining the eligibility of veterans he declared "these
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

One of the most interesting discussions of this question of receipt of relief was that which attended the sharp controversy resulting from the New Jersey legislature's enactment (in 1938) of a measure prescribing that no worker could be certified for WPA employment until he had received relief for at least three months. The WPA protested sharply against this provision, and issued instructions to certifying agencies that needy workers might be employed whether or not they had ever received relief—to say nothing of having received it for ninety days. State officials countered this move by threatening to withhold state relief funds from localities that did not adhere strictly to the state law. The WPA, however, had the last word—it revoked the certifying function from local relief officials, and did its own certifying while relief agencies were requested to "refer" for WPA employment needy workers not granted relief.

While Illinois has done some experimenting (usually for short and intermittent periods) with the possibility of opening up WPA employment to needy persons not actually granted relief, the usual practice has been to apply more restrictive measures, some of them unique. In this state, from July 1, 1936, until January 8, 1938, for example, cases referred for WPA employment "must (1) have received continuous relief for a period of not less than thirty days from the referring local relief authority, and (2) have a budget deficit of more than 50 per cent as determined by a thorough investigation of income and resources according to a budget established locally."^1

Even more specific requirements in Illinois have applied to employment on certain WPA projects. So long as the Relief men . . . should be entitled to a job on W.P.A. without first having to beg for relief."—Congressional Record, Appendix, June 5, 1941, p. 2875. Strangely enough, the privilege of qualifying for a WPA job without having to "beg for relief" was not something that required congressional action, inasmuch as relief and WPA officials already had every right to divorce receipt of relief and WPA employment—as had been done in most states.


In support of policies limiting WPA employment to persons whose income amounted to only about half their budgeted needs whereas relief was to be given to those whose income fell short of their needs by as little as 10 per cent, it was reported: "This proposal is made in order that persons whose net needs are less than fifty per cent of the budget standard may be cared for on general relief rolls at less cost to the taxpayer than the full WPA wage they would automatically receive if assigned. Also, WPA work opportunities would thus be preserved for persons with greater needs, and their transfer from relief rolls would thus result in a larger reduction of general relief expenditures."—Idem, Exhibit E, July 21, 1939.

408
Eligibility

Commission was empowered to use its funds to help finance WPA projects on which relief recipients might be employed, only those workers whose monthly relief allowance equaled or exceeded the man-month contribution (which was $13.08 a month in Chicago for a time) from relief funds were eligible for employment under this plan.

Approval of the Policy

Limiting WPA jobs to relief recipients has been defended on the ground that since WPA employment quotas have almost never been sufficient to employ even those needy employable persons who were already receiving relief, there was no reason to open these jobs to other needy workers. In this connection it is important to note that most areas in which actual receipt of relief has continued to be a necessary prelude to WPA employment are those in which relief standards are relatively high. Furthermore, the WPA has refused to sanction the practice of limiting WPA employment to recipients of relief unless assistance was generally available to those who needed it. Even this safeguard, however, has not spared applicants the humiliation that is often attached to the receipt of relief as opposed to the acceptance of a job even when this is a work-relief job. Neither has federal policy assured employment to that unknown number of workers who, because of unwillingness to accept relief, have thereby barred themselves from employment for which they might otherwise have qualified.

Among considerations advanced in favor of restricting WPA employment to relief recipients is the contention that such restriction is necessary to assure reductions in relief rolls. Since local and state authorities have long been required to provide funds for WPA projects, it is not surprising that they tried to make sure that benefits resulting from these jobs should go to persons who otherwise would have to be given relief.

Still another factor has been the contention that if workers are to be brought to the realization that WPA employment is a

---

1 This was one of the primary issues involved in the New Jersey controversy which led in 1938 to legislation designed to limit WPA employment to persons who had received relief for at least ninety days.—See, for example, Newark Evening News, June 24, 1938.

It was also Mr. Hopkins' explanation as to why the WPA at the outset limited employment to those who had received relief by a specified date.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

form of relief rather than "just another job," it is necessary to require them to accept relief as an antecedent to a job.

Among the administrative advantages claimed for the policy of restricting WPA employment to persons who actually receive relief, which implies prior investigation by relief agencies, is that it imposes upon local relief agencies relatively little additional cost. When called upon to investigate the need of workers not currently receiving relief, however, local agencies are put to considerable extra expense.¹

A further factor has been the unwillingness of local and state authorities to assume responsibility for certifying as "in need" any group of workers to whom no relief is granted lest the very finding that need exists be construed as prima facie evidence that such persons should be given relief.

Still another consideration, advanced more frequently by state and local relief authorities than by WPA officials, is that administrative employes responsible for investigating needs seem to take this task more seriously when they are required formally to authorize the granting of relief rather than merely to declare a worker to be in need.² In partial explanation of this fact it is sometimes said that the necessity of first placing an applicant on the relief rolls instead of referring him for a job seems to throttle some of the many outside pressures exerted in the interest of helping an applicant get work.³

Opposition to the Policy

In opposition to the policy of requiring that workers must receive relief before they may be employed by the WPA it is frequently urged that this practice increases relief loads and, consequently, relief costs. Workers who might otherwise spurn relief are said to be somewhat less reluctant to accept it when it is made a necessary step to a job.

¹ For discussion of the effect of these expenditures upon costs of agency administration see chap. 4.
² The anomalousness of this consideration is that the practice of limiting WPA jobs to relief recipients is confined, for the most part, to areas in which administrative practices are already of relatively high standard.
³ Early WPA policies limiting employment to persons who had received relief by a specified date were designed in part to keep local officials from running away with the show. When receipt of relief was no longer required, WPA officials announced that such controls as prescribing job quotas and fund limitations would thereafter have to be relied upon to keep employment practices within bounds.
Eligibility

Mayor La Guardia of New York City has contended that the heavy increase in the number of WPA employes in that city during the early part of 1936 did not result in a reduction of the number on home relief because relief status was “a prerequisite to WPA employment,” and because of the further fact that “in order to get WPA jobs people are the more ready to accept home relief.” ¹ Federal WPA officials, too, have repeatedly emphasized the falsity of the widely held view that to deter persons from accepting relief they must be made to work. The very offer of work, in practice, has brought queues of new applicants who would ordinarily scorn relief for which they are not permitted to work.

The second chief objection raised against the requirement that WPA workers must first receive relief has been the unevenness and gross inadequacy of relief programs in various localities. For example, in Illinois, in 1938, when the policy of restricting WPA employment to recipients of relief was temporarily abandoned, this change was defended by the state WPA administrator on the ground that it would help “to eliminate the artificial barrier to W.P.A. employment caused by shortage of local relief funds.” ² In further explanation of this attempt in Illinois to modify eligibility rules an official release of the Emergency Relief Commission reported:

The Regional and State offices of the Works Progress Administration are now definitely pointing out that the widely varying practices of local relief authorities do not permit state-wide or even county-wide uniformity in the establishment of these eligibility requirements which relate to need. . . .

This variation is indicated in part by the spread in average relief grants for the month of March 1938 when the allowances of the townships in one county averaged $5.47 per case with the allowances given by the townships in another county averaging $33.95 per case. Other variations, such as refusal of relief to groups or types of cases, also result in non-admission to

¹ New York City WPA, Community Improvement Appraisal: New York City. March 22, 1938, p. 15.
³ As quoted in the Illinois State Journal, May 26, 1938. This reversal of policy was effected, it may be noted, at a time when employment quotas were relatively adequate and there was, as the administrator declared, “no limit to how far we can increase W.P.A. employment.” This change in practice is but another illustration of the relaxation of standards of eligibility in times of comparatively high WPA employment.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

federal programs of persons in need. Thus, the absence of objective statewide standards for determining eligibility for relief has prevented certification for many persons actually in need of W.P.A. employment.\(^1\)

The heaviest barrage of opposition to the relief restriction upon eligibility, however, has been on the score of undermining morale, through forcing the unemployed to apply for relief as a condition of getting a job.

About the time the New Jersey controversy was raging (in 1938) and the ninety-day provision attacked as “demoralizing,” Louis E. Kirstein, vice president of William Filene’s Sons Company, in testimony before a Senate Committee denounced the practice of refusing jobs to workers because they were not receiving relief. Of this Mr. Kirstein declared:

There has been a good deal of complaint from people who were told that they were ineligible for work relief because the requirement for the particular projects for which they were applying was that they should have been actually on relief rolls. This has been a source of great discouragement to the person who has made every effort to keep off local relief rolls only to find at last that his conscientious attempt to avoid asking for charity actually works against the acceptance of his application for work relief. If we are to avoid weakening the backbone of our people and avoid the undesirable implications of anything like a dole, we should be careful to keep out of all relief administrations any regulations which would seem to put a penalty on self-help or family help.\(^2\)

The practice of limiting jobs to relief recipients has also been attacked (as it was by the American Federation of Labor) on the ground that it was unfair to “a large group of men and women who have succeeded in stretching out their savings over the long months of unemployment and who preferred deepest poverty to the dole. . . .” \(^3\)

General Hugh S. Johnson, the first WPA administrator in New York City, once ridiculed the argument that WPA employ-

\(^1\) Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Exhibit J. [Chicago], May 13, 1938.

\(^2\) U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 1, p. 448.

\(^3\) American Federation of Labor, Report of the Proceedings of the Fifty-fifth Annual Convention. Washington, 1935, p. 79. Further criticism of this same policy was expressed by the Federation in 1936 when it supported “a permanent works program for all unemployed white collar workers (such as statistical, research, technical, educational, social, recreational workers, and artists, writers, actors, dancers, musicians, etc.), whether on relief or not.”—Idem, Report of the Proceedings of the Fifty-sixth Annual Convention. Washington, 1936, p. 645.

412
Eligibility

ment "preserves pride against the humiliation of home relief," since "to go on work relief, the rules require that a man first go on home relief. To get there, he must submit to the equivalent of a pauper's oath." ¹

Special groups, primarily teachers, lawyers, actors, and other professional persons have been among those who have protested most earnestly against the policy. Representatives of these groups maintained that because application for relief would damage their professional careers, they should not be required to accept it as a condition of eligibility for WPA jobs. As a result, such persons in a number of jurisdictions have, from time to time, been certified on a somewhat more liberal basis than have other applicants.

Individuals and agencies already mentioned as favoring the giving of WPA jobs without respect to need have, of course, opposed even more strongly the restrictive practice of limiting jobs to those needy persons actually granted relief.

In reviewing considerations which have contributed to giving WPA jobs only to recipients of relief, one cannot but be impressed by the fact that many of these factors might have been modified, in part at least, by federal grants to reimburse local agencies for services rendered in connection with investigations and the referral or certification of workers for WPA employment. Such co-operation with states and localities would undoubtedly have lessened the opposition of relief agencies to accepting the extra administrative work involved. Complete federal responsibility for accepting and investigating applications could have overcome this difficulty even more effectively though not completely, perhaps, because the WPA, like state and local relief agencies, cannot long fly in the face of local public opinion.

An even more important step in keeping WPA rolls open to other than relief recipients might have been taken by the federal government if it had been willing to co-operate with states and localities in a program of direct relief. If the cost of caring for those not employed by the WPA could have been shared, local opposition to certifying for WPA employment other than relief recipients would undoubtedly have diminished. Or, under federal supervision, improved relief standards and practices might have been maintained with sufficient uniformity so that, without undue

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

hardship upon workers in any section of the country, employment might have been limited to those who had actually been given relief. Damage done to the morale of workers as a result of requiring that they receive relief before becoming eligible for WPA jobs might have been lessened if there had been federal aid for and leadership in a program of direct relief since such participation would indubitably have resulted in more nearly adequate assistance and less oppressive relief practices.

The Needy with Income Versus Those Without

Even more important than policies designed to give WPA jobs to relief recipients as opposed to other needy workers have been the attempts that have been made to distinguish in other ways between the needy and the needier.

These practices have assumed increasing importance since 1939 when Congress, over vigorous protest of high WPA officials, wrote into law provisions requiring that "in employing or retaining in employment" on WPA projects preference was to be given on the basis of relative need. Although strict application of this principle might appear to necessitate discharge of workers in relatively less need in favor of those who at any given time were in greater need, this was not supposed to be permitted. The term "retaining in employment" was officially defined to mean only "the continuing in employment of certified assigned employees at the time of enforced curtailment or reduction in employment on the project to which they are assigned." ^

Inasmuch as changes in the financial status of workers are constantly occurring, it is altogether possible that on the day after ^

---

1 An alternate proposal suggested by Colonel Harrington (and, in somewhat changed form adopted in 1941 as a modification upon the principle of "rotating employment") was that in making assignments or reassignments to WPA jobs, workers who had been certified but unassigned for six months or longer should be given preference over those who had been continuously employed for three years or more. In passing, it is noteworthy that although (as already suggested) relative need had in one way or another been taken into account in the assignment of jobs ever since the WPA program got under way, it was not until 1939 that Congress first wrote into law a provision requiring that relative need be taken into account in determining preference for WPA employment. This requirement was but another instance in which Congress, long after various practices had been instituted, enacted measures making the established practice mandatory. Further examples of this tendency, as shown elsewhere, were the actions of Congress with respect to such policies as payment of prevailing rates of pay and making continued employment contingent upon continued need.

Eligibility

an applicant is given preferential treatment on the basis of relative need his circumstances may so change as to disqualify him for special consideration. Conversely, since neither relief agencies nor the WPA pretend to keep up-to-date information about workers, an applicant placed in the deferred category one day might qualify for preferential treatment the next. Yet, because the necessary information is not available to the proper authorities, he might not receive the consideration due him.

Exceptions to General Policy

Preferential treatment on the basis of relative need was not to be given without limitation. It was supposed to apply only "as far as practicable" and "subject to the requirement that all persons assigned to work on projects shall be qualified . . . to perform satisfactorily the duties required." Obviously, decisions as to what is "practicable," and determinations with respect to the relative qualifications and abilities of workers, are subject to wide discretion and subjective judgment.

A further limitation (written into law only in 1941), upon the relative need principle, exempts veterans, unmarried widows of veterans, and wives of unemployable veterans from its application. Thus, these classes of workers are given first consideration whether or not they are in as great or greater need than someone else. In support of this policy, which was part of what spokesmen of veterans' organizations termed "full preference," these representatives reiterated their belief that Congress should provide jobs enough so that giving preference to veterans need not make it necessary to deprive needier workers of employment. One representative even branded as "tricky" a question as to whether full preference for veterans might not necessitate employing an able-bodied veteran at the expense of the proverbial widow with five children. Nevertheless, the policy finally adopted (at the instigation of the Senate and over the protest of the House) does just that.

Interpretations of Policy

To make effective the requirements of Congress that employment shall be on the basis of relative need, the WPA has pre-

\[\textit{Ibid.}, \text{ and WPA Commissioner's Letter No. 18, July 17, 1941.}\]
scribed that workers (other than veterans, unmarried widows of
veterans, and wives of unemployable veterans) be classed in two
categories: first, members of families or persons (including single
persons) with no income; and second, those "with income insuffi-
cient for maintenance on a subsistence level." Further gradations
are not supposed to be made without prior approval of
federal and regional WPA officials.

Income from occasional odd jobs, accident compensation for
injury on a WPA project, and irregular earnings such as children
may derive from selling papers or shining shoes are, in the de-
termination of relative need, excluded from consideration as
income.¹

Policies in a number of states specifically prescribe that "in-
come" shall include both income in cash and in kind. However,
WPA earnings, NYA benefits, and relief usually are not regarded
as income for purposes of establishing relative need. In a number
of states (including Massachusetts and Illinois) even families
with income so low as to require supplementation from relief
funds have been placed in the deferred category and ranked be-
low families which had no income whatever.

Arbitrarily dividing workers on the basis of whether or not
they had any income was soon found to give rise to such anomalies
as granting preference in employment to single workers without
income while the classic example of the widow with five children
and $2.00 a month income was placed in the deferred category.
To remedy anomalies of this type some states have permitted
preferential consideration of families if their income is less than
$3.00 per person a month;² if their income is less than 80 per
cent of their budgeted needs;³ or if their budget deficiency (the
difference between budgeted needs and income) is more than 50
per cent of the higher unskilled wage rate.⁴ Policy in Nebraska
has interpreted "no income" to mean no income that is significant
in size when compared with a family's need.

Federal rulings issued early in 1942 interpreted "no income"
to mean "no regular wage, in cash or kind, or remittance that is

² The practice in Ohio.
³ The practice in Pennsylvania.
⁴ The practice in Minnesota.
Eligibility

significant in size when compared with the need of a specific family or person.”

Despite liberalizations that had occurred, Congress in 1941 appeared greatly perturbed over reports that veterans with small disability pensions of $15 or $20 a month were being placed in the deferred category on the ground that they had some income. Though deferments of this kind had been referred to by Colonel Harrington more than a year before as a source of irritation to veterans, congressional leaders seemed never to have heard of them before, interpreted them as “refusal” on the part of the WPA to carry out the spirit of the law, warned WPA officials against further “violations” of this kind, and declared that veterans would be better off without their small pensions if these precluded employment by the WPA. Final action of Congress giving “full preference” to veterans and excluding them from application of the “relative need” provision was due in large measure to considerations like these.

What is most noteworthy about the interest Congress showed in the denial of WPA employment to families whose income was as little as $15 or $20 a month was that this concern was limited to the families of veterans. It did not extend to other families who might also be barred from WPA jobs not because they had as much as $15 but despite the fact they had no more than $5.00, or, perhaps, even less.

Discrimination Against Workers Without Dependents

Notwithstanding the ruling that families or persons without income shall, as a general rule, be given preferential consideration on the basis of relative need, the federal WPA has also prescribed that state WPA administrators (with the approval of specified regional and federal officials) may deny preferential consideration to single persons without dependents even though they have no income. Such exemptions, when granted, must be applied on a statewide basis. Taking advantage of this leeway, a number of states have requested and been granted permission to place all

1 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.040, [January, 1942].
2 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 17, p. 1, February 5, 1941. An earlier federal ruling had prescribed three categories of workers: family heads with no income, family heads with income, and finally, workers without dependents. Bitter opposition—based on the claim that single men get just as hungry as any—soon led to its repeal.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

workers with no dependents in the deferred category.\(^1\) In other states, even though special categories for single persons have not been set up, WPA officials have admitted that single workers frequently are the “last on and first off” or are employed only when the number of available workers is relatively low.

Of equal importance to excluding single persons from preferential consideration for WPA employment is the further fact that, because co-operating relief agencies refuse either to grant them relief or to refer them to the WPA, single workers are frequently unable to qualify as eligible for WPA employment even though they may be in desperate need and could qualify on other counts.

Wholesale removal of single workers, or refusal to employ them, has been reported at one time or another from such widely separated places as New York, many Pennsylvania cities, Cleveland, Colorado, Washington, as well as several other jurisdictions.

Perplexed by the discrimination against him, one single worker wrote the Indiana Department of Public Welfare: “I am Eligible for W.P.A. But I cant get it unless I get married. I can get a wife if that is what the law calls for. Does it. I hope not.” \(^2\)

Even in Michigan, where an official state ruling emphasized the fact that single persons were eligible for certification and assignment on the same basis as family heads, it was admitted that the WPA might give preference to “heads of families . . . since they represent families whose needs are acute.” \(^3\)

That the discrimination which has been heaped upon workers without dependents has found support in many quarters is evidenced by the uproar from the public, press, and relief officials when those with dependents have not been given preferential consideration. Typical of complaints on this score was that of a Norfolk relief official. “Repeatedly,” he charged, “we have seen men and women with four, six, or eight dependents laid off by WPA to go on the dole while single men with no dependents remained at two or three times the monthly income of the family man on the dole.” \(^4\)

\(^1\) During the last half of 1940, 16 states had been granted permission to do this.

\(^2\) Indiana State Department of Public Welfare, Public Welfare in Indiana, October, 1940, p. 15.


For further evidences of dissatisfaction on this count see chap. 10.
Eligibility

Dependents of WPA Workers

The inescapable corollary of discrimination against single workers and of practices designed to give employment on the basis of relative need has been that workers with families have been given preferential treatment. This has meant that WPA workers have had to stretch their meager earnings to provide for comparatively large numbers of dependents, as relief families go.

A study of Pennsylvania cases in 1936 revealed that whereas only 15 per cent of the families employed under the Works Program were single-person cases, 28.7 per cent of the unemployment relief cases fell into this category. Among families having Works Program employment 17.3 per cent were two-person families whereas 18.4 per cent of the families granted relief were of this type. Families of from three to nine persons, however, constituted a larger proportion of Works Program than of unemployment relief families, the widest discrepancy being in the case of four-person families which represented 15.4 per cent of the Works Program families but only 11.4 per cent of families receiving relief. Families of more than ten represented a greater proportion of Works Program families than of those on relief. Families of ten represented the same proportion among unemployment relief cases as among those having Works Program employment. In both instances the proportion of families having ten members represented approximately 1.3 per cent of the total.

Study of workers employed by the WPA in February, 1939, revealed that the average WPA worker’s family included 3.76 persons. By states, the average worker’s family ranged from approximately 4.8 persons in West Virginia, Kentucky, and New Mexico, to fewer than 3 persons in the District of Columbia, Nevada, and California.

For the nation as a whole, single-person families having WPA employment represented 10.7 per cent of the total. The range, however, was from less than 3 per cent in Kentucky, Iowa, and Utah to nearly or over 25 per cent in the District of Columbia, California, and Nevada, where the proportion was nearly 36 per cent. Although only 9.1 per cent of the male workers constituted single-person families, more than a fifth (21.4 per cent) of the women fell in this category.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

bers; \(^1\) 28.8 per cent had four or five members; \(^2\) and 18.2 per cent had six \(^3\) or more.\(^4\)

One bit of evidence appearing to contradict the contention that WPA employment, as a general rule, has been given to relatively large families, was disclosed by the study, previously quoted, of a sample from 13 cities. Here it was found that workers employed on the Works Program in April, 1936, had approximately the same number of dependents as those who were certified and awaiting assignment. This, however, may only mean that among workers already certified there was little discrimination against those with no dependents or with but few. It tells nothing, of course, of the difficulties such workers may have experienced in qualifying as in need of employment.

That such difficulties have been encountered is suggested by the fact that of those who registered as totally unemployed in November, 1937, and for whom data are available, 25 per cent had no dependents. Of those registering as emergency workers (that is, as employees of the WPA, CCC, and NYA) only 12 per cent had no dependents. Although differences with respect to workers having from one to four dependents were less marked, the proportion of emergency workers having four or more dependents (32 per cent) was nearly 70 per cent more than the corresponding proportion among unemployed workers.

The irony of WPA practices favoring the employment of workers with large families and of those with comparatively great need is that no attempt is made to gear wage policies to these practices. In fact, devices resulting in the employment of workers with relatively large families tend to negate one of the important considerations advanced in 1935 in support of the security wage levels which, by and large, were to give families more than they might get in relief. Though it was recognized that some families would receive less, this was justified on the ground that single workers and small families would receive more.\(^5\) Denial of employment to workers who would benefit most by

\(^1\) The range was from 28.9 in New Mexico to 48.5 in Oregon.
\(^2\) The range was from 18.4 in Nevada to 36.4 in Utah.
\(^3\) The range was from 8.7 in Nevada to 34.8 in New Mexico.
\(^4\) The proportion of women workers having families of two persons was higher than the proportion of men having families of this size. As for families of more than two persons, the situation was reversed, however, since the proportion of men having families of three or more exceeded that of the women.
\(^5\) See chap. 6.

420
such an arrangement, obviously vitiates any such defense of the low security rates.

In addition to those already described, a number of policies affecting WPA employment have been designed to give (or resulted in giving) preference to workers in relatively greater need than others. Notable among these has been the practice of "rotating employment," under which workers employed for a specified period are replaced by workers waiting assignment;¹ and the denial of employment to workers who might be eligible for other types of aid such as old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, or unemployment compensation.²

Departures from Relative Need Policy

Despite the fact that WPA officials have frequently countenanced and even urged the assignment and release of workers on the basis of relative need, there have been striking exceptions to this policy.

In direct contrast with policies recommended in 1936, WPA regulations issued early in 1939 with respect to reductions then in prospect provided that relative need should not be considered. This was defended on the ground that the review of need then being conducted would result in the elimination of those not in need. Reductions were, therefore, to be made on other grounds such as the discontinuance of (a) the least desirable projects; (b) projects on which federal expenditures for non-labor costs were unusually high or on which sponsors' contributions were unusually low; (c) projects in areas where operations were on so small a scale that administrative and supervisory costs were excessive; and (d) projects on which costs (from federal funds) of transporting workers were too high.

These recommendations, which were obviously designed to improve the WPA's status as a work, as opposed to a relief, program were widely protested by local authorities and relief officials who were suddenly confronted with responsibility for granting relief—not to those who were in relatively least need as theretofore—but to many who were heads of families and, therefore, needed relatively large relief grants. As on other occasions, when

¹ This policy is discussed in some detail in chap. 21.

² The effect of eligibility for social security benefits upon that for WPA employment is discussed in chap. 17.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

relative needs were not taken into account in the employment or discharge of WPA workers, public relief officials and the public generally were quick to protest. In Cleveland, for example, the "new method of firing" was contrasted sharply with previous methods under which workers were "fired by categories, hiring those with the biggest families and in the most need first, and firing single men and women, or special groups such as those eligible for old-age or widows' pensions first." The new method was "expected to throw a bigger burden on the local direct relief agencies" and was denounced as "discriminatory" by CIO and AF of L unions. Thus again, may be seen outcroppings of the fundamental work-versus-relief dilemma underlying the whole WPA program.

Even more recently there have been further evidences that WPA officials have seen fit, in making reductions in employment, to disregard workers' relative need and to consider primarily their efficiency. There is, for example, the testimony of one witness who wrote in the Survey Midmonthly:

Recently I spent a month in North Carolina. . . . The WPA offices received notice of a 15 percent reduction in quota, made necessary by reduced appropriation. In discussing the matter with WPA officials, I asked how the reduction would be made—bearing in mind that the WPA was the only source of assistance to great numbers of families with an employable member. I expected to be told that workers needing help least, or those most likely to get other jobs, would be the ones. But the officials said in effect, "We shall retain the most efficient workers. We have important defense work to do, and we want to get good results. Of course, if we know a worker is not in need we shall drop him, but our general test is efficiency, like that of any other employer."^3

The Relative Need Policy in Reverse

In sharp contrast with the many practices that have been designed to transfer to the WPA families receiving or entitled to receive large relief grants, has been the policy, occasionally found, of retaining such families on relief rolls.

When this has been done it has sometimes been because such practice appeared a lesser evil than granting supplementary relief; because supplementation as such was frowned upon as bad social

---

^1 Further evidence of attitudes of this kind is presented in chap. 10.
^2 Cleveland Press, April 3, 1939.
Eligibility

policy; because local agencies could not be reimbursed for supplementary relief granted even though state funds were available for other types of relief; or because relief agencies were compelled, either by law or fear of public criticism, to restrict expenditures for "administration" to a specified proportion of their total expenditures.¹

Differences of Opinion Regarding Relative Needs

Although the WPA has frequently recommended the practice of giving employment on the basis of relative need, officials have constantly been aware of the difficulties involved in such a practice, and have repeatedly opposed congressional action making it obligatory. In testimony before a Senate Committee in 1937 Harry Hopkins, for example, admitted that although it was impossible not to consider relative need when making reductions, it was very difficult "to pass on relative need between two people."²

Another high WPA official to protest the necessity of employing workers on the basis of relative need was Colonel Harrington, whose objection was that this interfered with project operations. Again, in 1941, Howard Hunter unsuccessfully requested Congress to abandon the relative need requirement as unfair and unworkable. Elaborating on his recommendation, Mr. Hunter declared:

... some of the factors which go into the determination of relative need are family size and composition, age, health, temporary fluctuations in income, the existence of home gardens, duration of unemployment, and so on. The relative importance of these factors keeps changing all the time, and they are not the sort of thing you can evaluate by a mechanical formula....

The problem is so complex that I do not think any system for administering this provision would work, and it is obvious that any method would involve complicated procedures and correspondingly high administrative costs. ...

... the principal factors to consider in assignment are the workers' qualification for the jobs available and their proximity to the work.³

Notwithstanding these objections, Congress again voted that WPA jobs should be meted out on the basis of relative need.

¹ For further reference to several of these issues see chap. 7.
² U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 361), Emergency Relief Appropriation. 75th Congress, 1st Session. 1937, p. 145.
³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 17-18.
Despite administrative difficulties and hardships involved in denying jobs to admittedly needy workers in favor of workers in still greater need, it is noteworthy that the relative need principle is widely accepted as a fair basis on which to distribute WPA jobs.¹ Even the Workers Alliance (in 1938) approved essentially the same plan as that later adopted by the WPA. This approval was effected through adoption of a statement that advocated the abolition of the current "requirement of relief status" and urged that:

... preference in the placement of those registered should be given to the following groups:

a) Unemployed (both men and women, married or single) in families where there is no income from private employment.
b) Unemployed in families where the income from private employment is less than could be obtained under this program.²

Similarly, Representative Marcantonio of New York (who could hardly be classed as a tight-fisted reactionary) has proposed that even under the sweeping all-out employment programs he has advocated from time to time, preference should be given first "to those without immediate source of income," and second to those whose income fell below what they might earn under his proposed program.³

While many observers have applauded the apparent justice of giving the comparatively few available WPA jobs to workers in relatively greater need than others, no one has yet suggested how realization that the neediest workers have been given employment helps to meet the need of a family which is itself in genuine distress.

¹ Acceptance of this principle is doubtless attributable to the same spirit that accepts as proper the exemption of family men from military service so long as the number having no dependents appears adequate to the need.
³ See, for example, U. S. House, H. R. 8615. 76th Congress, 3d Session. February, 1940, sec. 203 (a).
CHAPTER XVII
ELIGIBILITY: SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS
AND CONTINUED NEED

Eligibility for Social Security Benefits

Few aspects of the WPA program have caused more misunderstanding, more bitterness, and more distress than policies regarding eligibility for WPA employment of persons considered eligible for benefits under the Social Security Act. It may also be said that no policies affecting the WPA program have suffered more frequent, more abrupt, or more marked changes of direction than have those relating to the effect of eligibility for social security benefits upon eligibility for WPA employment. Policies and changes in policies effected from time to time have been influenced by a wide variety of factors.

"Those Eligible for Special Assistance Should Be Excluded from WPA Jobs"

In favor of the WPA's more or less consistent attempts to deny employment to persons presumably eligible for social security benefits it has been urged that since so few WPA jobs are available they should be limited to those for whom no other provision could possibly be made; ¹ that persons eligible for social security benefits (especially old-age assistance and aid to dependent children) are considered primarily the responsibility of state and local agencies rather than the federal government; and that, since WPA employment was only "a temporary and emergency type of assistance," needy families and individuals should, if possible, be granted the "more fundamental," "permanent" and "continuing" type of aid

¹ Thus, as already noted, these policies are in part only further manifestations of the administration's interest in seeing WPA jobs awarded on the basis of relative need. Of this, Colonel Harrington said in March, 1939, that during the fall of 1938 the WPA had adopted the policy that it "should not be caring for people for whom other provision has been made by legislation . . . [even] in those States where advantage had not been taken of the provisions for taking care of them or where the benefits were very small."—U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings on S. 1265), Department of Public Works—Amending Social Security Act. 76th Congress, 1st Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939, p. 264.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

(such as old-age assistance) available under the Social Security Act.1

A further factor is that persons eligible for old-age assistance, aid to the blind, or aid to dependent children under the Social Security Act frequently cannot (because of their age, physical disabilities, lack of work experience, or responsibility for the care of young children) properly be considered as "unemployed" or "employable" workers for whom WPA employment is primarily intended, and that even if such persons were employable, they are frequently less employable than other workers who might be given WPA jobs.2 It has also been urged that relief expenditures on the part of local and state governments could be reduced by transferring workers from WPA employment to special assistance benefits (of which the federal government paid a substantial proportion) thus making room on WPA jobs for workers previously maintained on general relief financed wholly from state and local funds. Finally, it has been held that without pressure resulting from the discharge of aged workers or mothers of dependent children the establishment of social security programs in some states would be unduly delayed and too low benefits would be tolerated too long.

Although certain high WPA officials have roundly denied dismissing workers for the purpose of stimulating states to adopt or liberalize their social security provisions, others have frankly admitted that this has sometimes been done. Even Colonel Harrington in 1939 admitted that action on the part of such states as had been delinquent in establishing adequate social security provisions would be "accelerated" by the WPA's policy of "removing people

2 Of this argument Harry Hopkins once said "... people who work on our program should be people who in normal times would be supporting themselves on a job—not people who are in need because they are unable to work. Provision for these people is traditionally a State or local responsibility."—WPA Release 4-1199, June 20, 1936.

When Colonel Somervell, WPA administrator in New York City, ordered the removal of all persons sixty-five years of age or over he is reported to have said it was designed in part to eliminate "dead wood."—As quoted in the New York Herald Tribune, June 30, 1938.


426
Eligibility

more or less ruthlessly" even though it was known that "no social-
security benefits" were available to them.¹

"Those Eligible for Special Assistance Should Not Be Barred from WPA Employment"

Against this consideration it has been urged that it is unjust
and heartless to use needy aged men and women and mothers of
dependent children as a club to bludgeon states into establishing
or liberalizing their social security programs.

Although the WPA sometimes has discharged workers "ruthlessly" in a desperate effort to hasten the development or liberali-
ization of social security measures, there have been times when
action has resulted in such hardship that it had to be reversed.
Early in 1938, for example, Aubrey Williams told a House Com-
mittee that the WPA was compelled to make exceptions to its
policy of releasing workers who should have been granted social
security benefits. These, he declared, were sometimes "such a
miserable amount" that the WPA "could not take the position of
forcing the people off [its] rolls." Furthermore, Mr. Williams
declared, the policy "worked great injustice" to mothers, for
example, who wanted jobs rather than direct assistance.²

Others, too, have condemned the WPA for denying the satis-
faction of work to potential workers even though other assistance
might be provided for them under the Social Security Act. Writing
of the "bitter resentment" felt by old persons weeded out of WPA
jobs in favor of younger men, Gordon Hamilton once wrote,"This clinging to work as security, as respectability, as companion-
ship, as reassurance about health and strength, as occupation in its
most poignant sense, is characteristic of many persons quite apart
from income."³

Although emphasis has usually been laid upon the unfairness of
depriving mothers or older workers of the privilege of working,
attention has sometimes been focused upon the obligation of bene-
cipients to work in return for the assistance granted them. In the

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 85), Addi-
tional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress,
1st Session. 1939, p. 67.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Supplemental Appropri-
ation, Relief and Work Relief, Fiscal Year 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938,
p. 40.
³ "Case Work in Old Age Assistance," in the Family, vol. 18, no. 10, February,
1938, p. 332.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

first annual report of the Social Security Board, for example, it was reported that "In some localities there still is a belief that . . . women should work for their assistance, though teachers and others interested in preventing juvenile delinquency urge that it be made possible for needy mothers to take care of their children at home." 1

A second consideration which has frequently been urged against requiring workers to give up WPA employment because they might be eligible for assistance under the Social Security Act is that such action is unfair because of the great discrepancy between the benefits payable under the two programs. When the so-called Byrnes Committee in 1939 was considering unemployment relief problems, Senator Byrnes advocated liberalizing social security benefits so as to "remove from the field of relief workers people who are the recipients of income under the Social Security Act and to avoid the continuance of assistance where under the present law we are providing checks for such small amounts that the only result is that the worker goes over to the W.P.A. to seek employment. . . . In practice it was utterly impossible for a worker receiving not more than $4.50 per month, or an aged person receiving $5 per month, to be denied the right to receive other aid." 2

Because of the discrepancy between WPA wages and special assistance under the Social Security Act, workers' preference for employment as opposed to receipt of assistance may well be influenced by the promise of greater income as much as by dislike of "getting something for nothing."

Even when WPA policy normally required the discharge of persons who might be aided under the Social Security Act, exceptions have frequently been permitted under unusual circumstances. 3 Whatever may have been intended with respect to deciding cases on the basis of their best interests, however, WPA policies normally denying employment to persons who might re-

2 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings on S. 1265), Department of Public Works—Amending Social Security Act. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 12.
3 For examples of such policies in Indiana, Minnesota, and Louisiana see: Indiana Unemployment Relief Commission, Handbook, [Indianapolis], Part I, chap. 2, p. 10, December 2, 1939; Minnesota State Board of Control, Certification Manual, St. Paul, sec. L, August 1, 1936; Louisiana WPA, Administrative C-80, New Orleans, pp. 1-3, October 17, 1936.
Eligibility

receive assistance under the Social Security Act have frequently resulted in widespread confusion and hardship. These led the National Right-to-Work Congress (held in 1939 under the auspices of the Workers Alliance) to endorse the recommendation that no worker should be discharged from WPA employment because of eligibility "for benefits under other government agencies unless such benefits are equal [to] or above WPA wages." 1

Most dramatic of the reversals of policy with respect to persons presumed to be eligible for benefits under the Social Security Act was that required by Congress early in 1939 when the WPA was forced to abandon its current practice of dismissing from WPA employment all workers presumed to be eligible for old-age assistance or aid to dependent children under the Social Security Act, regardless of whether, upon discharge, they were actually granted the assistance for which they were supposed to be eligible. 2

Numbers discharged under this policy (during a "few" months prior to 1939) were reported to have totaled approximately 45,000. In defense of this action Colonel Harrington said in January, 1939:

For some time we did not apply a rigid policy in those States where we knew that persons being removed from W.P.A. would not receive any benefits, or would receive benefits so small that they were practically negligible. But recently we have instituted action to remove from W.P.A. projects all persons eligible under the social-security law. 3

As might have been expected, this "rigid" policy suddenly threw into need thousands of aged persons and mothers of dependent children who though presumably eligible for special assistance were not (either because of the lack of appropriate programs or because of shortages of funds) given the aid to which they were supposed to be entitled. Suffering caused by this arbitrary action was well dramatized in St. Louis, where some 1,060 mothers with dependent children had been discharged by the WPA but were

2 Pub. Res. No. 1 (H. J. Res. 83). 76th Congress, 1st Session. February 4, 1939, sec. 1. This specified that "no requirement of eligibility for employment under such Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1938, as amended, shall be effective which prohibits the employment of persons 65 years of age or over or women with dependent children."
3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 53.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy
given no other aid (except federal surplus commodities) for approximately six weeks. The situation, occasioned in part by the inadequacy of the local relief agency’s administrative personnel, and in part by a lack of relief funds, was temporarily ameliorated by an emergency appropriation by the legislature.

Unfortunately, St. Louis was not the only center in the United States in which hardship resulted from WPA action of this kind. Similar conditions were reported in Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

In New Jersey the discharges drew a sharp protest from Governor A. Harry Moore, who in a formal statement declared the discharges “unjustified” and inconsistent with both the President’s and his own views of “what is fair play or humanitarian treatment.” If the principle of dropping workers upon their reaching the age of sixty-five were to be applied generally, continued Governor Moore, “we would have to scrap such splendid, able and helpful men as Jack Garner, Cordell Hull, Hiram Johnson, Justice Hughes, Carter Glass and a host of others whom we could ill afford to take from active service.”

Ohio, too, saw no little hardship resulting from the WPA practice. Condemning the “callous consequences” of dismissing aged persons and mothers of dependent children from WPA jobs, Mayor Harold H. Burton of Cleveland in 1938 urged that if the federal government had to cut down relief it should at least wait until the proper agencies could prepare to meet the needs of those for whom the federal government relinquished responsibility.

Despite distress resulting in many sections of the country and despite protests against the WPA’s practice of dismissing aged workers and mothers of dependent children presumed to be eligible for benefits under the Social Security Act, the administration staunchly defended its course. The President himself supported it and in a reply to critics of WPA policy on this question declared:

It is assumed that Congress in enacting the Social Security Act intended to make provisions of a comparatively permanent nature for persons whose need is primarily due to causes other than unemployment. Under the circumstances, the Works Progress Administration feels that their first responsibility, especially in view of the fact the number of persons whom they can

1 As quoted in the Paterson News, December 10, 1938.
Eligibility

employ is limited, must necessarily be toward those unemployed persons who cannot qualify for assistance under other Federal programs.

Moreover, since the public assistance features of the Social Security Act involve the States' assuming the primary responsibility for assistance to mothers of dependent children and to aged persons, both through the enactment of appropriate legislation and the appropriation of State funds, there is a serious question as to whether the Works Progress Administration would not delay the assumption of this long time responsibility by the States if they continue to employ such persons on the Federal works program.¹

As interpreted by Senator Byrnes, congressional action nullifying current WPA policy did not require “that every man over 65 years of age or every woman who has dependent children should be placed upon the roll.” It only meant, he said, “that that of itself should not be a bar to eligibility.”² Accordingly, regulations issued by the WPA prescribed that persons sixty-five years of age or over or women with dependent children were to be regarded as eligible for WPA employment if certified as to need and otherwise eligible, provided:

1. Such persons are not receiving public assistance benefits under the Social Security Act; or
2. Such persons do not relinquish public assistance benefits under the Social Security Act with the intent to establish eligibility for WPA employment.³

Even under this relatively strict interpretation placed upon congressional action, it was estimated that the WPA, in little more than a month, re-employed approximately 5,000 persons previously discharged because they were presumed to be eligible for special assistance grants. In April, 1939, it was reported that the WPA was employing some 90,000 workers whose families included “dependent children who could have qualified the family for aid to dependent children and 43,000 . . . workers 65 years of age or over who were possibly eligible for old-age assistance.”⁴

² U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings on S. 1265), Department of Public Works—Amending Social Security Act. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 265.
³ WPA General Letter No. 235, February 17, 1939. These provisions gave rise to interesting anomalies in states which had programs that were much like special assistance programs administered in conformity with the Social Security Act but which were not approved by the Social Security Board. Beneficiaries under these unapproved programs (as blind aid recipients in Pennsylvania and recipients of mothers’ pensions in Illinois) were free to relinquish these benefits to accept WPA jobs.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Policies, established by the WPA pursuant to congressional action early in 1939, have been continued even though Congress did not again require them. Early in 1942 they were liberalized, however, to permit welfare agencies and the WPA jointly to determine whether or not persons receiving or eligible for old-age assistance or aid to dependent children should be granted assistance of this type or be given WPA employment. Recipients themselves, as previously, were not permitted to relinquish assistance in favor of jobs with the WPA.

Congress has prescribed, however, that blind persons receiving aid under the Social Security Act may not “be prohibited from temporarily relinquishing such aid to accept employment on a Work Projects Administration project.” WPA regulations, therefore, provide that blind persons receiving assistance may be given WPA employment provided they have “the required skills and training which qualify them for employment and the problem is one of unemployment rather than of blindness.”

Blind persons not actually receiving aid, even prior to 1940, might be considered for WPA employment provided they had special skills and training which qualified them for employment and the problem was “one of unemployment, rather than of blindness.”

Since federal policies bar from WPA employment only such persons as are already receiving old-age assistance or aid to de-

1 About a year after its first action regarding aged workers and mothers of dependent children, Congress refused to approve Colonel Harrington’s contrary suggestion that after a prescribed future date, persons eligible for assistance under the public assistance provisions of the Social Security Act be declared ineligible for WPA employment. By deferring for about a year the effective date of this proposal, it was expected that the seven states (Pennsylvania, Delaware, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada, and Texas) having no plan for aid to the blind and the eight states (Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, and Texas) having no plan for aid to dependent children under the Social Security Act would have time to establish such plans. Similarly, states in which grants for old-age assistance, aid to the blind, or aid to dependent children were wholly inadequate would also have time to improve these programs before the WPA, under the suggested proposal, would be empowered to release workers presumably eligible for these types of aid.

2 See, for example, ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 15(e); ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 10(e).

3 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 15, p. 2, July 16, 1940. Congressional action on this matter was invited, in part at least, by the fact that under federal policy prescribed in July, 1939, blind persons receiving aid under the Social Security Act were not eligible for employment on WPA projects, whereas blind persons in areas (such as Pennsylvania) where there was no federally approved program of aid to blind, might be certified for WPA employment.

4 *Ibid.* For further reference to this issue see chap. 18.
Eligibility

ependent children, they seem to permit persons who might be eligible for but are not receiving such aid to choose which type of assistance to request. State policy, however, has sometimes out-run such an interpretation. In some areas WPA employment was refused persons whose applications for old-age assistance were pending even though they were not receiving aid; sometimes applicants for special assistance benefits were not eligible for WPA employment if they had already been declared eligible for, but had not yet received, assistance. In a number of states WPA employment was denied to those who had already been found eligible for assistance and for whom commitments had already been made. In Ohio, workers whose applications for special assistance were rejected because of social security fund limitations were not regarded as eligible for WPA employment. An opposite course was prescribed in Michigan where it was ruled that workers voluntarily applying for assistance were not to be discharged by the WPA until provision had been made for the payment of the benefits to which they were entitled.

Finally, although persons apparently eligible for old-age assistance appeared to be free to choose between this type of aid and WPA employment, state policies were sometimes so highly qualified that the applicant had no real alternative. In California, for example, it was prescribed that "in exceptional instances" a person eligible for old-age assistance might be referred for WPA employment if his need "is due to unemployment . . . and if he has been self-sustaining in private employment for at least 8 out of the previous 12 months, is temporarily unemployed, and has verified evidence of imminent reemployment." ¹

Early Purges of Workers Eligible for Special Assistance

The 1938-1939 purge of aged workers and mothers of dependent children was, unfortunately for those affected, not the first such move on the part of the WPA. In both 1936 and 1937 there had also been wholesale removals of aged workers and mothers of dependent children. These removals, too, resulted in widespread hardship to workers and their families and suddenly confronted local relief and public assistance authorities with bur-

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

dens which in most instances they were wholly unprepared for and in some instances unable to meet.

What was perhaps the most dramatic opposition to the WPA policy came from Detroit, where aged workers and mothers of dependent children presumably eligible for assistance under the Social Security Act were to be laid off beginning late in February, 1937. Formal protests, mass meetings, and sit-down strikes were resorted to by the workers. The administration countered by closing down projects, effecting what the workers termed a “lockout.” The mayor and the Common Council appealed to Washington on behalf of the workers; both the United Auto Workers and the Wayne County Federation of Labor supported the strike.¹ In the midst of this controversy a new order from Washington prescribed that workers who were employable and otherwise qualified should not be discharged until formal commitment granting assistance had been made. Workers previously discharged were to be re-employed provided they were employable.

Hardships Resulting from Lack of Broad, Integrated Program

In retrospect it is noteworthy that the administration which has prided itself on providing greater security to workers should so frequently have contributed to the insecurity of aged persons and mothers of dependent children by threatening their dismissal, discharging them arbitrarily only to take them back temporarily and to release them again. If the security and mental peace of needy individuals were really to be desired, it is a strange paradox that the administration did not underwrite broader and more adequate relief measures that could have prevented the bitterness and hardships which resulted from such piecemeal measures as have been established.

Finally, it is noteworthy that WPA policies with respect to the employment of persons presumed to be eligible for benefits under the Social Security Act have almost always resulted in discrimination against such persons since their security benefits were practically certain to be less than the WPA wages they might otherwise have received. Aged persons or mothers of dependent children who were not eligible for social security benefits, on the other

Eligibility for WPA as Affected by Eligibility for Social Insurance

Eligibility for or receipt of federal old-age or survivors' insurance under the Social Security Act is not in itself supposed to preclude employment by the WPA. Such income might, however, render a recipient ineligible for a WPA job if it resulted in a finding that he was not in need. Conversely, since WPA employment is not covered employment, a person receiving WPA wages is not barred from receipt of old-age insurance.

Unemployed workers, however, if eligible to receive unemployment compensation benefits, are normally ineligible for WPA employment both during the waiting period and during the period for which benefits are payable, provided such benefits are available. Thus (under unemployment compensation laws in effect early in 1940, for example) ineligibility for WPA employment applied to initial waiting periods of from one week in Texas to three weeks in 10 states and the District of Columbia during which workers had to wait before payment of compensation could begin, and applied also to periods during which payments were delayed.

Early in 1942 federal policy with respect to allowing workers to have WPA employment during a waiting period preceding receipt of unemployment compensation benefits was modified to permit such employment "in those States in which the State unemployment compensation law permits a person to earn waiting period credits while employed on projects. . . ." 1

Since unemployed workers who have already been paid all the benefits due them in any given quarter must sometimes wait until the beginning of another quarter before they can again qualify for benefit, practice in some states permits immediate certification for WPA employment in the quarter during which they cannot receive unemployment compensation. This is not the invariable rule, however. In Washington, for example, it has been ruled that "persons who may be eligible for benefits within a 30-day period may not be referred to WPA." This ruling applies not only to those who

1 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.020, [January, 1942].

435
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

have exhausted benefits payable within any one base year, but also
to workers in seasonal employment who are eligible for benefit
"only during a certain prescribed portion of the year." ¹

Especially during the early history of unemployment compensa¬
tion, when benefits were low, when inordinate delays were in¬
volved in paying even such benefits as were due, and when state
compensation policies had not yet been brought into some degree
of uniformity, various rulings affecting the eligibility of unem¬
ployment compensation beneficiaries for WPA employment re¬
sulted in numerous anomalies and untold hardship. Difficulties
encountered were due in part to interpretations adopted by various
state authorities.

Was a worker employed by the WPA to be regarded as em¬
ployed or unemployed? In some instances this question was de¬
cided in one way, in others, differently. In Michigan it was decided
both ways. At one time it was held that WPA work was employ¬
ment and not relief. Therefore, applications for unemployment
compensation benefit could not even be filed by WPA workers in¬
asmuch as claims could be accepted only from those who were un¬
employed. According to another interpretation, however, WPA
workers could be regarded as "totally unemployed" and, there¬
fore, eligible not only to file claim for but also actually to receive
benefits. The attorney general in Massachusetts also ruled that
WPA employes were to be regarded as unemployed and as such
entitled, simultaneously, to WPA wages and unemployment com¬
pensation.

A second question, closely related to the first, which gave rise
to all sorts of complications, was whether WPA employment
should be regarded as full or only as partial employment since a
worker’s WPA wages might (prior to June, 1939) be earned in a
relatively few hours a month.

On these issues the federal Social Security Board declared that
"WPA services and WPA remuneration constitute services and
wages within the meaning of these terms as defined by State laws" and
that WPA remuneration constitutes a security wage which
generally is paid for a monthly period even though the recipient
may perform services during only part of the month. "Under this
construction," declared the Board, "WPA wage recipients would

¹ Washington State Department of Social Security, Staff Manual for County Wel¬
fare Departments. Olympia, vol. 1, sec. 432.12, reissued December 10, 1941.
Eligibility

not be entitled to benefits for total or partial unemployment during any period for which their security wage was paid.”

As state unemployment compensation benefits, for the first time in American history, became payable first in one state and then in another, the WPA ruled that as these programs got under way WPA workers eligible for such benefits should file claims for them. Eligibility for benefits was not supposed to affect WPA employment, however, until the claims had been acted upon.

Workers who were not already employed by the WPA and who were apparently eligible for unemployment compensation were frequently denied employment until their benefit claims had been decided. This policy was vigorously protested not only by workers but also by relief agencies which were compelled to aid them. The director of the Department of Public Welfare in Baltimore, early in 1938, complained that this policy was already costing Baltimore more than $5,000 a week. However, in some areas (as in New York State) workers who might be eligible for unemployment compensation were offered WPA jobs until eligibility was finally determined. In West Virginia, where WPA workers were not supposed to be discharged until their applications for unemployment compensation had been acted upon, and where benefits (when paid) were extremely low, the Department of Unemployment Compensation, according to testimony before a Senate Committee, “just did not make determinations of eligibility . . . for persons who would thereby be removed from the W.P.A. without obtaining substantial benefits from unemployment compensation.” “We did our best,” admitted the director of the Department, “to suggest . . . [that claimants] go home and just forget about it.”

Since interpretations declaring WPA employment to be real work have sometimes meant that workers could not even file their applications for benefits so long as they were employed by the WPA, various devices have been worked out to inform WPA officials of workers who should file benefit claims. These workers,

---

2 See, for example, Buffalo Times, May 3, 1938.
3 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings on S. 1265), Department of Public Works—Amending Social Security Act. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 103.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy.

then, were supposed to be dismissed from their WPA jobs, remaining ineligible for further employment until they applied for and exhausted all benefit due them.

When the great disparity between the amount of WPA wages and unemployment compensation benefits payable to many workers became apparent, David K. Niles, then assistant administrator of the WPA, admitted that this disparity constituted a “real difficulty.” Examples were cited of workers released from $15 a week jobs to accept as little as $1.50 a week in unemployment benefit. However, it was thought that “in time” matters would be arranged so that “neither the individual nor the States which have put unemployment insurance systems into operation” would suffer. “We do not intend,” Mr. Niles explained, “to force workers off the WPA payroll in order that they may accept insurance payments on which they cannot possibly live.”

To remedy this situation, WPA employment in some (though by no means all) areas was given to a second worker in families in which another member was eligible for or receiving unemployment compensation. Much more far reaching was the provision that (with the approval of federal WPA officials) established policy might be waived to permit the continued employment of workers who were eligible for only very low benefits. More recently, federal policy has prescribed that persons eligible for unemployment compensation “benefits equal to or less than 75 per cent of the Unskilled ‘A’ wage applicable to the area in which they reside may be certified [for WPA employment] if they elect not to claim such benefits during their employment on a project.” However, it was specifically stated that it was not expected that workers would receive project employment and unemployment compensation benefits concurrently.

One striking exception to general policies requiring workers to exhaust all unemployment compensation benefits before they could be employed by the WPA has been that applying to workers entitled to veteran preference. Since, by congressional act, all

2 By the summer of 1941 exemptions had been granted 12 states, only five of which, interestingly enough, were in the South. In three of these (North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi) workers eligible for unemployment compensation benefits of no more than $3.00 a week might be employed by the WPA.
3 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.020, [January, 1942].
Eligibility

such persons are eligible for WPA employment so long as their total income does not exceed a prescribed limit, they may qualify for WPA employment even though they may be receiving unemployment benefits—provided these do not bring their total family income to more than the stipulated amount.

Difficulties Arising from Established Practices

Policies with respect to providing WPA employment for workers eligible for unemployment compensation, like those relating to workers eligible for special assistance under the Social Security Act, illustrate again the lack of co-ordination among the nation’s various relief and insurance programs and the anomalies that inevitably result.

The sudden discharge, for the duration of the waiting period, of WPA workers who had been receiving only security wages instead of normal earnings inflicted great hardship upon them. Added to difficulties arising from this source were those resulting from prolonged delay of perhaps five or six weeks while the newly established compensation agencies computed benefit allowances and made the payments. On top of all this came wholly inadequate weekly benefits which frequently fell far below the earnings a worker might otherwise have received from the WPA.

When it is recalled that unemployment compensation benefits usually amount to only about half a worker’s usual wages, that maximum rates provide for the highest paid workers only about $65 to $78 a month, and that legal minimum rates vary from approximately $43.33 a month in California to approximately $13 in 11 states,1 $8.66 in Alabama and only about $6.50 a month in North Carolina, it is clear that workers may receive much less in unemployment compensation benefits than they might receive in wages if they were employed by the WPA.2

Actual comparisons of average WPA wages for the three months—June, July, and August, 1939—with unemployment

1 Maine, Indiana, South Dakota, West Virginia, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and New Mexico.

439
compensation benefits paid during the second quarter of 1939 show that the latter, computed on a monthly basis, fell below average WPA earnings in all but three states (Oklahoma, Wyoming, and Nevada). In Kansas, both averages were approximately the same.

Among the remaining states the average unemployment compensation benefit, computed on a monthly basis, was at least 90 per cent of average WPA earnings in four states (Michigan, Tennessee, New Mexico, and Arizona); was at least 80 per cent but less than 90 per cent of WPA earnings in 13 states; and was at least 70 per cent but less than 80 per cent in 19 states. In five jurisdictions (Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia) average unemployment compensation benefits, computed on a monthly basis, were only 60 to 65 per cent of the average WPA earnings paid in those states. The remaining four states (New York, Illinois, Montana, and Texas) are omitted from this discussion because of the lack of data permitting comparisons with other states.

Thus, it may be seen that workers who are not covered by unemployment compensation but who, upon loss of their jobs, may be employed by the WPA without any required waiting period are likely to fare much better than their fellows who are compelled to get along on the comparatively low benefits paid under existing unemployment compensation programs. This anomaly might, of course, be abolished by denying WPA employment to non-covered workers until after a waiting period more or less equal to that of the covered workers. This practice, however, would work great hardship, particularly in areas having inadequate provision for general relief; and would also aggravate difficulties arising from keeping workers in idleness and from failure to give them useful tasks that would not only benefit the community but would also preserve morale, skills, and general employability.

1 Amounts used throughout this discussion are computed by multiplying weekly unemployment benefits by four and one-third, the number of weeks in an average month.


3 New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Maryland, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, California, and Washington.
Eligibility

Continued Need a Condition of Eligibility for Continued Employment

Legislation calling for recurrent review of the needs of WPA workers and the release of those found not to be in need was first enacted by Congress in June, 1939. This action required that the commissioner of work projects "cause a periodic investigation to be made of the rolls of relief employees on work projects, and . . . eliminate from the rolls those not in actual need, such investigation to be made so that each case is investigated not less frequently than once every six months." 1 Subsequent ERA Acts have required reviews of eligibility only once every twelve months instead of semi-annually as before.

These requirements represented a complete right-about-face from the policy originally in effect, though they had been reached gradually by several steps taken during intervening years.

That the removal of workers no longer in need of WPA employment was not contemplated when the WPA program was established is clearly indicated in an executive order issued by the President in June, 1935. This order prescribed that "all persons . . . who are certified . . . as eligible for employment on projects to be conducted by the Works Progress Administration shall be regarded as continuously certified for assignment . . . unless they are requisitioned . . . for employment on other projects, in other public work, or in private industry." 2

When, as a result of this policy, critics condemned the WPA for continuing to employ workers who were not in need, Aubrey Williams, then deputy WPA administrator, in February, 1936, retorted:

It has been said that people are working on this program who do not require their job to survive. Once a person is assigned we require no recurrent investigation of his need. It is possible that another member of his family may now have employment, he may receive a bonus, he may even have occasional odd jobs that supplement his security wage. I have no apologies for this policy. If funds were adequate, I would favor a program which assured a job to every man and woman in the country who wanted to work, regardless of need. I believe that a job is a right and that properly speaking a social investigation has no part in determining that right. 3

1 ERA Act of 1939, sec. 16(f).
2 Executive Order No. 7060, June 5, 1935.
3 WPA Release 4-1039, February 16, 1936. Lack of provision for excluding from WPA jobs workers whose circumstances, after assignment by the WPA, so changed
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Clear indications that federal policy on this issue was taken at face value in many jurisdictions are available from policies and rulings made in various sections of the United States.¹

Farsighted as this policy may have been, it was soon undermined by the realization that the Works Program was unable to provide jobs for all who needed them. Keenly aware of the magnitude of relief costs, taxpayers and relief officials, especially, saw no sense in denying work to men who needed it while others who were not in need continued to be employed.

The rising tide of complaints like these soon led to a reversal of policy. As early as October, 1935, Victor Ridder, WPA administrator for New York City, was reported as wanting to establish an investigating unit to discover how much of the $5,000,000 being spent in New York City each week for work relief was going to people who needed it. Families whose incomes were adequate without relief funds, Mr. Ridder declared, were to go off the WPA pay roll.²

Despite an earlier ruling that after a worker had been assigned there could be no change in his eligibility, the WPA in Louisiana, during March, 1936, when employment quotas were being reduced, provided for cancellation of the certification of workers whose relief eligibility was doubtful and whose conditions were known to have improved so that relief was no longer needed.

Disaffection toward the policy of continuing workers in employment regardless of their need, appeared even among regional officials of the WPA. One of these, in April, 1936, recommended

---

² New York Sun, October 20, 1935.
Eligibility

to a state relief official that "free use" be made of the forms employed to cancel eligibility of families for WPA employment whenever families had "rehabilitated" themselves and where there was "ample restoration to provide for . . . [them] outside the Works Progress Administration." ¹

Though apparent during the first year of the WPA program, this drift toward employing workers on WPA jobs only so long as they were in need appears to have been greatly accelerated by passage of the ERA Act of 1936. In a number of states the change in policy was even attributed to the new WPA law.² These attempts to link changes in policy on this score to action of Congress are the more remarkable since the change of front does not appear to have been required by federal law.³

Although earlier attempts were made in various parts of the country to weed out workers who were no longer in need, the first general review of eligibility was made between November, 1936, and the spring of 1937. This resulted in the dismissal of only about 5 per cent of the combined number of those working on the program and those certified as eligible but not then employed.

During the fiscal year 1937–1938 all but 15 states ⁴ were re-

² In Illinois, for example, it was asserted that a state WPA official had advised state relief authorities that this act indicated that "continued employment under [the] Works Progress Administration shall bear direct reference to actual need."—Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Exhibit H, [Chicago], December 29, 1936.
³ Similarly, a Minnesota regulation included a statement to the effect that "under the terms of the new relief act of Congress, passed in the winter of 1936, [sic] the WPA program changes slightly in its principle of operation . . . A further significant change lies in the fact that continuing employment depends upon continuing need of relief."—Minnesota State Board of Control, Certification Manual. St. Paul, sec. B, August 1, 1936.
⁴ The only reference in the new act to the relationship between need and eligibility was in a provision specifying that "applicants in actual need whose names have not heretofore been placed on relief rolls shall be given the same eligibility for employment as applicants whose names have heretofore appeared on such rolls."—ERA Act of 1936, par. 7. This does not appear to require that continued employment had to be conditioned upon continued need. Strangely enough, the provision enacted in law appears from debate on the measure to have been intended to liberalize eligibility requirements. Instead, it became the basis upon which eligibility for continued employment, at least, was made more restrictive.
⁵ These were Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. By the next year (1938-1939) Kentucky, Iowa, Nebraska, and New Mexico were said to have instituted regular reviews. Pressure of other duties and
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ported as having a continuous review of workers' eligibility, eliminating from their WPA jobs those found ineligible under current rules and regulations. Even in states having no regular reviews it was common practice to investigate suspect cases and to make "spot checks" as funds and staff permitted.

In retrospect it is noteworthy that a clear statement of federal policy on the question of limiting WPA employment to workers who continued to be in need was not forthcoming for several months after a number of states (sometimes at the informal suggestion of WPA officials) had already adopted this policy. When a forthright announcement of the policy change did appear, it defended the new practice as being necessitated by lack of funds rather than as a desirable end in itself.

Efforts to limit WPA employment to workers who continued to be in need were greatly accelerated in 1938 when Congress suddenly became aware of the extent to which WPA workers were being permitted to supplement their WPA pay by working at other jobs in their free time.

As a condition to continued employment, workers were to be required to file quarterly statements of their earnings, "if any," from outside employment while employed by the WPA. It was not required that workers having any considerable amount of earnings should be discharged but only that these filed statements were to be "taken into consideration in assigning such workers . . . and in continuing them in such employment." 3

various unanticipated demands upon the limited personnel available frequently interfered with state plans to review regularly the eligibility of workers.

1 A high official in the relief organization in one state which was among the first to insist upon current need as a condition to continued employment reported that the policy was brought about only after discussion with state and regional WPA officials and had not, so far as he knew, "been put into writing by Washington."

2 Release of "employees found no longer in need" was necessary "to conserve the funds," declared Aubrey Williams in November, 1936.—WPA General Letter No. 98, November 28, 1936.

This same explanation was announced to workers in a number of states where (as in Ohio and Wisconsin) great emphasis was given to the fact that the reviews of eligibility were being made because of "insufficient funds" and "restricted employment quotas."

3 ERA Act of 1938, sec. 10. This action had been suggested by the Senate Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief which had declared: "Admittedly Works Progress Administration does not provide a job for every unemployed person in the Nation. This being true, one worker should not be paid the security wage, receive outside employment and additional income, and continue indefinitely at work on projects, while others certified as eligible are denied the opportunity to receive any employment." This was not the only consideration, however, for it was felt that
Eligibility

Speaking of what these reports had revealed about the eligibility of workers, Colonel Harrington told a House Committee there were "practically none" who earned "enough really to affect their status." ¹

Apparently disappointed over the results of this policy, Congress early in 1939 required an investigation of relief employees with a view to eliminating "those not in actual need." ² The review made pursuant to this requirement resulted in the removal of only 37,295 (or 1.3 per cent) of the 2,926,926 workers whose circumstances were reviewed.³ Nevertheless, Congress wrote into the ERA Act of 1939 the policy of reviewing workers’ needs at least semi-annually. Release of those found "not in actual need" was made mandatory.

This requirement was inspired in part by the fact that Congress lacked confidence in the standards by which relief agencies in various parts of the country adjudged applicants as in need of WPA employment.

Six months’ experience with the semi-annual review showed that only about 1.6 per cent of the workers whose eligibility was reviewed were found to be no longer in need, although another 1.1 per cent were found to be ineligible on other grounds. The second six months’ experience was essentially the same as that of the first.

On the basis of these results (and recommendations of WPA officials) Congress in 1940 required only one review of each worker’s need each year. During the first ten months this policy was in effect the eligibility of 1,273,616 workers was reviewed.

outside employment of workers already assured a security wage might break down established wage scales.—U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 2, p. 1386.

¹ U. S. Senate Special Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 96-97. For a statement of what these reports disclosed see chap. 7.


³ In proportion to numbers reviewed, cancellations of eligibility because workers were not in need ranged from 4.3 per cent in Oklahoma, 4.2 per cent in Kentucky, and 3.1 per cent in Wyoming to less than 1 per cent in 15 states, reaching .3 per cent in Texas and northern California, and only .1 per cent in New York State, exclusive of New York City. (These 15 states were: New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Virginia, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and California.)
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Of this number only 24,845 (or about 2 per cent) were found not to be in need. Another 15,774 workers (or approximately 1 per cent) were found ineligible because of other reasons.

When Congress began consideration of new WPA legislation in 1941, WPA officials asked that the mandatory annual review be eliminated. They reiterated again and again their desire to have recurrent reviews but wanted to be relieved of the necessity of reviewing every worker’s need each year. “With a limited amount of administrative money,” Mr. Hunter told a House Committee, “I think it would be more sensible if we were to conduct the review by determining from time to time the localities where the review is currently most needed and then reviewing all the workers in that locality in a group.”

Another criticism advanced with reference to mandatory reviews was their cost. According to an estimate made in 1941, the cost of reviews was approximately $1.25 per worker, making a total of $1,250,000 to review at some time during the year the need of 1,000,000 workers. This estimate was materially below that made the previous year when it was reported that an annual review would cost some $3,750,000 and semi-annual reviews, $5,750,000. Instead of spending this money for periodic reviews, high WPA officials thought it would be better to give it to state and local relief agencies to help them do a better job of making investigations and referring needy workers to the WPA.

Despite all official pleas, reinforced by that of President Roosevelt, who asked elimination of the annual review on the ground that it was “unnecessary and costly,” Congress re-enacted the objectionable provisions.

Inasmuch as workers are constantly leaving WPA rolls and must be subjected to a review of their need and eligibility before they can be employed again, the WPA has ruled that “in general it will not be necessary to make a review of need of any person within 90 days after the last previous determination of need.” However, in order to prevent workers from escaping the necessity of having their needs reviewed, the WPA has ruled that, unless it is established that they left to take other employment, workers voluntarily leaving their WPA jobs “immediately preceding a scheduled review of need” shall not be eligible for reassignment.

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 18-19.
Eligibility

until their need status has been determined “by a thorough investigation.”

Reviews of eligibility during the first ten months of the fiscal year 1942, when a total of 687,000 certifications were reviewed, resulted in canceling only about 15,000 certifications (or approximately 2.2 per cent of the total reviewed) because workers were no longer found to be in need. Another 1.4 per cent of the certifications reviewed were canceled for other reasons.

Abandonment of the WPA's original policy of permitting workers to continue in employment regardless of changes in their circumstances repudiated earlier promises that WPA employment was to be “a job and not relief” and that once workers were employed by the WPA they would no longer be subjected to investigations and “pantry snooping.” Still, it was not only the workers who were to suffer because of this change of front; efficiency of operations has also been affected by the resultant labor turnover. Thus, here again the work aspects of the WPA program have been subordinated to its relief role.

The fact that a certain number of ineligible workers are discovered through periodic reviews does not mean, of course, that in the absence of such reviews these workers would necessarily be kept on the rolls indefinitely. Information received from relief agencies, workers themselves, other workers, or complainants having knowledge or suspecting that WPA workers have other resources frequently leads to their dismissal. Furthermore, policies requiring that workers leaving WPA jobs to take other employment or those released after eighteen months' continuous employment must be found to be in need before they can be reinstated, all help to clear the rolls of those who are not in need.

1 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.042, [January, 1942].
2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1943, p. 29.
CHAPTER XVIII

ELIGIBILITY: EMPLOYABILITY

Among the prime requisites for getting a WPA job is that an applicant must be employable and unemployed. That these two factors might some day be the only considerations taken into account in selecting workers for employment on federal jobs has long been the fond hope of many WPA officials.¹ Noteworthy among these has been Harry Hopkins, who in 1938 declared:

I think the time is coming, though I don’t think it is coming right away, when the Government Work Program for the unemployed is going to be on a basis of the ability of the worker to do a day’s work. I think the relief test is on the way out, though its exit may be gradual and cover a period of years. I think unemployment has to be treated as a problem of unemployment per se. It may be that as a matter of national policy we shall want to give work to all the unemployed.²

Though the question as to whether or not a given worker is unemployed might appear to be a relatively simple one, it is bound up, in practice, with a wide variety of considerations such as his usual occupation, the availability of work, rates of pay offered for available jobs, and the existence of a labor dispute in connection with some possible opening. The effect of these factors upon eligibility for WPA employment is discussed in the succeeding chapter. Here, attention is limited to the hardly less complicated question of employability.

Employability is neither easily defined nor easily measured.³

¹ This hope is shared by a number of national leaders and important organizations, as suggested in chap. 14.
² Hopkins, Harry L., Our Job. New York (City) WPA, No. 2 in a series of talks to New York City WPA executives as part of the Executive Training Program, November 16, 1938, p. 7.
³ Practical implications of these difficulties were clearly revealed when Mr. Hopkins, in April, 1936, was pressed by a member of a House Committee to estimate the number of employable persons left on relief rolls. To this he replied that the number was a “matter of opinion and not a matter of statistical data. One person might say that 100 people are employable and eligible, while another person of equal ability might say that only 50 are employable. Therefore, it is not a matter of statistical fact. Two people will disagree as to whether a man is employable or not.”—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1936, p. 182.
Eligibility

Whether or not a person is "employable" depends as much upon the nature of available work as upon the worker. Thus, employability is a concept which has no significance except in relation to the demand for workers to fill specific jobs. An unemployed watchmaker may be considered unemployable if the only available work is ditch digging; an unskilled manual laborer, if the only work to be had requires a high degree of some skill. As defined by a WPA ruling issued early in 1942 employability was to be "determined by the ability of a person to perform work for which he is qualified in a satisfactory manner." ¹

Relation to Available WPA Jobs

Employability, as a condition of eligibility for WPA employment, has usually been related to a worker's ability to perform work of definite types that the WPA has available or is empowered to prosecute. An Indiana definition released in 1940, for example, went somewhat further than the federal ruling noted above and prescribed that "Employability shall be determined by the ability of the person to perform work for which he is qualified, in a satisfactory manner, on projects which WPA has available." ²

In the adjoining state of Ohio, however, employability was related not to types of work the WPA had available but to those it was authorized to prosecute.³

In areas where there have been too few white-collar workers to justify establishing projects for their employment or where no sponsor was willing to initiate and contribute to the cost of such projects, white-collar workers have frequently been declared "unemployable" and therefore ineligible for WPA employment unless they could perform manual labor. Conversely, when the only employment open to women has been that provided on sewing projects, women who knew nothing but manual work and who lacked skills needed on sewing projects have frequently been de-

¹ WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.009, [January, 1942].
³ According to the policy there in effect in 1939, "Employability shall be determined by the ability of a person to perform work for which he is qualified in a satisfactory manner on projects eligible for prosecution by the Work Projects Administration. . . . This shall not be construed to . . . prevent the certification of persons whose normal occupations are not currently being used on projects, provided they are otherwise eligible and would normally be considered in the labor market."—Ohio WPA, Rules and Regulations Governing Employment Based on Operating Procedure No. E-9. Columbus, Part II, sec. 8, rev. September 6, 1939.
nied certification for WPA jobs on the ground that they were unemployable.

In jurisdictions having a relatively wide variety of WPA jobs available, workers have sometimes been certified as employable and therefore eligible for work on certain kinds of jobs (such as "manual," "non-manual," or "light" work) but not on others. Or, workers may be placed in any one of a number of categories (such as A, B, or C) depending upon their capacity to do work of various types. Gradations of this kind, in one state, have been carried to such a fine point that workers have sometimes been classed as capable of only "very, very light work." Thus, a worker's "employability" and eligibility for WPA employment frequently depend as much upon the variety of jobs offered by the WPA as by the characteristics of the worker. As a result, a worker classed as unemployable one week might, upon the inauguration of some new WPA project, suddenly find himself not only employable but much sought after.

Since preference both in making assignments and in the retention of workers on projects is supposed to be given on the basis of their qualifications for the work in hand, "employability" frequently fluctuates not only with the variety of WPA jobs available but also with the number.

Thus, workers who are regarded as "unemployable," or at least as relatively unemployable in comparison with other workers or applicants, may on this ground be denied employment so long as the number of available jobs falls far short of meeting current needs. Conversely, when jobs become relatively more plentiful, workers previously denied jobs or even discharged by the WPA for inability to "hit the ball" (or because of what official classifications sometimes term "unsatisfactory occupational ratings") may subsequently find themselves eligible for employment.

Inasmuch as a worker's employability and eligibility for WPA employment depend so largely on factors which are beyond his control but which, to an important extent at least, are in the control of the very agency that is responsible for providing this employment, many critics of federal relief policy contend that "employability" is no fair basis on which to divide responsibility.

1 As already noted in chap. 10.
Eligibility

between the federal government on one hand and state and local governments on the other.¹

Relation to Labor Market

To secure WPA employment in many areas applicants and workers must not only qualify as able to do acceptably the kinds of work the WPA has or may have available but must also give promise of being able to qualify for private employment. As stated in the policies of some states, WPA employment can be given only to workers “who are in the labor market,” are able to qualify for “normal employment,” for “work that is available or is likely to be available,” or (as in California in 1941) to qualify for “employment normally existing in private industry under the conditions prevailing for that employment.”²

Criteria commonly relied upon in determining whether or not a given applicant should be regarded as being in the labor market are as follows: Has he had previous paid work experience? Is he qualified by training for some kind of remunerative work? Does he give some promise of being able to hold his own should he be able to secure private employment? At best, application of these tests involves much discretion and no little uncertainty. Their importance, nevertheless, has been emphasized again and again.

Policies prescribed in Ohio with respect to a worker’s relationship to the labor market have been fairly representative of those adopted elsewhere. The Ohio WPA in 1938 held that:

Since WPA is intended to furnish work opportunity for the unemployed, persons not previously in the labor market and those not likely to qualify for any future private employment should not be certified. . . .

Certifications for persons who have not been in the labor market for the past several years shall be studied very carefully. Consideration shall be given to inability to obtain employment because of economic conditions. Acceptance or rejection of such certifications depends upon the work history, age, health, etc., of the worker.³

¹ For further discussion of the policy of dividing responsibility on this ground, see chap. 29.
² California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 250.1, rev. April 10, 1941.
³ A New Mexico ruling of 1938 interpreted “normal employment” to mean “employment in private industry or any political subdivision of the Government. Project employment with a lower standard of employability than the Works Progress Administration shall not be considered ‘Normal Employment.’”—New Mexico WPA, IC-2341-a, Santa Fe, [July, 1938].
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In the adjoining state of Indiana it was held, in 1940, that applicants for WPA employment "must have been previously in the labor market and likely to qualify for future private employment, unless through education and training, the applicant is occupationally adapted to the program." 1 In North Carolina it was ruled in 1939 that WPA employment should be given only to those who "would normally be considered in the labor market." 2

Emphasizing the importance of considerations like these, Harry Hopkins once declared: "People who work on our program should be people who in normal times would be supporting themselves on a job." 3

In some instances, particularly in the case of older workers or handicapped workers, it is not enough to have had paid work experience in order to qualify as employable. It is necessary also to have had recent experience. Thus, under a California policy already referred to, 4 a worker old enough to be eligible for old-age assistance could qualify for unemployment relief (a necessary prelude to WPA employment in this state) only if he could show that "he has been self-sustaining in private employment for at least 8 out of the previous 12 months..." A New Mexico ruling of 1938 prescribed that "a physically handicapped person may be considered employable if he can show that he was regularly employed or self-employed within a reasonable time prior to his application." 5

That requirements with respect to previous work experience have frequently militated against the employment of women has often been by design rather than by accident. This has been particularly true in the South where the WPA has been under great pressure to employ large numbers of women (particularly Negro women) for whom it has been difficult to provide suitable projects. As a result, policies regarding the employment of women have been prescribed with special care. In Georgia, for example, it was ruled early in 1940 that eligible women might be given WPA employment "if they have definite employment histories; or if they have education, training, and experience which fits them" not for

3 WPA Release 4-1199, June 20, 1936.
4 See chap. 17.
5 New Mexico WPA, IC-2341-b. Santa Fe, [July, 1938].
Eligibility

WPA employment, as policies frequently prescribe, but “to obtain private employment.” In further explanation of the announced policy it was held that:

It should be definitely determined that such women, if not provided with employment on the WPA program, would be in the labor market for private employment. If a woman has had no previous employment history, a careful check should be made to determine what change has taken place in her economic situation which has caused her to be in the labor market as contrasted with her former circumstances.¹

A second group which is necessarily affected adversely by strict interpretation of existing requirements with respect to previous experience, is that ever-growing body of youths who have had no opportunity “to get their hands in.” However, almost everywhere general rules regarding previous work experience or training have been waived to permit the employment of youths who “through no fault of their own, have had no opportunity for work experience” owing to the depression, or who for other reasons have not had previous opportunity to work.²

In view of emphasis laid upon a worker’s relationship to the labor market, it may readily be seen that eligibility for WPA employment may hinge upon the extent of unemployment in a community or upon the number and variety of jobs available in private employment as much as upon the number and kinds of WPA jobs available.

Previous Work Experience of WPA Workers

Despite the firm stand taken by the WPA in normally limiting employment to those having previous work experience, critics have frequently ridiculed the program for its alleged desire to provide jobs for workers who won’t, can’t, and never did work.³

¹ Georgia WPA, Manual of Procedure for Certification. [Atlanta], Part II, sec. 14, p. 36, February 15, 1940. Policies of this kind have been reported as causing considerable embarrassment in Ohio, where the WPA at one time was confronted with the question of whether it should retain in employment women whose only work experience had been with the WPA. In short, were women who had worked only on WPA jobs to be regarded as having had “work experience”? Since refusal to count WPA experience as work experience would have cast reflections upon the nature of that program, these women were allowed to remain.


³ See, for example, “Relief Heads Feel All Want Jobs,” by Tully Nettleton, in the Christian Science Monitor, August 4, 1936.
Nevertheless, data collected by the WPA show that the great majority of its project employes have had previous work experience—many of them for considerable periods of time.

When the Works Program was first proposed, for example, Mr. Hopkins reported to a Senate Committee that 63 per cent of the workers then on relief rolls had had more than four and one-half years’ experience at what was regarded as their usual occupations. He reported, moreover, that a large proportion of workers on relief rolls had not only had previous experience but had also enjoyed relatively stable employment, 40 per cent of the total having been employed by the same employer for more than four and one-half years.

When the WPA studied the usual occupations of approximately 6.5 million workers (of whom nearly 4.5 million were the economic heads of families) eligible for WPA employment, it was found that, as of January 15, 1936, only about 4 per cent of the family heads and approximately 13 per cent of the total number of workers had to be classed as “inexperienced persons” because they “had performed no gainful work of any kind during the 10 years preceding” the date of the study.\(^1\) Reports of this study, unfortunately, show nothing of the duration of the previous work experience recorded nor do they indicate how many of the inexperienced group received WPA assignments.

Corrington Gill, assistant administrator of the WPA, who once termed vocationally inexperienced workers “the most tragic group” among those needing WPA employment, has said of relief workers in general: “We feel that we have ample evidence that the great bulk of these people are employable in every sense of the word. They are physically able to work, have had experience at some occupation, and are pathetically anxious to get jobs again.” \(^2\)

The study, already referred to in other connections, of 6,333 cases certified for WPA employment in 13 cities \(^3\) revealed that only 8 per cent of those employed on the Works Program at the

---

\(^{1}\) Hauser, Philip M., and Jenkinson, Bruce L., Usual Occupations of Workers Eligible for Works Program Employment in the United States, January 15, 1936. WPA, 1937, pp. 2, 6, 7. For further reference to this study and the variety of usual occupations disclosed, see chap. 9.


\(^{3}\) Manchester, Bridgeport, Paterson, Wilkes-Barre, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Omaha, Baltimore, Atlanta, Houston, Butte, and San Francisco.

454
Eligibility

time of the study, early in 1936, were workers who were classed as having no usual occupation.

Early in 1939 WPA officials reported that “ninety-seven out of every one hundred Works Progress Administration workers had been regularly employed in private industry before they received their first Works Progress Administration assignment.” Of these workers “the great majority,” it was said, had “records of long experience in their usual occupations”; the “average” worker having had “10 years’ experience at his regular occupation.” The statement continued:

Of the 3 percent of Works Progress Administration workers who have had no experience in private industry, about half are inexperienced young people who have recently entered the labor market to seek jobs. In addition to this younger group, slightly more than one in a hundred Works Progress Administration workers are women without previous work experience, most of whom have been forced to become economic heads of families because the usual breadwinner is ill or disabled, has deserted the family, or has died. A considerable proportion of these women have children dependent upon them, although they may be unable to qualify for aid under the provisions for aid to dependent children; most of the remainder have other dependents in need of support. Few of them have other persons in their families who are able to work.

However, about 90 percent of all women employed on projects have gained work experience in private employment. As would be expected, the large majority had been previously employed at semiskilled work in manufacturing industries, at domestic or personal-service jobs, and in clerical or other white-collar occupations.

Opposition to Insistence upon Prescribed Qualifications

Just as there have been those who have deplored the WPA’s insistence that workers, to hold their jobs, must “give a day’s work for their day’s pay,” so have there been others who, in their zeal to have the WPA fulfill its role as a relief program have

More than a third of these (38 per cent) were assigned to unskilled jobs, nearly a third (31 per cent) to semi-skilled jobs not in building construction, and more than a fifth (22 per cent) to office work. The remaining 9 per cent were assigned to professional, skilled, or domestic work.—Shepherd, Susan M., and Bancroft, Gertrude, Survey of Cases Certified for Works Program Employment in 13 Cities. WPA, Series IV, no. 2, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1937, p. 29.

U. S. Senate, Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings on S. 1265), Department of Public Works—Amending Social Security Act. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 272-273. For discussion of the more specific problem of limiting employment on projects requiring special skills to persons possessing those skills, see chap. 9.

See chap. 10.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

wanted it to soft-pedal its declarations that it would employ only competent workers. There was, for example, the so-called Green bill (presented in the House in 1940) which would have prohibited any requirement by which “persons who have not within any previous period been employed” might be declared ineligible for WPA employment.¹ In support of this proposition Representative Green of Florida declared:

... the past-work-history requirement ... should be abolished. In my State, of course, there is very little industrial employment. It is, as in the past, impossible for many of the most needy persons to have had a work history. How can people be expected to have a work history when there has been no gainful employment for them to be engaged in? This requirement has been a serious handicap, especially to the women who have always kept their own homes and occupied the role of housewife and also to the young women who have not been able to find any employment this requirement is unfair and should be abolished.²

Another proposal of this type (less sweeping than the Green proposal and having a better chance of success) was that made in 1941 by the director of the national legislative committee of the American Legion. He asked inclusion in WPA legislation of a provision making it illegal, in assigning veterans of World War I, to apply “any qualification, ability, or experience test,” except in the case of “such jobs or positions as require special skills or a specially trained personnel, such as engineers, technicians, etc.”³

Though suggestions like these might make the WPA a more effective relief program, they run directly counter to the aspirations of those who want it to be more of a work program and who, like many WPA officials, would like to see jobs awarded almost without regard to considerations other than a worker’s ability to do a job.

Although available data indicate that the greater proportion of WPA workers have had previous work experience and many have had relatively stable employment records, workers employed

² Congressional Record, March 25, 1940, p. 3348.
³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 395.

In passing it may be well to recall that (as noted in chap. 11) one of the arguments frequently advanced in favor of giving to veterans the various kinds of preferential consideration accorded them, in making assignments to WPA jobs, was the fact that many of them were disabled and most of those who had not already arrived at were rapidly approaching an age which made it increasingly difficult to land private jobs.—See p. 355 of these same hearings.
Eligibility

by the WPA frequently are taken on only after they have been unemployed for a considerable period.¹

AGE, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CONDITION

Age and physical condition are, and from the very inception of the federal Works Program have always been, primary considerations with respect to employability.² As stated in 1939, federal policy on this issue was that “No person whose age or physical condition is such as to make his employment dangerous to his health or safety, or to the health and safety of others may be employed on any work project.”³ Substantially this same language had been incorporated in an executive order issued by the President as early as May, 1935. Elaborating upon the reasons for this policy, an early statement by Harry Hopkins declared, “We do not intend to jeopardize the lives of workers having physical impairments by assigning them to work which their physical condition incapacitates them to perform. We do not intend to increase the economic burden of the State by increasing the number of its public charges through the death of the wage-earner of a family.”⁴

In some states employability has been related not only to physical but also to mental health. In Pennsylvania early in 1940, for example, certification was supposed to be denied to “persons . . . known to be physically or mentally incapable of securing or holding employment.”⁵ Similarly, in Wisconsin it was prescribed in 1939 that “No person whose age, physical or mental condition is such as to make his employment dangerous to his health or safety or to the health or safety of others may be considered eligible for employment.”⁶ An Illinois ruling of 1939 specified that to be classed as employable a person’s “behavior habits” also had to be such that, if employed, he would not harm or

¹ See chap. 19.
² For further treatment of the question of the effect of age upon eligibility for WPA employment see chap. 11.
³ WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 43, pp. 1-2, July 31, 1939.
⁴ WPA-105, November 13, 1935.

457
jeopardize himself or others. In Missouri persons whose "inability to adjust themselves socially," that is, the mentally deficient, the "anti-social," and the "abnormally troublesome," would jeopardize not only the safety but also "the efficiency of fellow workers and of the project," were to be regarded as "unemployable." A New Mexico ruling of 1938 specified that "An applicant who is unable to retain employment due to habitual intoxication, the use of narcotics, or who is obviously suffering from mental disease or emotional instability shall not be considered eligible for certification."

This statement of policy corresponds closely with that in effect in California in recent years. The California rulings have gone somewhat farther, however, declaring that "Persons on parole from mental institutions are unemployable, pending their final discharge." This provision, interestingly enough, is diametrically opposite to that in effect in certain other areas where persons on parole from mental hospitals have not only been eligible for WPA jobs but where their employment has been considered an important element in rehabilitating parolees.

According to an early policy prescribed in Minnesota, applicants whose work habits indicated "inability to adjust to an employment situation" should not be certified for WPA employment. Included in the category were "persons whose temperament prevents adaptability to supervision."

While physical and mental health have usually been insisted upon as prerequisites to WPA employment, some allowances have been made from time to time to give special consideration to persons appearing particularly to need employment as occupational therapy. A recent example of this was the federal ruling (of 1941) which prescribed that "In those cases where the United States Employees Compensation Commission recommends that an injured project wage employee be reassigned to work as a therapeutic measure to hasten recovery, every effort shall be made to effect such reassignment, even though such reassignment may

2 Missouri State Social Security Commission, Manual. [Jefferson City], p. 120, [1938].
3 New Mexico WPA, IC-2341-b. Santa Fe, [July, 1938].
4 California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 250.2, rev. April 10, 1941.
Eligibility

necessitate special consideration." While this statement of policy specifically provides that even under these circumstances no injured employe shall be reassigned until "he has recovered sufficiently to permit re-employment without danger to himself or other workers," it clearly implies that injured workers may be re-employed even when they are unable, without "special consideration" to perform "normal duties."

Inasmuch as the federal government (except through established special assistance programs) does not participate in any broad, comprehensive program of assistance or service to persons who are declared unemployable because of age, physical or mental condition, persons classed as such are automatically placed beyond the pale of recognized federal responsibility. To many observers who maintain that problems of ill health and physical and mental disabilities are as much a national concern as unemployment, this division of responsibility between the various levels of government appears to be wholly unwarranted.

Physical Examinations

According to a federal ruling in 1939, "Action taken in regard to physical disabilities other than those that are obvious should be based on records certified to by competent medical authorities." Although WPA officials have frequently emphasized the importance of physical examinations, especially in doubtful cases, Colonel Harrington testified in 1939 before a House Committee that the WPA never had undertaken physical examinations as a general policy. This, he explained, was because examinations were "pretty violently opposed by the labor organizations." He explained further that questions relating to employability were left "largely" to the discretion of state WPA authorities. Nevertheless, federal rules and regulations issued early in 1942 declared that in order to reject as unemployable handicapped workers who could not be employed by the WPA, the state WPA might give not physical examinations, but what were termed "physical appraisals."

2 Further discussion of this position is included in chap. 29.
4 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 145.

459
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

With respect to payment for examinations, federal policy, announced as early as 1935, prescribed that: "It is desired that no funds allocated . . . for the prosecution of WPA projects be used for the purpose of defraying the cost of the physical examination of workers." Although this did not constitute a flat prohibition, physical examinations, when given, were usually paid for from funds of other agencies. Nevertheless, there have been exceptions to this general rule.

Agencies which have provided for these examinations are of the widest diversity. In San Francisco, in 1940, they were made by the State Relief Administration. In Flint, Michigan, the director of the Health Division of the Public Welfare Department has given time to examine persons certified for WPA employment; while in Louisiana examinations have been authorized by relief authorities. In Minneapolis they have been made in a clinic located at the Men's Relief Bureau, under the Board of Public Welfare; in Kansas it was prescribed that county relief administrators should, in case of doubt about a person's employability, obtain from the county physician a statement as to the types of work that the person could perform.

Applicants have sometimes been expected to secure from their family physicians, county doctors, or any other available source statements regarding their physical condition. Unfortunate experience with policies of this type and with practitioners who would "certify to anything for twenty-five cents" have frequently led to abandonment of these arrangements. In some areas applicants have been required to make their own arrangements to secure certifications from physicians chosen from a panel of accredited practitioners.

In many areas no formal provision has been made for physical examinations. In Chicago, although examinations were made later, it was reported in 1935 that:

No provision was made by the Works Progress Administration for ascertaining the physical fitness of a potential employee. No facilities were provided by the prospective employer and the certifying agency . . . was also without facilities. Neither took any responsibility and the result was that there were many who accepted employment who probably would not have

\(^1\) WPA-127, December 7, 1935.

460
Eligibility

been employed had physical examination at some point before assignment been possible.¹

From other quarters, too, similar reports have come. From one region, for example, a WPA official in 1937 reported that it was important to arrange for a medical check-up of workers already employed because “we have people hemorrhaging on the job, cardias fainting, hernias strangulating.”²

Medical examinations to determine employability have in some instances been given routinely to all applicants otherwise eligible. More frequently, however, they have been required only when a worker’s employability was in doubt because of suspected or reported disabilities.

In a number of states the referral agency reports to the WPA on prescribed forms special information regarding workers’ health or disabilities. Policies sometimes require that a disabled worker’s claim to being employable must be verified by communication with at least one previous employer.

Examinations of large numbers of applicants for WPA employment have yielded significant data regarding the physical condition of persons needing or receiving relief. In New York City, in 1938, nearly one-eighth (1,095) of some 8,800 relief recipients referred to the WPA were refused employment because of physical disabilities. A more recent study of the chief causes of ineligibility of some 123,000 workers for WPA employment revealed that in 17,769 instances the primary reason was temporary illness or permanent disability.

When the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission made its intensive analysis of families granted general relief during the fall of 1939 it was found that temporary disabilities made it necessary to classify as unemployable approximately 19 per cent of all cases studied. Permanent disabilities were responsible for declaring another 34 per cent of the cases to be unemployable. In Chicago, between December 29, 1939, and February 14, 1940, the WPA rejected nearly half (23,770) of a total of 50,761 applicants referred by the Chicago Relief Administration for employment, on the ground of physical disability. Relief offi-

² From memorandum in Russell Sage Foundation files, June, 1937.  
461
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

cials protested that these rejections were excessive and “out of line with past experience.” A subsequent medical examination given to a portion of those rejected resulted in approximately 20 per cent being found capable of performing WPA work of one kind or another.

A medical survey of one thousand persons certified for work relief in San Francisco during October, 1935, resulted in classifying 6.5 per cent as “presumably unemployable” because of some “demonstrable organic lesion which would interfere with the normal activities. . . . Another 36.5 per cent were classed as having some demonstrable organic lesion, such as hernia, varicose veins, heart murmur, etc., not producing symptoms.” These workers, it was reported, would have been eligible for employment only if they could have been “placed in work which would not aggravate the ailment found on physical examination.” The remaining cases were found to be either “physically robust and organically sound” or “physically frail, but organically sound” and were regarded as “eligible for placement.”

Failure on the part of many relief recipients to qualify for WPA employment because of physical disabilities reflects the shortsightedness of relief policies in effect in many areas. Whereas, under these policies, relief recipients needing remedial medical care in order to qualify for a job in private enterprise could be given the necessary attention, this was usually denied when the only employment in prospect was with the WPA. Thus, the burden imposed upon relief agencies by the necessity of maintaining many of those who are denied WPA employment because of their physical condition is, in part at least, one of their own making.

Despite all the limitations placed upon the employment of physically handicapped workers, an unknown number have nevertheless been given WPA jobs. In 1937 Josephine C. Brown, then director of intake and certification of the federal WPA, estimated that more than 20 per cent of all workers suffered disabilities of varying degrees of severity. In a report made to a House Committee by the American Security Union in 1941 it was estimated that approximately 14 per cent of those WPA workers

---

1 Larsen, Albert E., “A Medical Survey of One Thousand Work Relief Persons,” in California and Western Medicine, vol. 45, no. 4, October, 1936, pp. 319-320.
Eligibility

included in a small study concerned with reasons why private employers were thought to be unwilling to give them jobs, failed to qualify because of their physical condition.

If conditions disclosed more recently in an intensive study of WPA workers in Cleveland are true of the country at large, the extent of need for physical rehabilitation is indeed disquieting. Since the Cleveland study was limited to workers who appeared most likely to be taken over by defense industries, and therefore represented the elite of the WPA's working force, the findings are all the more arresting. When given physical examinations similar to those given by private employers 5 per cent of the workers studied were found to have irremediable disabilities that were thought likely to bar them from private employment. Another 15 per cent had remediable difficulties which, if not corrected, were considered as probable barriers to such employment.

The Physically Handicapped

The WPA has made it clear from the beginning that physically handicapped persons who might be employed without danger either to themselves or others were not to be disqualified per se as unemployable. Federal policy prescribed early in 1942 specified that persons suffering from such disabilities as loss or impairment of both arms, hands, legs or feet, total blindness, or extensive paralysis should not be regarded as eligible for WPA employment "if their education, training, and experience qualify them for manual labor only." Earlier rulings prescribed that persons known to be suffering from specified disabilities (such as double inguinal hernia; loss or impairment of both arms, hands, legs or feet; total blindness or deafness; psychosis; active tuberculosis or active venereal diseases; and epilepsy, among others) "should not be assigned to any type of manual labor on work projects." While this did not preclude employment of those

---

1 See, for example, WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 10, rev. July 31, 1939; also Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935.
2 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.009, [January, 1942].
3 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 43, p. 2, July 31, 1939. Under a ruling of May, 1940, the WPA specifically prescribed that although total deafness was supposed to bar workers for assignment to any type of manual labor on projects, deaf persons might be assigned to projects which do not involve construction work or moving equipment, provided their duties entail "no particular hazard to themselves or to other employees."—Ibid., rev. May 2, 1940.
having disabilities of the type specified, state policy has sometimes outrun federal regulations on this matter and has prohibited the employment of such workers. Thus, a Louisiana policy announced in 1940 ruled that "persons suffering from . . . psychosis, active tuberculosis, venereal disease in infectious stage, [or] extensive paralysis . . . will not be accepted [for WPA employment] under any circumstances."¹

Persons having less severe handicaps and disabilities (such as single inguinal hernia; loss or impairment of one arm, hand, leg or foot; impaired vision; and arrested tuberculosis, among others) were, under federal policy prescribed in 1940, supposed to be assigned only to duties which were "within the range of their normal experience and which entail no particular hazards to themselves or to other project employees."²

Special recognition, both in law and in rules and regulations, has from time to time been accorded to blind workers.³ When Congress in 1941 was beginning consideration of a new WPA law, Robert B. Irwin, executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind, declared that the 1940 provision permitting recipients of blind benefits to relinquish these in favor of WPA employment had "enabled several score of blind persons to earn through useful work money which would otherwise have been paid to them in the form of social-security relief while they sat at home in idleness." He then went on to request that blind workers be exempted from the legal requirement that workers continuously employed for a specified period should be automatically released. In support of his plea Mr. Irwin wrote:

This provision has worked a special hardship on the blind as it has practically no significance in the case of the blind. Almost none of the blind people on the Work Projects Administration has had remunerative employment in ordinary industry for many years, and the 30-day lay-off has merely had the effect of taking blind persons from Work Projects Administration jobs where they have been trained for useful work, to sit at home on relief for a month—usually 2 months—and then be assigned back to a Work Projects

³See chap. 17.

464
Eligibility

Administration job. Frequently these new assignments are not suitable to the blind, and it often takes months to get the blind person adjusted. . . .1

When the ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, finally emerged it included the newly requested exemption.

Employment for handicapped workers has sometimes been provided on special projects established particularly for them. In other cases, handicapped workers have been placed on regular projects as guards, watchmen, checkers, time-keepers, or at other tasks they were able to do. In at least a few instances effort has been made to see that the number of handicapped workers assigned to jobs represented not less than an agreed-upon proportion of the total number of workers assigned.

Emphasis upon provision of employment for the handicapped has undoubtedly been offset to some degree by the counter-emphasis upon selecting and retaining only those workers who are qualified to perform the duties required and are able to return a day's work for a day's pay. Efficiency drives, especially during periods of retrenchment, have taken heavy toll among workers with physical handicaps. During the fall of 1936, for example, an official WPA report declared that quota reductions in certain areas had been effected, among other means, by dismissal of workers who were physically disabled.

By 1941 the move to make the WPA program one of real work (as opposed to one of relief or even rehabilitation) had gained so much momentum that a special project which for more than two years had given employment to tuberculous workers in Detroit was discontinued. This move was said to have been due to uncertainty on the part of local WPA officials as to whether, under a work program, they had the power to continue a project which was so largely one for rehabilitating workers rather than for real work. In an effort to clear the atmosphere, a member of Congress from that area suggested an amendment authorizing the WPA to provide employment to further the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped who cannot compete with able-bodied workers. Speaking specifically of tuberculous workers, he pleaded for opportunity for them lest they die or be forced to return to public institutions for long and expensive hospitalization. The amendment was not adopted.

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 449.
Responsibility for Determining Employability

The WPA has uniformly retained the right to be the final judge of whether or not a given worker, after referral or certification by another agency, could either be put to work or continued on a WPA job.¹

Responsibility for the initial determination of employability has, however, been widely distributed and in some places, as in New York City, has rested heavily upon relief authorities.

In spite of its ultimate authority to determine the employability of workers referred or certified to it by other agencies, the WPA has never been in a position to rule upon the employability of those whom relief authorities might have thought were unemployable and therefore chose not to refer to the WPA. In these cases, therefore, the last word did not lie with the WPA. As in the determination of need, there has never been any effective system for the hearing of appeals of applicants who might want the WPA rather than the local relief agency to rule finally on the question of their employability.

Responsibility for determining a worker’s occupational classification—that is, the kind of jobs at which he is thought to be employable—has rested (since late 1936) upon each local WPA’s Division of Employment. Previously, however, efforts were made to have each worker’s Occupational Classification Record prepared by public employment agencies affiliated with the United States Employment Service. Earlier still, it had been a function of the relief agencies certifying or referring workers for employment.

Appraisal of Success in Limiting WPA Employment to “Employables”

Unbiased appraisal of the extent to which the WPA has succeeded in employing only such workers as might properly be regarded as “employable” is as difficult as judging impartially the degree to which WPA projects have been “efficiently” executed.² Even if any considerable body of data were available to

¹ Federal policy regarding this matter in June, 1939, was stated as follows: “It shall be the responsibility of the Work Projects Administration to determine the employability of persons for work on projects to which they may be assigned.”—WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 10, July 31, 1939.

² See chap. 10.
Eligibility

show how “employable” WPA workers are this would still provide no fair basis for evaluating WPA performance unless there were a comparable body of knowledge about the success of private employers in this area.

In the discussion of standards of efficiency realized by the WPA, it was pointed out that WPA boasts regarding the efficiency of WPA project operations were often qualified by statements to the effect that projects were run relatively efficiently in view of the handicaps under which the WPA program had to operate. Outstanding among these disadvantages has been the necessity of employing relatively older workers and those whose skills or lack of skill made them least attractive to private employers. These explanations in themselves, therefore, would appear to be admissions that, in comparison with workers employed in various types of private employment, at least some, if not a large proportion, of those employed at one time or another by the WPA were relatively “unemployable.”

In addition to indirect evidence of this type, there have also been clear indications that WPA authorities recognized that project employes were something less than the cream of the labor market. There was, for example, Colonel Harrington’s admission (in 1940) that among the workers hit by the legal requirement of firing automatically all workers employed continuously for eighteen months “were some people who would hardly secure private employment under anything that you can conceive might happen, within a period of years, at any rate.”

Although new heights of economic activity reached within a year or two after Colonel Harrington’s testimony probably exceeded anything visualized at the time he spoke (and transformed into much-sought-after “employables” many who had previously been regarded as “unemployable”) this does not alter the fact that under conditions prevailing at the time the WPA was employing workers who were, relatively speaking, of course, unemployable.

Similarly, when Mr. Hunter appeared before a House Committee in 1941—when the war boom was already well under way—he admitted that although “all” WPA workers had ability to turn out a good day’s work, “many” could not expect to secure

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session, 1940, p. 739.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

private employment because of such factors as "geographical location" and the fact that they were "over-age." ¹

Just how many WPA jobs, from time to time, have gone to those who might be regarded as "unemployable” because their age, skills, or some other consideration made their employment in private industry and under circumstances currently prevailing unlikely, is not known. However, estimates made by several observers at various stages of the WPA program have run high, amounting in some areas and at stated times to as much as 50, 65, and even 75 per cent. These opinions, unfortunately, are of but little value inasmuch as they are not based upon comprehensive study of the workers themselves. And, what is more important, they do not specify whether “unemployability” is measured in terms of such criteria as a worker’s “last” or “usual” occupation in private employment, in terms of what he is doing with the WPA, or might be able to do either in private enterprise or on a WPA job if only the right kind of job were available. Furthermore, almost nothing is known of the degree to which those regarded as unemployable might be made fully employable through retraining and other rehabilitation services which an alert government might be expected to provide for those unable to procure these benefits in any other way.

Finally, such estimates as have been made during the past several years of the degree to which WPA workers were, in theory, “unemployable” have usually been premised upon the existence of a considerable amount of unemployment. They probably would have been very different if they had been premised upon the level of economic activity realized after the United States entered World War II, and such as might have been achieved earlier (and, after the war, may be maintained) by careful social planning.

In defense of WPA workers in general it must be said that critics who have contended that a large proportion, if not a majority of those employed on WPA projects, were really “unemployable” have had great difficulty in squaring these claims with two observable facts: first, that private employers, ever since the inauguration of the WPA program, have complained bitterly that they could not find workers enough to meet their personnel needs

¹ Idem (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, p. 110.
Eligibility

because so many were employed by the WPA; and, second, that thousands upon thousands of workers have left WPA rolls from month to month to accept jobs in private industry.¹

Even if it could be shown from careful comparative studies that the WPA from time to time has employed considerable numbers of workers who, though they could perform satisfactorily useful work given them by the WPA, could not meet stiffer tests of employability established by certain private employers, this would not mean, necessarily, that WPA practice in this matter is socially undesirable. Perhaps it is the more stringent employment practices of private employers that should be considered inimical to the public interest. It is possible that these practices so exaggerate certain considerations (such as race, sex, physical fitness, and performance on the job) that other factors, more vital to the common good, are ignored. Thus it may well be that the general welfare is better served by employment policies like those worked out under the various types of social control that have molded WPA practice than by those of employers whose chief interest is profit rather than national well-being.

Opposition to the Principle of Limiting WPA Employment to Workers Who Qualify as "Employable"

Just as there have been those who have considered the WPA as being "too efficient" and others who have decried WPA efforts to limit employment, as a general rule, to persons who are "in the labor market" and have had "previous paid work experience," so also have there been critics who have urged relaxation of WPA standards for measuring employability. There was, for example, the plea entered before the House by Representative O'Hara of Minnesota who in 1941 urged that WPA jobs be made available to those men and women who cannot compete in industry. Although such workers might not be regarded as employable "from a commercial or industrial standpoint," he declared, "they are able to work these shorter [WPA] hours and do the work the W.P.A. does in its program. . . ."²

To assure employment of workers who are, at any given time, regarded as relatively unemployable and are therefore denied WPA employment, many qualified observers (including high

¹ For further discussion of these issues see chap. 20.
² Congressional Record, June 10, 1941, pp. 5073, 5074.
WPA officials in a number of states) have ventured the opinion that there really should be two work programs—one for unemployed workers of unquestioned "employability," the other for those who are relatively "unemployable." One proposal of this kind was that offered by the Advisory Council appointed by the WPA administrator in New York City. This body, in 1939, recommended that "'sheltered' employment, such as the handi-
craft projects used at present in many large cities" be made available to relief recipients in the marginal group between employable and unemployable.¹

Some such solution is necessary, it is sometimes urged, (a) if the comparatively less efficient workers (under any program Congress is likely to be willing to finance in anything like the near future) are not to be squeezed out of all possible employment; (b) if there is to be experimentation in the field of ascertaining what kinds of useful employment workers having the least mar-
ketable skills can undertake; and (c) if high standards of work (which alone can bring morale-building satisfaction to good work-
men) are to be preserved. As a means of stimulating interest in this employment proposed for relatively seriously disadvantaged workers, it has been suggested that participation should be voluntary and not necessarily tied up with their maintenance. Thus, needy workers if unable to qualify for work of any other kind might be assured relief sufficient to meet their needs and then be given opportunities to work—not in return for the relief granted but for the satisfaction of working co-operatively with others in similar circumstances, doing something useful either for the community as a whole or, perhaps, to help raise the standard of living of those dependent upon relief.

Proponents of any such dual program of public employment freely admit the necessity for flexible arrangements by which workers may be transferred from one program to the other as they prove that they can or cannot qualify for the more de-
manding type of employment.

Instead of attempting to provide work for relatively unem-
plovable workers under a separate program, certain observers (and in this group, too, may be found high WPA officials) believe the emphasis should be placed rather upon providing under a.

¹ Recommendations, March 14, 1939.
Eligibility

single program a sufficient number of widely varied jobs so that the problem of "unemployability" is reduced to the lowest point possible. Among those who have taken this position is the American Association of Social Workers, which in 1941 endorsed the following proposal:

Work under wholesome conditions and at wages sufficient to assure maintenance for the worker and his normal dependents should be available to all who are not disabled.

To the degree that private industry cannot provide such opportunities, government should provide them.¹

A somewhat earlier statement of this tenet prescribed "A work program sufficiently diversified to employ all persons not in private or other public employment in accordance with their skills and the degree of their employability." ²

Such a program, obviously, would cost a lot of money. Whether the game would be worth the candle would depend, of course, upon the social value one attaches to the benefits which accrue (or are thought to accrue) from public employment of unemployed workers.³

¹ "AASW Position on Public Social Services," in the Compass, vol. 22, no. 11, August, 1941, p. 25. Advantages and disadvantages of a dual as opposed to a single work program are further discussed in chap. 34.
³ These are discussed at some length in chaps. 32 and 33.
CHAPTER XIX
ELIGIBILITY: UNEMPLOYED, SEEKING WORK, AND AVAILABLE FOR WORK

To be eligible for WPA employment a worker must not only give evidence of being "employable" and "in the labor market" but must also be unemployed, seeking work, willing to work, and available for work.

Unemployed

Unless an applicant's need can be attributed to "unemployment" he cannot, as a rule, qualify for a WPA job. The significance of this requirement, particularly with respect to women, to the blind, and to older workers, has already been mentioned. This policy has also resulted in denying WPA employment to a number of other types of workers such as members of families in which some person is already employed on some other kind of work. Under a Minnesota ruling of 1940, for example, no member of a household could be given WPA employment if the husband or wife or, if both were unemployable, any other "logical wage earner," was employed in private industry on a full-time job, in which case the problem was construed to be one of inadequate wages rather than unemployment.

Unemployed "Through No Fault of Their Own"

Even workers who can qualify as "unemployed" are not eligible for WPA employment in some areas unless they can show, too, that they are out of work "through no fault of their own." One statement of this issue, as presented by the WPA in North Carolina in 1940, was as follows: "It is the purpose of the Work Projects Administration to give employment to that group of people who are in need, and who, through no fault of their own,

1 See chaps. 11 and 18.
2 Minnesota Department of Social Security, DSW-WPA-11. St. Paul, July 9, 1940. For discussion of policies regarding the effect of outside employment upon eligibility for WPA jobs see chap. 17.
Eligibility

are unable to find employment.” 1 Similarly, a Georgia policy of 1938 prescribed that WPA employment was to be restricted to those who were unemployed “having lost employment through no fault of their own.” 2 Thus, workers who voluntarily leave private jobs or who are discharged “for cause” sometimes find themselves disqualified for WPA employment.

Since relief and public work are usually regarded as necessary not only to the individuals concerned but to the community as a whole, denying them to persons whose need might be attributable to some fault of their own presents something of an anomaly which contrasts strangely with practices followed in other areas of human affairs. In the field of medicine, for example, a patient contracting pneumonia or syphilis as the result of some careless or deliberate act on his part would hardly expect to receive treatment which differed from that given a patient who contracted either of these diseases accidentally and “through no fault of his own.”

Jobs for Strikers?

Inseparably related to this question of restricting employment to workers who are unemployed “through no fault of their own” has been the perennially perplexing problem of what to do about strikers.

Official policy on this highly controversial issue as stated in 1941 was that the WPA shall maintain “a neutral policy ... in all disputes between employees and employers in private industry.” Workers were not to be denied employment on projects (or, if already employed, were not to be discharged) for refusal to accept either private or public employment where employees were “locked out or on strike.” 3 This ruling obviously does not prescribe specifically that strikers should, as a matter of policy, be given WPA jobs. Nevertheless, this has in fact been done in many areas.

Although the WPA has attempted to steer a neutral course, WPA officials have admitted that this policy of neutrality has been of “moral” benefit to strikers, since it did not discriminate

---

against them. Such freedom from discrimination has not been without at least a theoretical limit, however, since various federal officials have at one time or another specified that strikers might be denied federal help in the event that their strike was declared unjustified by the Department of Labor—a step the Department has never taken.

The position of the WPA with respect to permitting the employment of strikers is one which was vigorously defended by certain senators, who, even before the first ERA Act was passed, bitterly opposed the proposal that the pending measure should prohibit the giving of relief to persons who within sixty days had "resigned from or left any position the wage for which was at a rate in excess of $50 a month." So great was the opposition to this suggestion that it had to be withdrawn. Considerations which figured prominently in forcing its withdrawal were those advanced by such champions of labor as Senators Wagner, Costigan, Cutting, and Bone who pointed out that at least one effect of the proposal would be to deny relief to strikers.

Although formal statements of federal policy have prescribed only that there shall be no discrimination against workers who refuse to accept jobs involved in a strike or lockout, rulings made in various areas have gone somewhat farther. In Georgia, for example, it was ruled that:

Whenever workers are out of employment because of strikes, lockouts or disputes between employees and employers in private industry the WPA is not concerned with the merits of either side in the situation, and such workers shall be entitled to the same consideration for certification and employment on the Works Program as other unemployed workers. No device of certification shall be used which violates this principle of neutrality and places certification on any other basis than need.

Modifications of federal policy have not, however, always been on the side of liberality. There have been repeated rulings by the Michigan WPA, for example, that although the WPA was expected to maintain a neutral policy with respect to labor disputes, it would "not accept certifications for persons who are on

1 Congressional Record, February 18, 1935, p. 2077.
2 To these objections Senator Glass retorted: "If we want to tax the people of the United States to maintain strikers, let's say so."—As quoted in the New York Times, February 19, 1935.
Eligibility

active strike.” When the strike ended or resulted in a lockout, certifications for such persons as were not re-employed might be accepted.¹

In the case of Michigan, it may be noted that it was the WPA itself that barred the employment of strikers. In other areas it has been the local certifying or referral agencies which have refused to co-operate in this matter although the WPA stood ready to offer jobs provided relief agencies recommended strikers for employment. Outstanding among a number of classic struggles between the WPA and relief authorities over this issue was the widely publicized controversy which arose in California during a strike in 1938. When the State Relief Administration refused to certify to the WPA workers who could be employed in department stores that remained open despite the strike, the WPA administrator declared that the WPA could not approve “a certification procedure that would in effect be discriminatory against any person or group of persons.” To this statement the head of the relief administration replied:

It is the policy of the Relief Administration to contact the last employer of each relief applicant to find out if there is a job available. . . . If there is, we deny relief and certification to W.P.A. because need does not exist. To give relief or W.P.A. certification to the Retail Store Clerks would be an out and out financing of the strike out of relief funds appropriated to help those who cannot help themselves. . . . We decline to comply with your request that the Retail Store Clerks in San Francisco be certified to W.P.A.²

Refusal of local authorities to make it possible for the WPA to employ strikers is not necessarily designed to undermine strikes. Sometimes it is due to the realization that the need of strikers is likely to be of short duration and that what few WPA jobs are available had better be given to workers more likely to need employment for a considerable period. This policy is defended on the ground that it not only gives a job to the person likely to need it most but also simplifies the task of the relief agency and tends to improve the efficiency of WPA operations by reducing labor turnover.

This time element with respect to employing strikers was given an interesting twist in an early Washington ruling. The ruling

prescribed that because "the problem of those out of work as a direct result of the strike is not a problem of unemployment" they could not be certified for WPA employment since the number of available WPA jobs was "limited" and needed to be conserved for those who were "unemployed." However, workers who were unemployed as the "indirect result of the strike situation" might be certified for WPA employment provided the period of unemployment threatened to be "a long one."^1

A second factor which has contributed to the unwillingness of relief agencies to facilitate the employment of strikers by the WPA has been the fact that strikers were frequently eligible for some kind of union strike-relief whereas other applicants may have had no such source of aid available to them.

While denial of WPA employment to strikers might, at first blush, be regarded as being inimical to the success of their strikes, this view is sometimes rejected by labor leaders. In fact, WPA officials in a number of areas report that union officials have sometimes called upon them in advance of the time set for certain strikes, asking that strikers be ruled ineligible for WPA jobs. Requests of this kind, say informed officials, have never been made except when the unions concerned had funds available for strike-relief. The purpose of having strikers declared ineligible for WPA jobs in these instances was to bring home to the strikers the realization that they would have to stick together and rely upon their own resources, rather than to look to outside help, to win their struggle.

**Duration of Unemployment**

While there has never been any provision specifying that workers may be employed by the WPA only after they have been unemployed for some prescribed period, there have been a number of policies which have had a bearing on this issue. Of special significance are the fundamental requirements that before they can qualify for WPA employment workers must be in need and that, normally, they must have exhausted unemployment compensation benefits for which they may be eligible.^2

The first of these policies assumes a long enough period of

---


^2 See chaps. 14 and 17.
Eligibility

unemployment to exhaust such savings, credit, borrowing power, and fluid assets as applicants might have. The second policy has meant that workers covered by unemployment insurance have usually been denied WPA employment until after the expiration of both the waiting period and the further period during which unemployment compensation benefits were payable. The duration of such benefits is determined by one or more of the following: the length of time workers were employed in a covered occupation; their total earnings during this period; the amount of weekly benefit they receive; and the legal maximum period for which benefits are available regardless of the length of covered employment or the amount of earnings. Thus, workers eligible to receive unemployment compensation benefits for as long as state laws allow, may be ineligible for WPA employment for periods varying from fifteen to twenty-two weeks after loss of covered employment.¹

A number of studies made from time to time yield important information about the length of time workers employed by the WPA have been without other types of employment. Among certified workers in 13 cities whose work-records were studied in 1936, there was wide variation in the length of unemployment reported.² As of the date of interview, economic heads of families included in the study “had not worked at their usual occupations in private industry for an average of nearly 3 years. At one extreme, 8 percent of the economic heads were currently employed at their usual occupation and 13 percent had lost their last jobs at their usual occupation within the last 12 months. At the other extreme, 17 percent had not worked at their customary jobs within 5 years. . . .”

Differences in duration of unemployment were reported to have been explained “to some extent . . . by the occupations of the workers.” Unemployment had a tendency to be “shortest for certain types of unskilled and semiskilled workers. . . . The number of those who had not worked for 5 years or more was relatively greatest among office workers and skilled building workers. . . . Median duration of unemployment was longest

² Unemployment, for purposes of this study, was interpreted to mean unemployment since a worker's last job of four weeks or more at his usual occupation.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

for office workers (44 months) and shortest for domestic workers (29 months)."  

More recent data on the length of time applicants for WPA employment have been unemployed are scanty indeed. However, when the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1939 polled not only WPA workers but relief recipients as well, it was found that the "typical" person canvassed said it had been nearly three years since he had what he considered a "steady job" other than with the WPA. Nearly two-fifths of those interviewed declared that they had not had steady work for four years or more.

Studies made by the WPA in three cities in March, 1939, revealed that the average length of time since Works Program employes had had a full-time job was eighteen months in Toledo, twenty-seven months in Birmingham, and thirty-eight months—in San Francisco. The tendency to give WPA jobs to those longest out of work is clearly illustrated by the fact that the average duration of unemployment of workers not employed on the Works Program was only six months in Toledo and San Francisco and eight months in Birmingham.

Critics of the WPA who blame that agency (and its allegedly easy work standards) for whatever "demoralization" they think they see among WPA workers, but fail to make due allowance for what happened to these workers during such periods of unemployment, poverty, and near-destitution as they suffered before securing their WPA jobs, are held by various observers to be guilty of straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

This question as to how soon after the onset of unemployment a worker who is unable to find another job should be given public work rather than unemployment compensation benefit or cash maintenance provided in some other way has, unfortunately, received but little attention from students of relief policy. There


2 In this analysis it is, unfortunately, impossible to distinguish between the length of time the WPA workers, as opposed to relief recipients, had been unemployed. Since it is likely that those employed by the WPA represented a more employable group than the others, the average duration of unemployment for both groups may overstate somewhat the average for WPA employes alone.

3 That is, a job lasting at least two weeks with thirty hours or more employment each week.

Eligibility

have, however, been a few important proposals. On the one hand, it has been urged that public work should be made immediately available to workers who otherwise would be without jobs. A second proposal is that a waiting period of as much as six months might not be unreasonable.

Pre-eminent among those who have taken a stand on this issue is the imposing committee of 68 experts brought together by the American Association for Social Security to formulate a program of social security in wartime and after. This committee agreed that public work for otherwise unemployed workers “is of particular value after the first six months of regular unemployment compensation benefit.” In support of this position it is claimed that “the great majority of workers normally retain their employability in their own or similar occupations for at least six months after a lay-off, and that during this time their chief need is for cash maintenance.”

According to Abraham Epstein, executive secretary of the American Association for Social Security, who was chairman of the committee of experts, this recommendation was not intended to imply that a six-month waiting period should necessarily be imposed before an unemployed worker could qualify for public employment. Rather, the proposal was to suggest that in view of the probably limited number of jobs available, employment would become relatively more important after six months of unemployment than before. However, the question as to whether, as the committee suggests, a worker’s “chief need” during the first six months of unemployment is the need for cash maintenance is not one that can be easily settled. Who, for example, can say in what month and for how long any one of the many various objectives urged in defense of public employment for unemployed workers gains or maintains ascendancy over others? After all, the preservation of employability which, the committee suggests, becomes increasingly important after six months, is but one of a wide variety of reasons why the provision of public work has been regarded as sound public policy.

A second analysis of the question of when, in the course of unemployment, a worker may best be offered work, is that provided

---

2 For discussion of this and other considerations urged in favor of public employment programs see chaps. 32 and 33.
by E. Wight Bakke. This discussion, however, does not relate to public employment in general but specifically to work relief, of the type provided by the WPA. Work relief is not “appropriate” says Mr. Bakke, for the earlier stages of a worker’s unemployment (which he terms the period of “momentum stability”) since the worker would not yet have “felt the need for the restoration of his position as a worker by means of any job carrying a partial stigma of relief.” Neither would he be prepared “to seek work opportunities outside of his normal occupation.” The length of time during which work relief is inappropriate Mr. Bakke estimates at about six months, provided workers during this period are “subsidized with funds adequate to keep their plane of living fairly approximate to their normal plane.”

If a worker were not given a cash subsidy sufficient to keep his plane of living fairly approximate to his “normal plane” this lack would, of course, be expected to shorten the period of transition from the stage of momentum stability to a second stage—that of “unstable equilibrium”—at which Mr. Bakke thinks work relief becomes appropriate.

A second possible way of shortening the period thought to be necessary to bring needy workers to the point of accepting work relief would be to make public work available to unemployed workers without the “stigma of relief,” or otherwise to improve the quality of the work programs as, for example, by increasing the variety of available jobs so that workers could be offered public employment at least roughly comparable with their own.

Thus, the length of time a worker should be required to go without a job before becoming eligible for one provided under governmental auspices might well depend upon what other provisions are available to mitigate the seriousness of his economic plight and the desirability of the proffered job. At best, this issue is inextricably bound up with a variety of questions which go to the very heart of one’s philosophy regarding public employment programs. The greater the emphasis upon the relief aspects of a work program, the greater will be the emphasis upon restricting employment to those who have been unemployed a relatively long time. On the other hand, the more emphasis is laid upon the work aspects of such a program—the preservation of morale, skills, and employability, and the utilization of these skills for the

Eligibility

benefit of the community at large—the less emphasis there will be upon requiring unemployed workers to wait any specified period before public jobs can be offered them.

Seeking Work and Willing to Work

Eligibility for WPA employment has usually involved more than previous work experience, ability to work, and being without a job. It has often been ruled that applicants must be "seeking work" and "willing to work."

Like other provisions relating to eligibility, rulings on this matter of "seeking work" have often been given a special interpretation applicable particularly to women. A ruling in Michigan in 1935, for example, provided that "women with home responsibilities . . . should be certified only if they are definitely working or seeking work outside their homes." ¹ Under this ruling, if a woman failed after due notification to report for registration at the public employment office, she was held to be "not seeking work" and therefore "not employable." A Louisiana ruling of 1939 prescribed that needy unemployed women were eligible for WPA employment only if, among other specified conditions, they had a previous work history, if they could be considered potential wage-earners, and were "seeking employment."

The acid test of a worker's willingness to work is, of course, the way he acts when he is given an opportunity to work. Policies with respect to acceptance of offers of work are discussed in the succeeding chapter, and policies regarding performance on WPA jobs are discussed in Chapter XXI. Discussion here is limited to a device widely used to test an applicant's willingness to work and to prove that he is in truth seeking work—the practice of urging (and, in some areas, of requiring) applicants for or workers employed on WPA jobs to register with public employment offices and to maintain this registration on a current basis by re-registering at specified intervals. A federal regulation issued in 1939 required all certified workers to "maintain active registration with employment offices designated by the United States Employment Service." Exceptions to this requirement were allowed in

localities where these public employment offices were not "reasonably accessible." ¹

So long as public employment offices were called upon to find jobs for so many more workers than could possibly be placed, the value of further crowding their already bulging files with names of WPA workers has often been questioned. This practice of requiring WPA workers to register with public employment offices has also been challenged on the ground that it was not really worth while because the employment offices so frequently passed over the names of WPA workers, giving preference to others. Such a procedure, though admittedly contrary to announced policy, was nevertheless defended on several grounds. In the first place, when the workers to be referred for other employment were already employed on WPA jobs it was often difficult quickly to get word to them about possible openings. Even when given such information, workers often delayed applying for these other jobs until they could secure permission to be absent from their WPA posts without jeopardizing their tenure. By the time such release could be secured it was often too late.

A further factor is that, even though he was referred by an employment agency for a possible job, the low rate of pay for WPA work has had a tendency to cool the WPA worker's enthusiasm for following up leads suggested by public employment offices. Gambling even 10 or 20 cents for carfare to investigate a possible opening that might already be filled before his arrival often seemed to him to be sending good money after bad.

Still another factor has been the attitude of some employment officials that the WPA worker after all has a job so why not give preference to some worker who has none? Failure to give such preference might mean only that one worker was removed from a WPA job while another worker who might have been placed in the new job in the first instance is then hired by the WPA. Since this double shift involves more red tape than giving referrals to workers not employed by the WPA, the more direct solution has often been preferred.

A final argument that has frequently been advanced in defense of not referring WPA workers for placement in other jobs is that many employers are so prejudiced against them that their

Eligibility

referral might result not only in the employer’s refusing to hire the workers referred but also in discontinuing use of the employment office.

Because of dissatisfaction over the number of project workers placed by employment offices in other jobs, WPA officials in many sections of the country have developed various plans of their own for keeping in touch with employment possibilities in their bailiwicks.¹

Available for Work

In addition to meeting other requirements, applicants for WPA employment must be available for work. In Ohio, in 1938, for example, it was ruled that “no family shall be certified unless a member of the family is immediately available for assignment.” In Michigan in 1939 established policy provided that a worker’s certification for employment might be canceled if he was not “available for assignment.” A worker’s certification was supposed to be canceled in Illinois (under a ruling made in 1937) if he became “either temporarily or permanently unavailable for immediate assignment.”² Similar policies have been in effect in a large number of states.

Availability for work has been variously interpreted. Sometimes it has been related to the fact that a worker has no other employment which precludes his being assigned for the full number of hours he would be expected to work on a WPA job in any given month. In some instances persons attending school have been disqualified on the ground that they were not available for work.

A third consideration to which availability has sometimes been related is the distance a worker lives from centers of employment. As already noted (in Chapters X and XIII) the distance a worker lives from a possible WPA project very often affects his chances of being employed. An early Florida ruling, for example, prescribed that employment should be denied to “those living in remote areas and where, without transportation facilities, assignment would be impractical.”³ This same principle has

¹ These plans are discussed in the succeeding chapter.
² Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Official Memorandum. [Chicago], October 14, 1937.
³ Florida WPA, GB-140. Jacksonville, October 19, 1936.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

also been applied, however, to the distance a worker lives from work opportunities of any kind. In California, for example, too great distance from "employment centers" was considered as making persons unavailable for employment and therefore ineligible for unemployment relief, the receipt of which was usually a necessary prelude to WPA employment.¹

Still other factors which have resulted in classing workers as "unavailable" for WPA employment are those relating to responsibility for the care of dependents, invalids, minor children, and, as stated in Pennsylvania policy, to their being needed at home "for other purposes." ²

The ultimate test as to whether a worker is or is not "available" is, however, his acceptance or refusal of a proffered job. Under policies which at one time or another have been in effect in various sections of the country, the certification of a worker's eligibility was supposed to be canceled if he failed to report for work after two (or perhaps three) assignments had been offered.

Assuming that certified workers who continued to be in need and remained available for WPA employment should assume responsibility for keeping the WPA informed of their continuing eligibility, federal policy, prescribed in 1939, provided that the WPA might cancel the certification of any worker who "within 90 days of certification" failed to notify the WPA that he was "still in need, seeking employment and available for assignment." ³

The obvious purpose of such policies is to eliminate as much

¹ California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 240.1, rev. January 13, 1941. This policy was said to be aimed particularly at disqualifying prospectors for WPA employment. A somewhat earlier statement of California's policy on this issue was as follows: "In the counties which have an extended hinterland we have cases of clients who have been on continuous relief for 2, 3, and 4 years. They have refused assignments to WPA because of the distance to projects and the expense of transportation. . . . "Since unemployment relief is designated for those who are in need due to unemployment, we expect these persons to be available for and accessible to employment centers and work projects. . . . "Therefore, where clients have refused assignments to WPA because they live in isolated areas and there appears to be no prospect of private employment shortly . . . we would ask that family as a condition to receiving continued relief to move to a location where it would be possible for the employable head to accept an assignment to WPA as well as be able to seek work in the community. If necessary, we will assist the family to move to a location they choose within the county."—Ibid., Interpretation no. 19, chap. 1, sec. C, rev. August 5, 1938.

² Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance, Employees' Manual. [Harrisburg], Sec. VII, Part 1, p. 2, rev. January 16, 1942. For further reference to policies of this type see chap. 15.

³ WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 19, July 31, 1939.
Eligibility

dead timber as possible from WPA files, to present a clearer picture of immediate employment needs, and to reduce unnecessary expenditures incurred by offering WPA employment to a number of unavailable workers before finally finding one who can accept the proffered job.
CHAPTER XX
ELIGIBILITY: UNAVALAILABILITY OF OTHER WORK AND AVAILABILITY OF WPA JOBS

UNAVAILABILITY OF OTHER WORK

For the purpose of determining eligibility for WPA employment it is not enough that workers be employable and available. They are supposed to be assigned to or continued in WPA jobs only when no other form of employment is available to them.

Regulations and Laws

Procedure with respect to private employment at first rested upon federal regulations. As early as January, 1936, for example, Mr. Hopkins ruled:

It is expected that WPA workers will accept available jobs in private employment, whether of a permanent or temporary nature, provided:

(1) That the temporary or permanent work shall be a full time job;¹
(2) That such work shall be at a standard or going rate of wages;
(3) That such work shall not be in conflict with established union relationships; and
(4) That workers shall be offered an opportunity to return to the Works Progress Administration upon completion of temporary jobs.

In explanation of this policy Mr. Hopkins declared:

It seems to me extremely important that all workers be given every reasonable opportunity to accept temporary employment because this often results in a permanent opportunity, and obviously workers are going to be loath to accept temporary jobs unless they can be given definite assurance that the WPA work will be open to them upon completion of the job.

Important as this declaration was felt to be, emphasis was also laid on the fact that the WPA should not develop employment exchanges or serve "as a means of forcing workers to accept sub-standard wages from anybody."²

Though not requiring workers to accept work at "sub-standard"

¹This was interpreted as an official rebuke to the WPA administrator of New York City who, only a short time before, had dismissed several workers holding part-time jobs in private industry while working for the WPA. (Author's note.)
²WPA-156, January 11, 1936.

486
Eligibility

wages, federal policy has long required denial of WPA employment to workers refusing other jobs paying much less than they could earn with the WPA, provided these jobs paid rates prevailing in the community for the type of work offered. WPA officials in the South, for example, have admitted releasing employees to work as farm laborers at rates as low as 10 cents an hour or 75 cents a day! Women have also been dismissed to accept work as domestics at four or five dollars a week though they might receive much more from the WPA.

Despite the efforts made by WPA officials to induce workers to accept all reasonable offers of private or other public employment there has (from the program's inception) been widespread, loud, and almost ceaseless complaining that the WPA has continued in employment workers needed in private enterprise. There have been, for example, allegations that WPA employment contributed to a shortage of apple pickers in New York and New England in 1936 and 1937; to a shortage of shoe stitchers in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1937; to insufficient dairy farm help in Connecticut and Minnesota in 1937 and 1939 and to a shortage of tobacco field hands in Connecticut in 1936; to shortages of skilled labor in many sections of the country, as in New York City in 1935. Taxicab drivers were also said to have been difficult to find in New York in 1935 because so many were employed by the WPA. In Pennsylvania, it has been alleged that mine workers and tobacco field hands have been hard to secure because of the WPA and the same has been said of tobacco cutters in Kentucky. Cotton growers in all sections of the South have complained on various occasions that the WPA has made it difficult if not impossible to find the necessary farm labor. From Colorado at various times have come complaints that WPA employment has contributed to shortages of labor for beet-sugar growing.

That the problem of labor shortage was "a tough one" was admitted by Mr. Hopkins as early as 1936, when, in a radio broadcast, he explained that "if a farmer can't get hands he should state his case to his own local Works Progress Administration officials, because they have already been instructed that nobody is to have a Works Progress Administration job who has refused private employment at a fair wage." To this he added, however, "You can be equally sure that we are not going to kick anybody out of these low-paid jobs just so some bird can get a lot of cheap labor."
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

And that goes not only for the farmer, but for any private employer. ¹

Although admitting that the questions posed were tough, Mr. Hopkins and other administration officials have consistently repudiated charges that the WPA program has caused labor shortages. In October, 1936, for example, Mr. Hopkins denied that the WPA had caused a shortage of skilled labor, as charged by Mr. Landon, Republican candidate for the presidency. Some six months later Mr. Hopkins was reported to have offered to curtail the WPA program "if industry substantiates its charges of a labor shortage and provides employment for persons now on relief." However, Mr. Hopkins declared, his organization was convinced "as a result of conclusive investigation of complaints by various manufacturers and trade associations" that there was no shortage of skilled labor at that time.²

Attacking the general contention that the WPA program created "a shortage of workers for private employment," Cortington Gill, assistant WPA administrator, declared in June, 1937, "The perennial charge that the Works Program creates a shortage of workers for private employment has cropped up again. . . . As usual the charge is false." Speaking explicitly of complaints from truck farmers in Nassau County, New York, and the canning industry in Delaware and Maryland, Mr. Gill declared, "The Works Program is not responsible for the alleged shortages of farm laborers and cannery workers in these districts."³

A check-up of labor needs among cotton growers in South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas revealed, according to reports issued by the WPA, that, contrary to charges, no shortages had occurred in 1937 despite the unusually large crop. Action of local WPA officials releasing workers to pick cotton was reported to have helped insure an adequate labor supply.

A rapid survey made for Fortune magazine and published in October, 1937, suggested that although in some fields there appeared to be a "hunger for skilled labor," this lack could not be attributed to the WPA.

¹ WPA Release 4-1199, June 20, 1936.
² Philadelphia Record, May 4, 1937.
³ WPA Release 4-1554, June 22, 1937.
Eligibility

According to a memorandum issued by the WPA in November, 1937, reports from 24 cities indicated that in some cities there were shortages of skilled workers in machine trades and in a few areas shortages of certain types of building mechanics. A "general" shortage of domestic servants was also reported. The shortages were declared to have been less serious than in the preceding year and Works Program employment was said not to have been a factor in their creation.

In 1941 Mr. Hunter told a House Committee that he had not found substantiated "in any way" complaints that it was impossible to get agricultural labor. Assuring the Committee that he would like specific information about complaints of this nature, Mr. Hunter continued:

... we have investigated any cases that have been brought to our attention, to determine whether they may or may not be due to the W.P.A. We have never substantiated one of those cases, and we have investigated every one brought to our attention. ...

There is only one case of that kind that I have had personal knowledge of, and that is in the case of a shortage of farm labor around Camp Beauregard, in Louisiana. We had 700 W.P.A. workers in that district, and there are 26,000 workers constructing Army camps. So if there is any shortage in agricultural labor I would say it would be more largely due to the construction of camps there than to the 700 workers we have on W.P.A.¹

Speaking of this problem at somewhat greater length, Mr. Hunter in a radio address made in 1939 declared:

We have received hundreds of complaints involving thousands of workers. The complaints are always to the effect that the WPA is creating a labor shortage in a given area and that nobody can get workers for the jobs that are available. We have investigated every one of these complaints, and we have a complete file of every case of so-called job rejection by a WPA worker. ...

Now we have found one single overwhelming fact in all these cases—as soon as we ask for concrete details, with names and dates, the stories melt away into nothing but idle rumor. Out of all the complaints that have come to us, less than one-tenth of one per cent have had any validity. But in those few cases, the WPA workers involved were immediately fired.

The other ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of the cases were the most amazing collection of rumors, wish-fulfillments, axe-grindings and idle dreams you ever saw. ... Photostatic copies of all the evidence ... [are on file] at WPA headquarters for anyone to investigate who cares to. This

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

material is also available to the newspapers and the magazines that print the original complaints but that usually lose interest as soon as the facts are discovered.¹

Although WPA officials vehemently, categorically, and consistently have denied that their program has been responsible for labor shortages, they realize that it might easily be so and have attempted to set up safeguards against this danger. Devices adopted have included discontinuance of projects in areas likely to need labor, wholesale dismissal of workers thought to be needed by private enterprise, and selected dismissal of WPA employes having previous experience necessary to performance of specific kinds of work likely to be available.

While certain critics have regarded these policies as insufficient to prevent labor shortages, there have been others who have attacked them as too severe. There was, for example, the resolution passed by the American Federation of Labor in its Annual Convention of 1936. This resolution deplored what was termed the “forced labor practices” of the WPA and the “open cooperation between WPA and relief officials with employers of farm, packinghouse and cannery labor.” In support of the resolution the Federation charged that:

Local, State and Federal relief agencies and WPA administrations have in the past co-operated with large vegetable, cotton and other produce growers and agricultural interests to force unemployed and WPA workers [off] relief lists and onto farms, canneries and packing houses at below Union rates; and [that] . . . .

This practice has even gone so far as to discharge WPA workers who refused jobs at scabbing as happened during the recent Salinas lettuce strike; and [that] . . . .

Local and State relief and WPA projects have been delayed and shut down completely to carry through these forced labor and scabbing practices in the interests of agricultural employers. . . .²

Similar collusion between the WPA and sugar corporations was charged in 1936 by representatives of workers in sugar beets.

In an effort to stiffen WPA policy with respect to encouraging workers to accept other employment when available, Congress in 1937 wrote into law two provisions requiring WPA employes (upon pain of discharge) to accept private or other public em-

¹ WPA Release 4-1973, June 3, 1939.

490
Eligibility

In the case of private employment a needy WPA worker was to accept a “bona fide offer” of a job “under reasonable working conditions” and paying “as much or more in compensation for the same length of service as [he] . . . could receive” from the WPA, provided he was “capable of performing” the work offered. This provision obviously differed markedly from earlier WPA practice in that it required workers to accept jobs, not if they paid the rate prevailing in the community for the type of work offered, but as much or more for the same length of service as a worker could earn with the WPA.

With respect to accepting other public employment, Congress prescribed that needy workers might not be employed by the WPA if they “refused to accept employment on any other Federal or non-Federal project at a wage rate comparable with or higher than the wage rate established for similar work” on WPA projects. This requirement obviously differed somewhat from that relating to private employment since a worker being paid a relatively high wage on the WPA for work of one type might be required to accept another public job of a type paying a materially lower rate provided this rate was comparable with or higher than the WPA rate for similar work. A worker offered private employment, on the other hand, was not required to take this unless the rate of pay was as much or more than he received (or could receive) from the WPA. Thus, workers were not required to accept even such jobs as paid locally prevailing rates unless these were comparable with or higher than those paid by the WPA.

These changes in policy were substantially continued in effect until February, 1939, when Congress authorized return to the WPA’s original practice of requiring workers to accept private jobs paying prevailing rates even though these may have been materially lower than what workers might earn on WPA jobs. This change in the law was recommended by the Senate Appropri-

1 ERA Act of 1937, sec. 1.
2 Ibid., sec. 2.
3 Differences in legal provisions applicable to offers of private as opposed to public employment were eliminated only in 1940 when Congress prescribed that the WPA could employ no needy worker who refused a bona fide offer of either public or private employment (which he was capable of performing) under reasonable working conditions and paying “the prevailing wage for such work in the community where he resides . . . ”—ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 16 (a).

This same provision was re-enacted in 1941.—ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, sec. 11 (a).
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ations Committee which reported that it had received representa-
tions “that in certain areas especially in agricultural communities,
private employers have experienced difficulty in finding workers
to take care of their needs.”

Policies requiring the release of WPA workers to accept jobs
paying substantially the same and even higher rates of pay than
WPA employment—to say nothing of jobs paying lower rates—
have frequently resulted in total monthly earnings of much less
than workers could earn with the WPA. This has been due to
greater loss of time, whether because of weather, material short-
ages, or other delays on the job or between jobs. Because of diffi-
culties encountered in keeping together efficient crews of men,
contractors have sometimes refused to release workers to go back
to their WPA jobs even when, for the time being, they had no
work for them. Thus, because of the relative security of WPA
employment, workers have by leaving their WPA jobs frequently
suffered wage losses even when the work to which they turned
entitled them to higher rates of pay.

Other Measures of Availability of Work

While “availability of other work” has usually been measured
only against actual offers of work it has sometimes been gauged
by the likelihood or the possibility of a need in private industry
for workers of various types. Because of this fact WPA workers
have sometimes been dismissed en masse and entire projects closed
down in anticipation of increased private employment of some
type—regardless of whether working conditions were likely to be
reasonable or “prevailing rates of pay” offered.

Particularly in farm areas, further evidence of the unavail-
ability of other work has (as shown in a subsequent section of this
chapter) sometimes been required as a condition of eligibility for
WPA employment.

Still another type of evidence that has sometimes been required
(usually by relief officials as a necessary antecedent to referral
or certification) has been a statement signed by certain, some-
times designated employers or, more commonly by a specified
number of employers declaring that the applicant had applied
to them for work but that none was available. Illinois, in 1941,

1 U. S. Senate, Report No. 4 (to accompany H. J. Res. 83). 76th Congress, 1st
Eligibility

for example, again reverted to a once discarded policy requiring applicants for relief (and, therefore, for WPA employment also) to submit "evidence that they have endeavored to obtain employment from at least five potential employers." ¹

Under federal laws enacted in 1940 and in the two subsequent years, workers refusing bona fide offers of private or other public employment meeting prescribed conditions were supposed to be ineligible for WPA employment during the period for which the rejected employment would have been available. Workers discharged for refusal to accept outside employment in New York City in 1940, however, were denied WPA employment for three months after their dismissal. A federal ruling issued in 1942 prescribed that the maximum period for which a certified worker could be declared ineligible for WPA employment because he refused to accept a bona fide offer of another job could never exceed ninety days.

Further Steps Taken by the WPA to Make Workers Available for Other Employment

Dissatisfied with the efforts public employment offices—for reasons already enumerated in the preceding chapter—appeared to be making to place WPA workers in other types of employment, the WPA by 1942 had initiated the practice of stationing representatives in what Acting Commissioner Dryden termed the "major Employment Service offices."

The reason for this, he explained, was that WPA officials "had become thoroughly convinced that the W.P.A. worker was not given the chance of an assignment to a job because—well, let us say that someone might have considered that he had a job already; and we felt that they were not given the same chance as those persons receiving unemployment compensation, for example." ²

Even before this policy was adopted, local WPA officials in various parts of the country had established co-operative relationships with employment offices in the hope of securing more favorable consideration of those on WPA rolls. In some localities WPA officials even went so far as to maintain direct contact

¹ Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, News Release, Chicago, April 16, 1941.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, pp. 97-98.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

with large employers to whom WPA workers were referred directly as opportunity presented. Arrangements like these were the more noteworthy in view of the repeated warnings issued by federal WPA officials, during the early stages of the program, against setting up within the WPA employment agencies that might appear to compete with regularly established offices.

To facilitate the transfer of WPA workers in rural areas to farm jobs the WPA early in 1942 held regional meetings with all state administrators at which the importance of such placements was emphasized. State administrators, as a result, inaugurated what were reported to have been "vigorous farm placement programs."

In WPA offices serving agricultural areas, special re-employment representatives were placed to promote the farm placement program. Co-operative relationships were also maintained with various other governmental agencies concerned with agricultural problems so as to assure the transfer, when possible, of WPA workers to farm jobs.

Further steps taken by the WPA to put project workers in the way of possible jobs include a number of comprehensive studies and the subsequent listing of workers' skills. The most recent of these has been the Defense Industries Employment Register, made up from work records of workers who had received or were awaiting WPA employment. By May, 1941, this register included the names of some 150,000 experienced mechanics and industrial production workers with skills needed in defense industries.

Closely related to this comprehensive register of WPA workers has been the much more limited practice of listing workers by name and circulating the list among various employers. Instead of sending around the names of potential workers, in a few areas employers have been allowed to visit WPA job sites and make their own choice of workers.

Reinstatement

When the WPA first began to insist that workers accept other jobs offered to them it was immediately recognized that such a policy could not succeed unless workers were assured that upon loss of their other jobs they could return to the WPA. So important did these promises seem to Congress that it wrote into
Eligibility

the same law which required workers to accept other employment another provision assuring reinstatement. Congressional policy as first stated (in 1937) was that a worker leaving the WPA to accept private employment was, at the “expiration thereof,” to be “entitled to immediate resumption of his previous employment status” if he was still “in need of relief and if he has lost the private employment through no fault of his own.”

To these two qualifications a third was added in 1939 when Congress prescribed that a worker might qualify for reinstatement only after he had drawn all the unemployment compensation benefits due and available to him as a result of “his term in private employment.”

To all other limitations upon a worker’s eligibility for reinstatement the WPA itself has added another. This is the requirement that to qualify for reinstatement a worker must apply within a prescribed period after the loss of his private job. In November, 1938, for example, it was ruled that no reinstatements could be made by the WPA except in the case of “persons returning from private employment within six months.” Upon approval of the ERA Act of 1938, this policy was amended to permit re-employment by the WPA of workers who had “accepted private employment subsequent to the date of approval of the Act, June 21, 1938.” In February, 1941, it was ruled that provisions regarding reinstatement were applicable only to workers who left their WPA jobs “on and after July 1, 1940.” Early in 1942 the WPA returned to its practice of limiting the application of its reinstatement policy to workers “who left project employment for the purpose of accepting . . . other . . . employment within 6 months prior to application for reemployment.”

The various qualifications surrounding this matter of reinstatement have caused no little discontent among workers. Particularly objectionable has been the requirement that they must be found to be “in need,” in accordance with standards which do not permit their keeping insurance, savings, or other assets they would

1 ERA Act of 1937, sec. 1.
2 ERA Act of 1939, sec. 17(b). Essentially the same provision was included in the three subsequent ERA Acts. For discussion of policies with respect to workers eligible to receive unemployment compensation benefits see chap. 17.
3 WPA Serial Telegram No. 198, November 29, 1938.
4 WPA Serial Telegram No. 207, January 10, 1939.
6 WPA, Manual of Rules and Regulations, p. 3.2.012, [January, 1942].

495
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

have been entitled to retain if they had continued on their WPA jobs. Even when workers could qualify as in need, they frequently experienced delays while their applications were being investigated. This led to further wage loss which they might have escaped if they had not left the WPA. To avoid difficulty on this ground, WPA practice has sometimes permitted immediate reinstatement subject to later investigation of need. This was made the general policy early in 1942.

A further grievance over reinstatement policies of the WPA has been that the chronic inadequacy of job quotas often precluded the possibility of employing workers who returned from other jobs. Thus, the very inadequacy of the program may be said to have contributed to the reluctance of workers to leave jobs provided under it.

Still another cause of dissatisfaction over the way in which reinstatement policies have worked out in practice was that workers when reassigned to WPA jobs frequently found themselves employed at tasks that paid less than they had been receiving before they left. Disaffection on this score was heightened by the language, incorporated in law until 1941, declaring a worker entitled to “immediate resumption of his previous employment status.” This was so widely interpreted by workers to mean that they were entitled to jobs of at least as high a classification as those they left that Mr. Hunter in 1941 asked and Congress voted that WPA workers leaving for other employment should be assured only of “reemployment.”

Numbers Discharged or Leaving WPA Rolls Voluntarily to Accept Other Employment

Such success as the WPA has attained in transferring workers to other jobs, obviously, has not been accidental. As already noted, the WPA has from time to time not only discharged individual workers because they failed to accept private or other public employment meeting prescribed standards, but has also laid off large numbers of workers and has closed down projects at such times and in such areas as workers were likely to be needed to meet demands for labor. Discharges, made in advance of actual offers of other employment, have often resulted in extreme hardship

1 ERA Act of 1937, sec. 1; ERA Act of 1938, sec. 12; ERA Act of 1939, sec. 17(b); ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 16(b).
Eligibility

to those who found other jobs only after considerable delay if indeed they were able to find them at all. Even after new jobs were found they have frequently been of a type much below the capacities of the workers and frequently paid even less than they previously received in WPA wages.  

Unfortunately, there are no reports available to show the number released by the WPA from time to time to take other jobs. As to the numbers who are not discharged, but leave voluntarily, regular reports are, however, available. Although by far the largest proportion of these separations are thought to be for the purpose of accepting other jobs, they also include those due to active military service, new sources of income, illness, and death. During the forty-six-month period from July, 1938, through April, 1942, voluntary separations ranged from 61,000 (in December, 1941) to approximately 173,000 (in September, 1938). During 1941 alone more than a million workers left the WPA rolls voluntarily. 

Since these figures include some workers who leave WPA rolls for various reasons other than to accept private jobs they tend to exaggerate somewhat the degree to which workers leave the WPA for this purpose. Some idea of the extent to which data relating to voluntary separations may overstate the number of workers who leave WPA employment for other jobs each month is afforded by a nationwide study made in December, 1940. On the basis of this study it was estimated that in September and October, 1940, when the number of voluntary separations totaled 195,000, only about “125,000 certified workers voluntarily left WPA projects to take private jobs.” The total number leaving the rolls during 1940 to take private employment was estimated at “at least 600,000.”

To what extent the separations and discharges which have occurred from month to month have approximated the number of workers who should have taken other jobs is, of course, not known. While certain observers maintain that any degree to which WPA employment has kept workers out of other jobs was to be condemned, this view has not been universally held. Many ob-

2 WPA, Employment Experience of Certified Workers Separated from WPA Projects September and October, 1940. January 15, 1941.
servers and organizations have supported wholeheartedly the policy of not forcing WPA workers to give up their jobs for "substandard" employment under other auspices. Not satisfied with the policy of permitting WPA workers to keep their jobs only when other possible openings fell below generally accepted standards for employment, there have been some who have defended the right of WPA workers to continue in their jobs so long as these were more desirable than any possible alternative. Of this E. Wight Bakke has written trenchantly:

... every emphasis on this problem is an indication of the degree to which private business and industry fail to provide even the inadequate security possible from the allowances of tax-rate-conscious public officials. . . .

I have neither seen nor heard of any evidence in my contacts with the unemployed either in England or in America that would lead me to suspect that when a job which promised a degree of security comparable to relief was offered, it would not find more applicants than could be taken. Indeed, as I have indicated elsewhere, reaching even noneconomic goals depends upon job holding. This fact will stimulate a man to accept normal work even at the sacrifice of a degree of economic security. To expect, however, that any available job regardless of its reward in economic or social security should be accepted in preference to relief is to expect that workers shall renounce all of that foresight and economic intelligence, the decay of which is popularly supposed to be indicated by the single fact of job refusal. . . .

Mr. Bakke concludes that this resulted because workers tried to:

... add up the advantages and the disadvantages of leaving relief work and going back to private employment. This is a most natural thing for them to do, and, incidentally, it indicates that they still possess some of the qualities of judgment and self-reliance they are supposed to have lost. In order to accept a private job which in the balance of a man's judgment appeared to be less advantageous than his relief work, a man would have to stop thinking rationally and be guided by sentiment. He would have to abandon the foresight and the planning that we have always admired and accept the job because presumably morality, self-respect, and community status are tied up more thoroughly with private than with government wages. Rationally a man must ask, "Can this source of maintenance supply me with the best possible security and standard of living for my family and satisfaction of my own major desires?" To some, the best possible choice of jobs on this basis falls to W.P.A. . . .

Thus, as Mr. Bakke clearly indicates, the same dilemma which has frequently been referred to in this volume as underlying the entire

1 The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, pp. 369, 367.
Eligibility

WPA program again crops out. “In order to make work relief do the best possible job from the point of view of morale building we have to make the job sufficiently attractive. . . .” An inescapable result of this, he maintains, is that it reduces the chance that private employment of a marginal nature at least “will rate comparatively high in the estimation of relief workers.”

A further consideration advanced in defense of the WPA’s keeping on its rolls (to whatever degree this may have happened) workers who might have found other employment is that, in its effort to maintain employment at specified levels, the WPA has often assigned new workers to take the place of those who had left the rolls for private employment. As a matter of economy, therefore, it has sometimes been urged that instead of transferring WPA workers to possible openings in private employment it is more economical to fill these jobs with workers waiting for WPA assignments. By thus reducing both turnover and, consequently, the need for breaking in new workers, it has been claimed that the efficiency of WPA operations is increased.

Availability of WPA Jobs

No less important than a worker’s availability for work and the unavailability of other employment is the availability of a WPA job despite the fact that various federal regulations prescribed that certifications for WPA employment were not supposed to be limited by “current assignment opportunities on projects.” In a number of jurisdictions applicants for work have been eligible for certification only as there appeared to be some hope of putting them to work or upon requisition from the WPA for specified numbers of workers possessing prescribed abilities or skills.

When the WPA issued a report on the policies of local certifying authorities early in 1939, it was declared that the general practice in 11 states was to certify applicants for employment only as specific requests were made by the WPA for workers possessing designated skills. In another 19 states referrals were said

1 Ibid., pp. 424-425.
4 Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington.
to be limited by inadequate administrative personnel or were de-
liberately restricted to approximately the number that could be
employed. In two additional states \(^1\) certifications were restricted
by other factors. In Illinois, at the time, certifications were sus-
pended altogether, as was also the case in 16 counties in Kentucky.

Even in areas where the general policy has been not to limit
certifications when there was little hope of assigning workers,
this practice has sometimes been adopted for longer or shorter
periods when the number already certified seemed far greater than
could be employed by the WPA in any foreseeable future. This
was the case in Illinois and in Louisville, Kentucky, for example,
when certifications, during 1939, were temporarily discontinued.

Still another method of keeping down the number of workers
declared eligible for WPA jobs when these have been insufficient
to the need, has been merely to stall some phase of the investiga-
tion process rather than to halt, openly, the making of referrals
or certifications. In Chicago, in 1940, for example, physical ex-
aminations of women applying for WPA jobs were deliberately
deferred because of the current lack of WPA work for women.
Similar practices have been said to have been pursued in certain
other areas where the number of women, Negroes, or other
groups of workers seeking employment greatly exceeded the
supply of available jobs.

Discontinuance of certifications when there seemed little likeli-
hood of employing the workers thus made eligible for employ-
ment has been defended on a number of grounds: that it is unfair
to workers to lead them to expect employment when in reality
their chances are very slim; that it is wasteful to ask hard-pressed
personnel in relief agencies to give time to such futile activities
when there are so many more urgent demands upon their atten-
tion; and finally, that declaring workers in need of WPA employ-
ment places relief agencies under some obligation to meet their
need if they are not given jobs.

On the other hand, the practice of certifying only such workers
as are thought to stand some chance of being employed relatively
soon after being found eligible has been condemned on the ground
that it fails to provide a true picture of the number who need and
can qualify for WPA jobs in a given area at any given time. Hence
the practice not only fails to provide a record of those who apply

\(^1\) West Virginia and Kansas.
Eligibility

and might be employed but serves to deter others who might qualify from even filing applications since they know that certifications are not being made. It is obviously impossible for federal officials and Congress to plan to meet existing needs when the very process by which these might be measured tends to obscure their extent. Some idea of the degree to which numbers certified as eligible for WPA jobs fail to reflect the total number thought to be in need and eligible is apparent from data presented in a subsequent chapter.¹

The lack of a possible WPA job may not only prevent a worker from qualifying for employment but may also lead to his disqualification even after he has been certified if he has been given no assignment within a specified period. Federal policy on this issue (as stated in 1939) was that a worker’s certification should be canceled if he had not been given a job within ninety days after he was certified unless in the meantime he had notified the WPA that he was still in need, seeking work, and available for employment. This policy was somewhat more liberal than practices which had previously been in effect in many areas where certifications were subject to cancellation if workers had not received jobs within sixty or even thirty days after being certified.

Though it has been customary to cancel the eligibility of workers who were neither assigned nor heard from within some prescribed period, the inadequacy of administrative personnel and the pressure of other duties have frequently prevented the carrying out of whatever policies of this kind were supposed to be in effect. As a result, workers who had not been given WPA jobs have, nevertheless, sometimes been retained on eligible lists for months, long after they had secured other jobs, had moved away, died, or become ineligible as a result of any one of many reasons. Thus, although it is true that the number certified for WPA employment at any one time is much smaller than the total number who are in need and eligible, it is also true that a significant proportion of those who are actually certified at any given time may not be available for assignment even if jobs were offered them.

Effect of Occupation upon Eligibility

Persons in specified occupations have from time to time been declared ineligible for WPA employment. On the other hand,

¹ See chap. 25.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

some attempt has been made in certain areas to give preference in employment to workers possessing special skills that were regarded as particularly useful and necessary to preserve. In Louisiana in 1938, for example, it was ruled that one of the considerations to be taken into account in certifying a woman for employment was whether she possessed “a skill which should be preserved; such as, teachers, typists, and stenographers.”^1

In addition to those previously discussed as being ineligible for WPA employment because their skills are not suited to the kinds of work available under the WPA program,^2 further groups which have sometimes been barred include farmers ^3 and self-employed business or professional persons.

Restrictions upon these last named groups are usually justified on the ground that they are never truly “unemployed,” that they are not “available” for WPA employment, or that their employment by the WPA would be bad social policy in that it would divert them from occupations in which they might later become self-supporting. Furthermore, since they frequently own property, stocks of goods (and, in the case of farmers, livestock and farm equipment), they frequently find themselves disqualified on the ground that their assets do not, under rules and regulations regarding methods of determining need, permit them to be classed as “needy.” ^4

Farmers

With respect to farmers, it is also held that so long as they have even a “patch” of ground and a roof over their heads they are not in so great need as other types of workers who have not even these resources. Furthermore, it is often difficult to arrange projects in sparsely settled rural areas accessible to farmers or farm workers.

Still another consideration has been that since WPA pay is fre-


^2 See chaps. 9 and 18. Noteworthy among those denied employment on this ground are women accustomed only to housework or field work, barbers, rag sorters, chicken pickers, and so forth.

^3 Farmers and others to whom certain policies have frequently been applied have been variously defined in different states. In Mississippi, for example, a farmer has been defined as “a worker whose income is derived from the farm, as a day laborer, wage hand, renter, sharecropper, or landowner.”—Mississippi WPA, Employment Manual: Intake and Certification. [Jackson], Part I, sec. 10, p. 1, rev. March 3, 1941.

^4 Discussion of methods used in determining need is included in chap. 15.
Eligibility

quently much higher than that of agricultural workers, opening the door to their employment by the WPA would upset the existing rural economy. Finally, it is urged that since farmers may be receiving benefits administered by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) they should not be given WPA employment at least until this source of aid has been exhausted, any more than industrial workers should be employed before having exhausted unemployment compensation benefits due them.¹

To guard against the possibility of employing farmers who might be better aided in some other way, various statements of policy have repeatedly specified that no person presumptively eligible for FSA loans or grants could be employed until that agency ruled that it was impossible to give or to continue aid to him.² This practice has not always been required by federal WPA officials, however, since experience has proved that farmers who can qualify for WPA employment are not usually able to meet the conditions upon which FSA aid is normally given. Experience has also shown that delays encountered in ascertaining whether or not a farmer can qualify for FSA help frequently result in real hardship to his family.

Despite the widely prevailing policy of denying WPA jobs to those eligible for help from the FSA, it has not always been possible to exclude from WPA employment all farmers eligible for such aid. FSA officials in the state of Washington, for example, admitted in 1940 that there were “a few farm families on WPA that could best further their own rehabilitation, if they could receive grants and stay at home on a work program . . . [which] would be one strengthening their resources and working toward their becoming self-supporting as farmers. These families in all cases have . . . livestock or other resources which are producing some income but in no case, income sufficient to support the family,

¹ Brief reference to the FSA grant program is included in chap. 1.
² Typical of statements of state policy on this question is the following which was issued in Wisconsin in 1939: “Farmers in rural areas who are in need shall be eligible for certification to WPA if they are not active standard loan clients nor currently receiving emergency grants from the FSA. Farmers who at one time received standard loans from FSA, but who are not currently receiving such loans, or who have been definitely rejected for loans by FSA, and are in need, are eligible for referral to WPA.”—Wisconsin Public Welfare Department, Manual of Procedure for Certification to the Work Projects Administration. Madison, sec. 4, p. 412, rev. September 29, 1939.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

consequently they are receiving WPA assistance. FSA recognizes the desirability of assisting these families to further their own rehabilitation.” Arrangements were, therefore, made to remove from WPA employment and to give FSA grants “to a limited number of these families where there is reasonable belief that they are potential rehabilitation clients.”

Since the FSA is not the only resource available to farmers, state policies have frequently required that other possible ways of meeting farmers’ needs must also be exhausted before they could be given WPA employment. Typical of policies of this type was the following, prescribed in North Carolina in 1939.

It should be clearly understood that WPA is a works program and is not intended to displace farmers from their natural occupation of farming. For this reason, therefore, all farm programs, such as Farm Security Administration, Seed Loans, Farm Credit Association, etc., should be exhausted before a farmer is referred to WPA. The Farm Security Administration is set up to help farmers to help themselves, and through supervision it can help a farmer to best utilize his land and farm resources.

A Louisiana ruling of 1940 prescribed that “If a farm applicant can be financed through a local bank, Federal loan, or landlord, he should not be referred [for WPA employment].” “Relief,” according to another Louisiana ruling, “should no more replace the farmer’s credit than the factory worker’s private employment, but if credit is exhausted and no further credit is available, the applicant, whether landlord or tenant, may be referred.”

On similar grounds, giving WPA employment to farm laborers who are unable to secure credit from their landlords to tide them over until harvest time has been sharply assailed, on the ground that this permitted landlords to shirk what had previously been an acknowledged obligation. From other quarters the policy has been heartily acclaimed as a means of helping workers to escape from the subjugation in which they had frequently been held by landowners.

1 Farm Security Administration, State Letter 56-RR. Olympia, Washington, February 7, 1940.
Eligibility

Statements of policy with respect to employing farmers normally apply only to those living in "rural areas." Thus, farmers or farm laborers who move into towns or villages are not, as a rule, affected.

Both the policy and the exception have been widely criticized as inviting farm workers to leave farms on which they might ultimately make a better economic adjustment than in the towns to which they move. In a report issued by the American Association of Social Workers in May, 1940, for example, it was held that because the WPA "discriminated" against farmers, "many former farmers and farm laborers have sold their belongings, live stock, and farms and gone to town to go on to WPA projects. In town they now clog the relief rolls and obviously have no future, because there is no possibility of their being absorbed in industry. They need an opportunity to start ‘from scratch’ again, and be assisted to that end.”

More recently Gertrude Springer, writing in the Survey Monthly, after one of her many tours of observation to study the operation of relief and public welfare programs, has quoted a local public welfare official as follows when speaking of a former WPA employe who, with his family, was then living in a boxcar:

Of course he’d be better on the land. So would hundreds of farm people who were drawn into these little towns by WPA and now are stranded, rotting their lives out. WPA unsettled ’em in droves and now FSA piously resettles ’em one by one. What kind of a policy do you call that? And meantime the land that they left has been gathered in, usually for delinquent taxes, by a new kind of speculator who works it at the absolute minimum to get the maximum benefits under the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Those guys don’t give a whoop about producing. They’re farming to get the most they can out of the government.

Policies with respect to the employment of farmers on WPA projects have been colored not only by the fact, just noted, that other agencies existed to help them, but also by the availability of work on farms at certain seasons which does not permit classifying them as “unemployed.” This consideration was made clear in an Ohio ruling (of 1940) that "Farmers who have opportunities

1 Highlights in the Trends, p. 10.

to obtain private employment and farmers who can work on their own farms during the farming season are not eligible for certification during the time such employment is available." ¹ Similar regulations have been prescribed in a number of states.

To safeguard against the danger of diverting agricultural workers from farm employment (as well as to guard against the possibility, already alluded to, of overlooking sources of possible aid) several states have established elaborate procedures to make sure that certain types of applicants make at least some effort to secure farm jobs. In Louisiana, for example, it has been prescribed that:

Sharecroppers living on plantations in the plantation quarters should not be considered for referral without consultation with the plantation management to determine if there is employment available for them on the plantation and whether the usual source of credit, namely, the landlord, is available to them. This information should be given in detail at the time of referral.²

In North Carolina it has been held that "referral to WPA is not intended to cause a tenant or farm hand to endanger, give up or lose his agreement. Referral to WPA of a land owner is not intended to cause him to leave or endanger his farm operations." In order to permit tenants and farm hands to "live within" agreements made with landlords, the WPA has required them (as a condition to employment by the WPA) to negotiate forms designed to facilitate their release by the WPA at such times as they might be needed in farming operations.³

Investigations of the eligibility for WPA employment of farm laborers in North Carolina in 1940 were supposed to include verification of their attempts to make "land arrangements" with landlords. A comparable policy was prescribed in Georgia in 1940.

A highly significant step in the direction of better co-ordination of WPA employment with the needs of farmers was the agreement reached (in 1941) by the heads of both the FSA and the WPA. Under this co-operative arrangement it was agreed that

Eligibility

it was the WPA's responsibility to provide "useful public employ¬
ment during the periods of inactivity in farm operations." This
inactivity, it was recognized, "normally occurs during the winter
months."

The role of the FSA under the plan was to assist families
through loans, through help in developing "with the families com¬
prehensive farm and home plans," and through "supervisory
guidance to the farm and home management activities of the par¬
ticipating families." It was also understood that the FSA "should
determine the period or periods in which each individual family
may be employed by the Work Projects Administration." ¹

Having settled upon these general principles, detailed arrange¬
ments for integrating more closely the programs of the two agen¬
cies were left to their regional and state authorities.

While questions as to whether they were "unemployed," "avail¬
able for work" or might better be aided in some other way have
frequently been the controlling considerations barring farmers
and other agricultural workers from WPA jobs, another impor¬
tant barrier has been their inability to meet prescribed standards
of need or to qualify for relief when and where this was necessary.
In fact, in 1938 southern representatives and senators succeeded
in persuading Congress to write into law a provision which pre¬
scribed that "Farmers in need and who need employment to sup¬
plement their farm income but who are not on relief rolls shall
have the same eligibility for employment on projects in rural
areas as persons on such rolls." ²

Whatever effect this provision may have had upon the admin¬
istration, it is significant that within two months after its enact¬
ment, Mr. Hopkins announced that he had authorized WPA offi¬
cials in 11 southern states (in which diets for thousands con¬
sisted of "grits, greens, and gravy") to put to work 200,000
farm workers. In support of this decision Mr. Hopkins declared:

¹ FSA and WPA, General Guides for Development of Cooperative Plans for
Assisting Needy Farm Families through the Services of Work Projects Administra¬
FARM Security Administration, and State Departments of Public Welfare.
[Transmittal Letter], February 20, 1941.
² ERA Act of 1938, sec. 10. Incorporation of this provision, applicable particularly
to farmers, is especially significant in view of the fact that the same section of this
law (as also the ERA acts passed in each of the two preceding years) included an¬
other clause which specified that needy applicants whose names had not previously
been placed on relief rolls were to be given the same eligibility for employment as
applicants whose names had previously appeared on such rolls.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

I believe, therefore, as a matter of permanent policy the head of every farm family whose income is inadequate should be given employment a few months each year to supplement his agricultural income. . . .

If the per capita net income of farm families in the South could be brought up to the level of farmers' incomes in the rest of the country, the pool of new purchasing power thus created would absorb twice as many goods as we exported to all foreign countries in 1935.¹

Largely as a result of this policy, employment of certified WPA workers in 11 southern states ² catapulted from 461,000 workers in July, 1938, to 641,000 in November—an increase of approximately 40 per cent as contrasted with a gain of about 10 per cent for the nation as a whole. As compared with employment in November, 1937, employment in the 11 southern states in November, 1938, showed an increase of 170 per cent as opposed to a gain of 114 per cent for the entire country.

These comparatively large gains in WPA employment in the South were accompanied by an even larger proportionate gain in FSA rehabilitation grants to farmers. Although the absolute number of cases was very small in proportion to WPA employment, the number of FSA grants in the southern region increased, between November, 1937, and the same month a year later by nearly 200 per cent, whereas the number of such grants for the country at large showed an increase of only about 8 per cent.

The much-heralded program of between-season employment for farmers came to an abrupt close late in 1938 with the signing of an agreement reached by Aubrey Williams, deputy administrator of the WPA, and Will W. Alexander, administrator of the FSA, and presented to representatives of agencies in 12 southern states. This agreement provided, in part, that the WPA "effective immediately" would:

. . . terminate the employment of those WPA workers who are farmers and who have, or should be able to make, adequate land arrangements for the coming cropping season.

All such farmers whose employment is terminated will be advised to apply to the Farm Security Administration if they are still in need of aid and cannot get adequate assistance for farming operations from any other source. . . .

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, August 6, 1938.
² Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.
Eligibility

This agreement applies to farmers presently employed by the Works Progress Administration and also to farmers certified and accepted for WPA employment now awaiting assignment. Only those workers who could not make land arrangements and who could not qualify for FSA benefits were to be considered eligible for WPA employment. Nevertheless, because of the large number of farmers certified for WPA jobs, it was necessary in many areas to limit a worker's period of employment to two or three months to make room for others whose farm income needed supplementation.

When Congress in 1939 enacted another ERA act, it included no special mention of conditions upon which farmers were to be considered eligible for employment.

Although Mr. Hopkins in 1938 announced that the WPA's intention of providing supplemental employment for farmers was to be a "permanent policy," no subsequent season prior to the summer of 1942, at least, saw anything like the 1938 gains. In fact 1939 saw an actual decline in employment (between July and November) in the southern states, as well as in the United States as a whole. Between-season employment since 1938 has been provided for only about 40,000 to 50,000 workers a year, according to estimates by WPA officials.

Since the tremendous increase of employment during the latter half of 1938 coincided exactly with the period of the national election, critics of the administration were quick, of course, to cry "politics." However, the fact that so much of the increase occurred in the "solid South" was cited repeatedly by administration stalwarts as proof positive that the increases had no special political significance.

The 1938 drive to put farmers on WPA rolls was the second

2 See, for example, the statement of Aubrey Williams, WPA Release 4-1815, October 30, 1938. For further reference to this matter see chap. 24.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

drive of its kind. The first came in the fall of 1936 when because of drought (especially in the Midwest) some 325,000 workers from farm families in drought-stricken areas were given WPA jobs.

This employment of farmers in drought areas marked a departure from earlier policy. In explaining why federal officials had come to believe that "the major responsibility for providing aid to destitute families in the drought area, other than standard rehabilitation grants, should be assumed by WPA" an official Minnesota release declared:

It is consistent with the general policy of relieving destitution by providing employment rather than giving direct relief.

It will enable the people to engage in a program of soil improvement and water conservation that will contribute to the solution of the drought problem.

The morale of the farmer in the drought area will be improved by employment on projects recognized as having economic value.\(^1\)

Even friends of the Roosevelt administration (and indeed WPA officials in certain areas) roundly criticized the WPA effort in the drought areas on the ground that it was undertaken without sufficient advance planning and took men off their own land on which they needed to do what they could to overcome the ravages of drought and prepare for putting in new crops. Less charitable critics attributed the move to aid drought-stricken farmers through giving them WPA jobs rather than the less liberal grants of the Resettlement Administration as an attempt to influence the election which came just when the drought program was at its height.\(^2\)

Steps taken by the WPA within recent years to facilitate the employment of farmers contrast sharply with the earlier practice in a number of states where, during the program's early years especially, being a farmer meant all but automatic disqualification for a WPA job. In some areas relief officials reported that "farmers" on any kind of farm, even a "mountain" farm—to say nothing of a "knob farm" which, apparently, is somewhat less steep than a "mountain" farm—could not be certified. Similarly, it made no difference whether the "farmer" was a genuine, experienced tiller of the soil, or a former coal miner or unemployed

---


\(^2\) For further discussion of this issue see chap. 24.
Eligibility

industrial worker seeking temporary refuge on some abandoned farm.

Noteworthy among states which have gone far beyond federal policy in denying WPA jobs to farmers is Missouri where, for a time, at least, "Farmers, share-croppers, tenant farmers, and renters who when self-supporting made more than fifty percent of their living (not including WPA, CWA, and relief work) from farm operations cannot be certified to WPA." The reason given in explanation of this policy was that "WPA is planned for the unemployed industrial worker." \(^1\)

In view of the reluctance shown by many relief agencies with respect to certifying farmers for WPA jobs it is worthy of note that nearly 12 per cent of the workers and approximately 14 per cent of the economic heads of families certified for jobs as of January 15, 1936, were farmers, farm laborers, farm foremen, managers, or overseers. In only two occupational groups (unskilled labor in industries other than agriculture, and semi-skilled workers in manufacturing and other industries) did the number of economic heads exceed the number of farm operators and laborers.\(^2\)

Despite all the WPA has done to assure employment to workers in agricultural areas,\(^3\) the 1940 Report of the Secretary of Agriculture declared that in 1939, before the United States entered World War II:

It appeared . . . that our urban industries, even at the quickened pace engendered by the war, would not absorb all the urban unemployed, not to speak of the surplus agricultural labor. This situation pointed clearly to the need for a rural works program, as a means of providing jobs for the excess rural manpower and of promoting the conservation of our natural resources.\(^4\)

At the time of writing, continued the report, there was need:

... to find work and incomes for more than 3,000,000 totally or partially unemployed men who are now living on farms and at the same time to prevent the deterioration of soil, water, and forest resources. In 1937 the unemployment census registered half of these men as totally or partially unem-

\(^1\) Missouri State Social Security Commission, Manual. [Jefferson City], pp. 121-122, [1938].
\(^3\) See chap. 13 and table 20 for an analysis of WPA employment in areas of varying degrees of urbanization.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ployed, and other sources of information showed that the other half and their dependents were trying to exist on gross cash incomes from their farm operations on an average of less than $200 annually. The same areas in which most of the needy people live are the areas in which our natural resources have been most depleted, where erosion is the most advanced, and where land, water, and forest resources are least protected from further damage by man and nature. We need to bridge the gap between the unemployed or the underemployed man on the land and the conservation job.

... a rural conservation-works program should be undertaken as one approach to the solution of this twofold problem. Such a program would supply jobs or supplemental earned income to these 3,000,000 needy farm people; it would also accomplish greatly needed additional conservation work which would pay permanent dividends in larger farm incomes, more secure farm homes, and protected natural resources. It would treat human erosion and soil erosion as twin aspects of the same national requirement.

In general the areas of greatest rural poverty are the areas of greatest need for terracing, contouring, stabilizing of drainageways, fencing, the planting of hay and pastures, and the development of water-spreading and water-storage structures. Every year erosion removes some 3 billion tons of soil from the agricultural land of the United States. This wasted soil contains the equivalent of 90 million tons of phosphorus, potassium, nitrogen, calcium, and magnesium. ... Figured at commercial fertilizer prices, the annual loss is 6 billion dollars. ...

Enough man-days of work are required for the conservation job to utilize the unoccupied time of the needy people for several years. Obviously, a program that would utilize this unoccupied time so as to provide supplemental farm income and promote conservation would go to the root of the farm problem. It would conserve human and material resources together.1

Whatever effect the war may have upon problems raised here, the issues posed by the Secretary of Agriculture will need to be squarely faced in the post-war era.

Businessmen and Professional Persons

Similar provisions to those established to prevent the diversion of farmers from work at which they might again become self-supporting have been applied in some areas to persons in business for themselves or practicing a profession.

In Illinois a business or professional person would have been eligible for WPA employment in 1940 only if this would not have been "detrimental to his pursuit of the profession or business."2 Missouri policy has precluded the employment of persons who

1 Ibid., pp. 108-109.
Eligibility

were “practicing a profession or operating a small business for which they are qualified and equipped.”

In Louisiana early in 1940 it was prescribed that persons engaged in operating small businesses such as shoe repairing and rooming and lodging houses were not “as a rule” eligible for certification since they were regarded as employed.

Although an applicant might, under a 1941 ruling, be given unemployment relief in California provided “careful review of the factors involved” gave promise that he might become self-supporting within ninety days, cases of this kind were not, however, eligible for referral for WPA employment.

Denial of WPA employment to professional persons and owners of small businesses has had a somewhat different cast to it than denial of jobs to farmers. The latter, if in need of assistance, may look to the FSA, a federal agency, federally financed. To needy professional persons and businessmen, on the other hand, the federal government offers nothing at all except the WPA jobs from which they are frequently barred. Whether, as this great disparity in treatment implies, responsibility for aiding professional or business persons is in reality vested with less “national interest” than is aid to farmers is an open question.

3 California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], chap. 1, sec. 442.2, rev. March 31, 1941.
CHAPTER XXI
ELIGIBILITY: PERFORMANCE ON THE JOB
AND DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Performance on the Job

However employable and available a worker may appear to be and however many openings the WPA may have, the acid test of his eligibility for WPA employment is his performance on an actual job. WPA policies and practices in this area have already been presented in some detail.\(^1\) As shown previously, workers are supposed to be continued in employment only so long as they give a day’s work for their day’s pay. Failure to make good on the job may result not only in a worker’s discharge but also in disqualification for further WPA employment. This extreme step is usually not taken until several attempts have been made to find a job within the WPA to which a worker can adapt himself. An Ohio WPA ruling (of 1938), for example, specified that a worker’s certification might be canceled if he did not “produce a reasonable day’s work after a short induction period.” A later ruling prescribed that this should be done only if a worker repeatedly failed “to demonstrate his ability to perform satisfactorily the duties required and continuous effort to adjust him to the project has failed.”\(^2\)

In some states the disqualification has sometimes appeared to be permanent. In Ohio, for example, it was ruled in 1938 that persons whose certification had been canceled “because of lack of adaptability to the program” could not be recertified.\(^3\) An Illinois ruling of 1937 prescribed that consideration for further assignment would be denied workers whose records showed that they had failed to do satisfactory work. Reinstatement was permitted,

\(^1\) See chaps. 9 and 10.
\(^3\) For examples of similar policies in other states, see Minnesota State Board of Control, CFS-WPA-35, St. Paul, March 3, 1937; and Nebraska WPA, DL-15, Lincoln, February 26, 1936.
Eligibility

however, after a single dismissal for disciplinary reasons, permanent disqualification following only after a second such dismissal.

A change of policy in New York City early in 1940 permitted recertification, after suspensions of from thirty days to six months, of WPA workers dismissed for loafing or shirking. Employees discharged because of any one of a number of specified reasons, however, were not eligible for re-employment. Among offenses warranting this drastic penalty were felonious assault with intent to do bodily harm, bribery, malicious destruction of government property, fraud, “insubordination involving spreading of false reports and slander,” assault on a superior, and being twice rated as “unsatisfactory and dismissed for reduction in force.”

Policies adopted in New York City late in 1940 prescribed that workers dismissed in the course of quota reductions because their occupational ratings were either unsatisfactory or only fair, might not be reassigned to their previous jobs but might be re-employed at “an entirely different type of work.”

Workers whose certifications had been canceled in Missouri because of failure “to adjust on the project” were not, under a 1938 ruling, eligible for recertification unless the cause for their failure was subsequently removed.

Duration of Employment

Once a worker succeeds in running the eligibility gauntlet, secures an assignment, and even proves himself fully capable of his job he has little reason to feel any sense of security since “rotation” will probably get him, if he doesn’t watch out.

One of the ways of rotating jobs (that is, spreading them among as many workers as possible) is to dismiss, upon completion of a project, all workers employed on it. These workers then must take their chances, along with all other workers awaiting WPA jobs, of getting assignments to other projects. This policy, born of the chronic inadequacy of WPA jobs and a desire to make these few help as many workers as possible, contrasts

^ New York (City) Department of Public Welfare, P-40-7, January 24, 1940.
^ Idem, Informational Memorandum No. 40-188, October 21, 1940.

515
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy sharply with earlier policies which assumed that a worker was to be continued in employment on one project or another so long as he continued to meet prescribed eligibility requirements. As originally contemplated, WPA employment was designed to be, in fact, "employment assurance." If one job was shut down, workers were to be transferred to another. This policy was gradually abandoned, however, in favor of assigning workers only to a given project and of throwing them back into the pool of unassigned workers when the project was completed or discontinued.

If a project proved particularly long-lived still another aspect of this rotation principle might overtake a worker, since those employed "continuously" for specified periods are subject to automatic dismissal. In this respect employment with the WPA differs markedly from that in private enterprise. There great effort is made to reduce labor turnover by hanging on to experienced workers who have proved themselves. Under the WPA program, however, the opposite is true. The worker who makes good on the job and thereby becomes entitled to continued employment finds himself marked for automatic and arbitrary dismissal after a specified period. Thus, seniority brings not privileges, as in private employment, but penalties.

The practice of "rotating" WPA employment through releasing workers who have been employed for specified periods and employing others who have had less recent employment, has a long history. It was not until 1939, however, that it was almost universally applied.

Purposes Underlying Rotation Policies

Rotation in employment is intended to serve two ends. Its first purpose is to "spread the work" by giving a larger number of applicants access to whatever jobs are available. Second, it has a disciplinary undercurrent. Workers are to be deterred from settling down to making WPA work a lifetime career; or else they are to be induced to seek and enter private employment—the obverse and reverse of the same idea.¹

¹ In passing, it is significant to note that the idea of rotating WPA employment has a British counterpart, the so-called "gap principle" incorporated into that nation's unemployment insurance scheme during the years 1922-1924. The effect of this principle was to limit payment of uncovenanted or extended benefits to specified periods broken by gaps of from one to five weeks in which no benefits could be received. Noteworthy among the reasons advanced in favor of abandoning these stoppages of uncovenanted benefits which were intended to emphasize their conditional charac-
Eligibility

Early Practices

Among the earliest evidences of interest in relating eligibility to length of employment was that which appeared during 1937 when in various parts of the country reductions that had to be effected were made in part through the release of the "careerists" who had already enjoyed a comparatively long period of WPA employment.

Later in 1937 the rotation principle got a real workout in at least one area—New York City—where WPA and relief officials agreed to a plan by which workers employed by the WPA for at least two years were to be returned to relief rolls and replaced on WPA rolls by workers who had previously received relief. In effectuation of this general policy, workers who had not previously been employed by the WPA were (other considerations being equal) given preference over those having previous experience whenever job openings were available.

When the WPA in 1938 adopted the policy of providing low-income farmers with "between-season" employment, as described in the preceding chapter, rotation was the very essence of the scheme. In many instances employment of any one farmer, under this program, was limited to a period of two months.

Further local experimentation with the rotation of workers was attempted in Los Angeles during the spring of 1939, when local WPA authorities played with the idea of discharging all workers on a project when the project closed. When a new project opened, workers were selected from among those receiving relief from the State Relief Administration. After bitter attacks against the plan by the Workers Alliance, it was abandoned.

Still another local practice which limited severely the length of time a worker could be continued in WPA employment was that which was in effect in Illinois during the period when state relief funds were being used to help finance WPA projects on which relief recipients might be employed. Since relief standards then in effect prescribed only $25 a month for single persons, and since such persons employed by the WPA could earn an average of $50 a month, relief authorities decided that single workers em-

\[517\]
ployed on projects financed in part from relief funds should be permitted to work only two months, after which they were to be discharged for two months, during which they were expected to live on the balance of the $100 they were presumed not to have needed while they worked.

Despite sporadic and local interest previously manifested in the rotating of WPA workers in various parts of the country it was not until 1938 that much attention was paid to the possibility of applying the principle on a national basis. What touched off the sudden interest in spreading WPA employment among as many workers as possible was the testimony given by Colonel Somervell, then WPA administrator in New York City, before the Byrnes Committee of the Senate. The Committee heard, with apparent amazement, that "a high percentage" of WPA workers in New York City had been "on the rolls since 1935" while some 80,000 workers who were eligible for WPA employment continued to receive direct relief because no WPA jobs were available for them. Claiming that his rotation policy had the approval of Mr. Hopkins, Colonel Somervell declared it to be his intention to put it into effect in his territory, though with certain limitations, to permit the retention of certain workers needed to carry on established projects.

This proposal obviously struck a responsive chord with the Committee. "I have no doubt about the wisdom of it," declared Senator Byrnes. "It is unjust," he continued, for one man to regard his WPA job "as a permanent job" and for the government to employ him while there is "another man over here on the roll eligible," but unable to get a job.¹

This same slant was clearly evident in the questioning of subsequent witnesses. In response to probing by the Committee, the WPA administrator of Pennsylvania, for example, ventured the guess that of the 193,000 workers then employed in Pennsylvania, 75 to 80 per cent had been on "since the start of the program." ² Although he admitted having thought of the possibility of rotating employment, he believed that it would reduce efficiency.

² Ibid., p. 659. The survey made by the WPA in 1939 disclosed that 23.4 per cent of the WPA workers in Pennsylvania had been employed by the WPA continuously for three years or more.

518
Eligibility

In view of the interest manifested in this subject by the Committee, it is not surprising that its preliminary report contained a recommendation that the WPA administrator "should endeavor to spread employment among all eligible workers, and in the rotation of eligible workers should take into consideration the income received from outside employment." ¹ Although there was talk in Congress of writing into a supplementary WPA appropriation act early in 1939 a provision requiring some such rotation policy as hiring workers for two weeks, then laying them off for two, it was not until the ERA Act of 1939 was enacted that rotation was finally worked into national policy. When it did come, however, it came with a vengeance.

National Policy, 1939

The action Congress finally took on this matter was initiated in the House and was influenced to no small degree by findings resulting from the investigations of need first recommended by the Byrnes Committee. This study revealed that of some 2,700,000 workers who early in 1939 were found eligible for continued WPA employment, over half (51.6 per cent) had been continuously employed for one year or more; more than a fourth (25.8 per cent) had been employed continuously for two years or more; while about a sixth (16.7 per cent) had been continuously employed three years or more.

These proportions varied widely from place to place, the percentage employed for three years or more ranging from only 2.3 per cent in Maine, 4.2 per cent in Florida, and 4.9 per cent in Vermont to as much as 38.1 per cent in New York State. In New York City this proportion was even higher, reaching 42.1 per cent—a fact that received no little attention on Capitol Hill. In other large cities of 100,000 population or more the proportion of WPA workers employed continuously for three years or longer averaged about 18 per cent, while in cities of from 5,000 to less than 50,000 population, the proportion was approximately 14 per cent and in smaller cities was about 10.5 per cent.²

¹Ibid., vol. 2, p. 1386. The effect of this requirement has already been described in chap. 17.
²An earlier study made in November, 1937, revealed that by that date some 4,937,000 different workers had, since the WPA's establishment, been given employment at one time or another. Of these workers only 15 per cent had been employed continuously between March, 1936, or earlier, and November, 1937.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The action originally proposed by the House Appropriations Committee (over the vehement objection of WPA and other administration leaders) was to require dismissal of all WPA workers employed eighteen months or more and to prohibit their reinstatement before the termination of a waiting-period of sixty days. Although the House defeated a number of proposals either to eliminate this provision altogether or to restrict severely its scope, only two tempering amendments proved successful. One of these excluded from automatic discharge workers who were family heads and forty-five years of age or over. The other exempted veterans.

When the relief bill went to the Senate, the Appropriations Committee recommended to substitute for the House rotation proposal an amendment which was said to have been suggested by Colonel Harrington. This modification would not have required (as did the House measure) the arbitrary discharge of workers for any prescribed period after a specified term of employment but would have given workers unassigned for three months or more preference over those employed for eighteen months or more. The Senate approved this proposal as it did still another amendment suggested by Senator Barkley to permit the exemption of workers who "had in good faith made an effort to secure private employment without success" and to give the administration some discretion in applying the automatic discharge principle so that it would not result in "dire want and need and disaster." ¹

These modifications of the earlier House action fared badly, however, in the hands of House and Senate conferees. When the bill finally emerged from conference even the House proposal to exempt family heads forty-five years of age and over had been thrown overboard.² This left the original proposal much as it had been approved by the House. There was, however, one major alteration. It reduced from sixty to thirty days the period during which workers continuously employed for eighteen months could not be re-employed.

Upon signing this measure, President Roosevelt expressed

¹ Congressional Record, June 27, 1939, p. 7979.
² Exclusion of family heads who were at least forty-five years old from discharge under the rotation plan was eliminated on advice of WPA officials who feared that such an exemption would soon leave the WPA with a preponderant number of oldsters and thus affect its efficiency as a work program.
Eligibility

special regret over the ultimate defeat of the Senate amendment which allowed the exercise of some discretion in the case of families in dire need, which, he said, "was stricken out at the insistence of the House Conferences."  

The inevitability of widespread suffering resulting from the arbitrary dismissal of all WPA workers employed continuously for eighteen months or more was clearly recognized by a number of congressional leaders who branded the new policy as "cruel," "vicious," "sadistic." Replying to these critics, Representative Woodrum retorted (amid applause, says the Record) that they were wrong and that:

. . . the most humane thing written into this bill is this amendment requiring rotation of W.P.A. workers. . . . If the Government were undertaking to give a job to every person out of work, if the program of the administration were to provide a job for every person eligible for a W.P.A. job, what these gentlemen say about the inhumanity of taking them off the rolls would be eminently true, but the program has never called for doing more than giving a job to about one in every three or four entitled to it.

What about the inhumanity, what about the starving, what about the hundreds of that army of people standing in line in New York City who would like to have some of the benefits of this Government program that you will not let get on the program because you want to perpetuate the people already there? . . .

Why not shed a few tears for the deserving American citizens who have never had a meal from the W.P.A. in the whole three and a half years?  

Despite his profession of concern for that large host of needy unemployed workers who could not be given WPA jobs, Mr. Woodrum never once lifted his voice in favor of "raising the ante" sufficiently to provide jobs for all who needed them. In this failure to make any such proposal he differed markedly from Senator Bone of Washington who declared during Senate debate that although he recognized that the other fellow "who has been out of work is entitled to a job, too, if we can provide it," he still could not bring himself "to vote to cast a man out into utter darkness simply because he has been compelled to be on a W.P.A. job for 18 months." He therefore proposed an amendment to raise the amount of the pending appropriation to 2.5 billion dollars.  

1 As quoted in the New York Times, July 1, 1939.
2 Congressional Record, June 16, 1939, p. 7361.
3 Ibid., June 27, 1939, p. 7978.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Notwithstanding the attempts made by the administration during congressional debate on the bill to have the eighteen-month provision modified, it was frequently alleged that this amendment had had the blessing of the President as well as that of WPA officials. Vehemently denying this charge, Howard Hunter in a radio speech that set Congress by the ears declared, "No one in his right mind would believe that this administration approved such a provision." 1

Social Effects of 1939 Policy

When the new policy went into effect, its harshness immediately became apparent. Dismissals numbered about 171,000 in July, 1939. 2 In August they catapulted to more than half a million—611,733, or nearly a third of the number employed during the month. During the next twelve months discharges because of the eighteen-month rule ranged from more than 86,000 in September, 1939, to approximately 10,000 in June and July, 1940.

Comprehensive surveys 3 of what happened to these discharged workers clearly revealed that early fears had been well grounded, that the rotation provision would result in great hardship to workers in all parts of the country. When the American Association of Social Workers, early in 1940, requested its chapters throughout the United States to report on relief conditions, 38 co-operating chapters located in 26 different states, without exception declared that no benefits were derived from the policy. "The effect in general," it was said, "was to augment insecurity, to increase relief pressures on the community, and to add to the administrative expenses of WPA and local welfare departments. Workers and projects alike suffered, private jobs did not become more numerous, and there was resentment because of such a needless and arbitrary rule." 4

1 WPA Release 4-2028, August 24, 1939.
2 Late in July (and for a week in August) these dismissals were temporarily halted by WPA officials pending final action on an amendment the Senate wrote into the so-called Lending Bill which was then under discussion but which the House subsequently rejected. This amendment (like one Senator Murray of Montana later attempted to write into a deficiency bill) would have tempered the rotation policy materially, modifying it to conform substantially with what the Senate had agreed upon during discussion of the ERA Act of 1939.
3 These findings are summarized in chap. 25.
4 Highlights in the Trends, p. 7.
Rotation, 1940 Style

After the rotation principle had been in effect a little more than half a year, Colonel Harrington, appearing before a House Committee, recapitulated the hardships resulting from its operation. He declared, however, that he expected the proportion of workers arbitrarily released each month in the future would represent only about 3 per cent of the total employed. As a result, he added, "the suffering will not be so widespread, and so many operating difficulties will not result."

Since the WPA was not providing for all unemployed persons in need, he believed that "it was only fair to secure a measure of rotation which would prevent those individuals who had jobs from remaining upon the program indefinitely."

However, he urged an amendment reducing the compulsory lay-off to fifteen instead of thirty days, and further providing that in making assignments certified workers who were available, qualified, and had been waiting three months or longer for jobs should be given preference over workers removed after eighteen months' continuous employment.

Efforts of the administration and others to mitigate the rigor of the eighteen-month clause did not deter Congress in 1940 from re-enacting essentially the same provision written into law the previous year. One important difference, however, was the extension of the exemption for veterans to include also "unmarried widows of . . . veterans and wives of such veterans as are unemployable."

Rotation Policies Modified

Early in 1941 there were clear indications that Congress was being subjected to considerable pressure to repeal the existing

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 439.
2 ERA Act, fiscal year 1941, sec. 15(b). Although both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees again agreed (as they had the previous year) to extend the exemptions from automatic discharge to older workers having family responsibilities, these were not written into law. When questioned about this proposition, Colonel Harrington declared himself opposed to it on the ground that it "would tend to freeze on our program people over that age limit in increasing numbers, and I do not believe a policy of that nature has a place in a work program."—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, pp. 476-477.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

eighteen-month rotation provision. Demands to this effect came not only from workers who were themselves affected by it, but also from local and state officials sponsoring projects whose prosecution was interrupted by periodic loss of trained workers and the burden of breaking in new ones. Pressure from sponsors was also said to have been exerted to secure prompt reinstatement, after the prescribed lay-off period, of workers who had been dismissed.

Even after President Roosevelt (in May, 1941) asked for abolition of the eighteen-month automatic discharge on the ground that it worked "a great hardship on many people," the House Appropriations Committee again recommended its continuance. However, the House rejected the Committee's proposal by a vote of only 169 to 165.

When the ERA Act, fiscal year 1942, finally saw the light of day, the provision with respect to rotation was found to have had its claws severely trimmed. In the first place, a new group—blind workers—was added to the list of exemptees. In the second place, the general provision was modified so that it required only that workers (other than those entitled to veteran preference and blind employes) were to be released after eighteen months of continuous employment if this was necessary to permit the employment of employable persons who had the required qualifications and had been certified for at least three months, without having had employment during this period. One further modification was that workers removed after eighteen months' employment, under this regulation, were eligible for reinstatement upon the same basis as other unassigned workers, after only twenty instead of thirty days as before. Thus, although workers might not be discharged automatically because of continuous employment, those who were released had to wait at least twenty days before they could be reassigned. Again, it was prescribed (as it had been in both 1939 and 1940) that "furloughed" workers

Prominent among groups opposed to the rotation principle has been the CIO, which, in a proposal to establish a federal work program to provide a minimum of three million jobs, stipulated that workers should not be subject to rotation. State and local authorities, state legislatures, and relief officials also went on record as opposing the rotation plan devised by Congress.


Representative Healy of Massachusetts, who led the fight against the Committee's recommendation, emphasized especially the necessity of protecting workers who were past fifty years of age and could not find employment in private industry.
Eligibility

could be reinstated only if they were certified as in need and otherwise eligible. Congress in 1942 continued in effect without modification the rotation policy adopted in 1941 although, as already noted,1 the group that was exempted from discharge because of continuous employment was broadened to include veterans of World War II, the widows of such veterans, and the wives of such veterans as are unemployable.

Within two months after the new policy on rotation was authorized by Congress, dismissals because of continuous employment fell precipitately. During the last four months of 1941, for example, discharges on this account averaged only about 3,000 a month whereas under the earlier policy during the first four months of the year they averaged no fewer than 52,000. Important as the policy change may have been in explaining this sharp reduction, there was, as Acting Commissioner Dryden explained to a House Committee, a further contributing factor—the more rapid and more constant turnover in WPA employment than there had previously been.

Official interpretations of the term “18 months continuous employment” used in conjunction with the operation of rotation policies have usually meant employment for that length of time “without a period of separation or interruption in such employment causing the absence of a payment of wages for a pay-roll period and for which no allowable time is credited.” 2 This policy which exempted workers from automatic discharge in case there had been an interruption in employment for any reason for a full pay-roll period obviously constituted an open invitation to workers to manage somehow to leave their WPA jobs for at least two weeks before the expiration of their eighteen-month term of employment. It was sometimes felt to be much safer thus to risk a loss of two weeks’ pay and, if possible, to find some kind of job and to take one’s chances of being reinstated by the WPA either after the two-week break, or upon “loss” of this other employment, rather than to lose one’s WPA pay for thirty (and more recently twenty) days and even then not be sure of a reassignment. Jobs that might give a worker two weeks’ employ-

1 See chap. 13.
2 WPA Operating Procedure No. E-9, sec. 53, pp. 1-2, rev. July 16, 1940. Pay-roll periods (as shown in chap. 6) are normally periods of two weeks. For a discussion of the practice of crediting “allowable time” see chap. 8.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ment (yet paid so little that quitting them would not hurt his chances of reinstatement with the WPA) included canvassing jobs of various kinds, door-to-door selling, magazine subscription-taking, and distribution of handbills and throw-abouts.

Rotation and the Work-and-Relief Problem

In passing and re-passing the eighteen-month provision, Congress exemplified the peculiar dichotomic philosophy that has dogged the steps of the WPA from its beginning. Workers must be efficient, and return "a day's work for a day's pay." Yet no increasing efficiency can save them from automatic discharge at the end of a year and a half.

In view of the degree to which the rotation principle was looked upon as a means of sharing the chronically inadequate number of WPA jobs available, it is strange indeed that Congress sought to remedy the situation by taking jobs away from needy workers. The obvious alternative of creating enough jobs to meet the need which Congress admitted to exist was never seriously considered.

Although rotation, under prevailing conditions, has appeared to many first-hand observers to be a lesser evil than giving no employment to fully qualified eligible workers, there have been widespread demands that the principle be applied less rigidly and mechanically than in the past. William Hodson, commissioner of welfare in New York City, in 1939 reported:

There was little opposition to the policy adopted by Congress to dismiss those who had been on WPA for a long time and give others who had not been employed a chance to work. The trouble was that Congress invaded the area of wise administrative discretion and fixed an arbitrary time for accomplishing that result which did not square with the needs of the people, the needs of the projects or the capacity of the relief administration to absorb those in need.1

In short, the reason why the automatic and arbitrary rotation of employment has worked so much hardship is that, as Mayor Reading of Detroit once put it, "It is pretty hard to rotate your appetite."2

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, p. 474.


Eligibility

While many congressmen as well as more distant observers of the WPA program have approved of rotation of employment as a means of forcing WPA workers to seek other employment, Mr. Hopkins once rose to the defense of these much maligned WPA “addicts” and “careerists,” declaring that he was not “ashamed of the fact that people will take a government benefit in the form of work relief, and, when some of their neighbors ask them what they are doing, they will say, ‘I am on the WPA.’ What if they are proud of it?” he demanded, “who is to say that the services of a man building a park in a city or paving a road are not as valuable as the services of a man who works in a night club? I cannot see, socially, why you should put a stigma upon a person who, with his hands, is laboring and working on something useful for the community.”

Since throwing workers off WPA rolls and into the labor market does not ipso facto create jobs for them, and since there have often been from two to three other unemployed workers without WPA employment bidding for such jobs as were available, it has seemed to a number of observers that American intelligence could devise more effective ways of bringing workers and jobs together than by depriving needy men and women of their one means of support.

1 WPA Release 4-1613, November 16, 1937.
PART FOUR

NUMBERS EMPLOYED
CHAPTER XXII

WPA EMPLOYMENT

Since one of the primary purposes of the WPA has been to provide jobs for unemployed workers, the number actually employed from month to month and year to year is, of course, of utmost importance to those who are interested in judging its usefulness. Considered as a single unit, the total volume of WPA employment, during the first six years of its history, is sufficient to stagger even a wild imagination. By contrast, the estimated number of man-years required to build the pyramids of Egypt—which have long been symbolic of gigantic undertakings—looks small.¹

Fluctuations in Employment

Although during the six years 1936 through 1941 the WPA has employed on the average about 2,060,000 persons a month, employment has ranged from an average of 1,136,000 in 1941 to an average of 2,717,000 in 1938.² The monthly average number employed in the several fiscal and calendar years is shown in Table 21, and the number employed in fiscal years in Diagram 3.

In addition to those employed by the WPA, an average of some 512,000 workers has been employed between January, 1936, and January, 1941, on projects of other federal agencies, while an average of some 776,000 youths were aided each month through the programs of the CCC and NYA. Detailed employment data for these several programs are presented on a monthly basis in Appendix Table i.

¹ Employment provided by the WPA during the six-year period between January, 1936, when the program was first well under way, and January, 1942, represents an average of approximately 2,060,000 workers per month. This adds up to a total of well over 12,000,000 man-years—more than six times that required to build the pyramids, which are thought to have consumed the labor of 100,000 workers for twenty years. In addition, it is estimated that it took 100,000 men ten years to construct the 3,000-foot causeway to facilitate the transportation of the stone required to build the pyramids. If this labor is added to that used in building the pyramids themselves the total is only about one-fourth the man-years of labor performed by WPA workers during the six years 1936 through 1941. This comparison obviously omits any consideration of hours of work—and rates of pay!

² WPA employment discussed in this chapter means employment on WPA projects operated by the WPA and does not include employment on projects of other federal agencies even though such projects were financed from WPA funds.

531
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Far more striking than differences in annual averages of WPA employment over the six years prior to 1942 are the month-by-month fluctuations in employment, which has ranged from slightly less than a million in September and October, 1941, to 3,238,000 in November, 1938. During the six years here under review WPA employment totaled less than a million in two months and totaled from 1 million to 1.5 million in eight months; from 1.5 to 2 million in twenty-two; from 2 to 2.5 million in twenty; from 2.5 to 3 million in fourteen; and from 3 to 3.5 million in the remaining six months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fiscal year ending June 30</th>
<th>Calendar year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,156,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1,995,000e</td>
<td>2,544,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>2,227,000</td>
<td>1,793,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1,932,000</td>
<td>2,717,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>2,911,000</td>
<td>2,324,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,971,000</td>
<td>1,849,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,638,000</td>
<td>1,136,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>979,000d</td>
<td>—f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>400,000e</td>
<td>—f</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Data from Appendix Table 1.
b Average for five months.
c Average for 11 months.
d Average for 10 months.
e Planned.
f No figure available.

Up to January, 1942, WPA employment has been characterized by four clearly marked phases, two of increasing and two of decreasing employment. The first phase was a period of expansion, which began with the inauguration of the Works Program (during July and August, 1935) and ended in February, 1936, when an average of 3,019,000 workers were employed.

During the second phase, employment fell steadily (except for a slight counter movement in September, October, and November, 1936) until September, 1937, when it reached 1,454,000. Then began the third phase, a period of increase, during which employment rose to the all-time peak of 3,238,000 jobs in November, 1938. The WPA program then entered its fourth phase,
a long period of generally declining employment which continued until the end of 1941, although interrupted by temporary increases in the fall and winter of both 1939 and 1940. WPA employment, by months, during the five and one-half years, 1936 through June, 1941, is shown in Diagram 4.

Critics of the WPA program have been quick to point out that the two highest levels of WPA employment since the beginning of 1936 came in October and November, 1936, and in November, 1938, both periods coinciding with national elections. Whether there was in the United States in those months more need than

![Diagram 3](image)

**Diagram 3.**—Average monthly number of workers employed by WPA, 1935 to 1943, by fiscal year

exist at any other time during the WPA's history has never been made clear.

**Comparisons with Private Employment**

Tremendous as WPA employment totals during the six-year period here reviewed may appear to be, they represent only about 5 per cent of the total number of workers gainfully employed during the period. Nevertheless, in comparison with some of the nation's largest corporations, numbers employed by the WPA loom large and represent an impressive body of employees. In 1938, for example, WPA workers numbered approximately three times the combined employment of the American Telephone and
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Telegraph, the General Electric, and Westinghouse companies, the United States, Bethlehem, and Republic Steel corporations, and the Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, Pennsylvania, and Union Pacific railroads. Late in the spring of 1938 (when the WPA had on its rolls some 2.5 million workers) Harry Hopp-

kins wrote that the WPA was employing "more people than the automobile, steel and coal industries combined." ¹

Even in a single large state, these comparisons are impressive. For example, the WPA in the state of New York alone during 1936 employed more workers than were employed throughout

Numbers Employed

the whole nation by both the American Telephone and Telegraph and the General Electric companies in 1938.\(^1\) In Pennsylvania the number employed during 1936 by the WPA was approximately the number employed in 1938 by the United States Steel and the Republic Steel corporations together. In Ohio, in 1938, numbers employed by the WPA came within 4 per cent of the number employed in that year by the Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, Pennsylvania, and Union Pacific railroads combined. The average number employed by the WPA in Illinois in 1938 exceeded the numbers employed by both the General Motors and Chrysler corporations in the same year.

WPA Employment in Relation to Unemployment and to General Relief Cases

WPA employment has varied widely from year to year and from month to month not only in absolute terms but also in relation to such measures of presumptive need as estimated unemployment and the number of cases granted general relief. Neither of these measures, unfortunately, provides a foolproof guide to an appraisal of the justifiability of any given level of WPA employment. Estimates of unemployment are, after all, only estimates and differ widely, depending upon their source.\(^2\) Furthermore, the WPA has on occasion (as in 1936 and again in 1938) given employment to large numbers of farmers and farm operators who, because of the nature of their occupations, are not included in estimates of unemployment.

For reasons enumerated in Chapters II and III, the number of cases granted general relief cannot be taken as a guide by which to reach any final judgment with respect to WPA employment levels since general relief itself has never been available to all—

\(^1\) Employment data for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company used in this discussion refer not to the year 1938 but to December 31, 1938.

\(^2\) Estimates of unemployment used in this discussion are those of the American Federation of Labor inasmuch as they are neither as high nor as low as other estimates sometimes used, and are widely publicized and readily available. Comparisons here made between WPA employment and estimates of unemployment are (like those between WPA employment and the number of cases granted general relief) intended to illustrate only the vast fluctuations in WPA jobs as opposed to these two rough measures of need for such jobs. These comparisons are not intended to imply that all those who are unemployed or all cases receiving general relief at any one time could qualify for WPA employment. More detailed analysis of WPA employment in comparison with numbers thought to be eligible for it is incorporated in chap. 25.
and particularly not to employable persons—who may have needed it.

Even cursory analysis of WPA employment data reveals that the number employed by the WPA has sometimes fallen while estimated unemployment or the number of cases granted relief (or both) was increasing; that as WPA employment has declined, general relief cases have increased; and that even when all three measures have risen or fallen they have done so at different rates.

One result of these various movements is that, during months in which the number employed by the WPA has been more or less equal, there have been wide divergences both in the number given general relief and in the estimated extent of unemployment. Conversely, during months in which either unemployment or the number of cases given general relief has been substantially the same, the number employed by the WPA has varied widely. For example, in the 20 monthly periods during which the WPA employed between 2 and 2.49 million workers, the number of cases receiving general relief ranged from between 1.25 and 1.49 million in four months; to between 2 and 2.24 million in two months. Unemployment in these same twenty months ranged from between 7.5 and 8.4 million in four months to between 10.5 and 11.4 million in two months.

During the five-year period beginning with 1936 WPA employment, as shown graphically in Diagram 5, ranged from 95 per 100 cases granted general relief in January, 1938, and from 98 per 100 granted such relief in December, 1937, to a maximum of 213 in both October and November, 1938—months coinciding with an important national election, it will be recalled. The next highest peaks, as may be noted in the diagram, were in October and November, 1936—again, months of a national election—when WPA employment per 100 general relief cases totaled 183 and 181, respectively.

In the years 1936 through 1940 WPA employment, per 100 workers thought to be unemployed, has varied from an average of 20 in 1940 to an average of 27 in 1936. The range during this period, the diagram shows, was from 16 per 100 unemployed in January, 1938, to 31 in October and November, in both 1936 and 1938.
Numbers Employed

Employment by States

Among the various states WPA employment has varied greatly, not only in terms of absolute numbers employed but also in relationship to population, numbers of cases granted general relief, and the extent of unemployment. Illustrative of the wide range of employment is the fact that during 1939 WPA employment in Nevada averaged only about 1,800 a month whereas average em-

![Diagram 5: Number of Workers Employed by WPA Per 100 Unemployed Workers, and Per 100 General Relief Cases, January, 1936, to December, 1940, by Month]

ployment in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois either approximated or exceeded 180,000 a month. In January, 1942, WPA employment was only 953 in Nevada, but totaled approximately 82,000 in New York. In Table 22 is presented the monthly average number employed by the WPA during 1936 and during each subsequent year through 1939. As this table shows, there have been, from year to year, notable differences in the relative increases and decreases in employment in the several states.

537
### TABLE 22.—AVERAGE MONTHLY NUMBER OF WORKERS EMPLOYED BY WPA, 1936 TO 1939, BY YEAR AND BY STATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2,544,355</td>
<td>1,792,525</td>
<td>2,717,125</td>
<td>2,323,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>8,475</td>
<td>4,583</td>
<td>8,586</td>
<td>7,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>8,893</td>
<td>6,092</td>
<td>9,356</td>
<td>7,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>4,720</td>
<td>2,993</td>
<td>6,058</td>
<td>4,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>108,841</td>
<td>76,089</td>
<td>111,186</td>
<td>97,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>12,471</td>
<td>16,413</td>
<td>15,161</td>
<td>12,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>23,576</td>
<td>16,413</td>
<td>25,651</td>
<td>21,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>324,469</td>
<td>226,298</td>
<td>225,365</td>
<td>187,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>84,696</td>
<td>66,128</td>
<td>92,146</td>
<td>75,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>250,434</td>
<td>181,969</td>
<td>244,919</td>
<td>179,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>158,544</td>
<td>104,077</td>
<td>231,234</td>
<td>187,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>73,773</td>
<td>53,507</td>
<td>88,463</td>
<td>70,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>173,467</td>
<td>129,780</td>
<td>214,318</td>
<td>184,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>81,996</td>
<td>52,166</td>
<td>149,144</td>
<td>111,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>60,393</td>
<td>41,518</td>
<td>71,621</td>
<td>59,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>54,115</td>
<td>38,628</td>
<td>60,631</td>
<td>51,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>27,177</td>
<td>20,010</td>
<td>31,152</td>
<td>25,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>83,139</td>
<td>64,290</td>
<td>96,486</td>
<td>82,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>22,779</td>
<td>12,895</td>
<td>14,412</td>
<td>11,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>26,318</td>
<td>14,777</td>
<td>15,479</td>
<td>13,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>21,692</td>
<td>19,434</td>
<td>28,295</td>
<td>24,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>42,427</td>
<td>31,220</td>
<td>35,215</td>
<td>26,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td>1,919</td>
<td>3,390</td>
<td>2,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>15,854</td>
<td>10,753</td>
<td>13,806</td>
<td>12,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>7,875</td>
<td>6,173</td>
<td>10,049</td>
<td>9,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>29,139</td>
<td>19,509</td>
<td>24,691</td>
<td>23,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>47,100</td>
<td>32,524</td>
<td>45,851</td>
<td>38,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>33,657</td>
<td>22,600</td>
<td>40,175</td>
<td>40,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>27,689</td>
<td>16,416</td>
<td>37,717</td>
<td>38,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>40,241</td>
<td>26,170</td>
<td>49,830</td>
<td>51,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>29,112</td>
<td>23,840</td>
<td>40,614</td>
<td>41,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>55,218</td>
<td>43,309</td>
<td>60,467</td>
<td>50,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>39,626</td>
<td>23,935</td>
<td>38,933</td>
<td>41,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>35,637</td>
<td>23,693</td>
<td>47,159</td>
<td>48,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>30,364</td>
<td>19,857</td>
<td>36,959</td>
<td>39,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>34,635</td>
<td>23,116</td>
<td>40,250</td>
<td>42,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>40,143</td>
<td>27,107</td>
<td>39,312</td>
<td>40,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>70,864</td>
<td>45,423</td>
<td>64,548</td>
<td>51,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>87,879</td>
<td>63,116</td>
<td>86,001</td>
<td>88,784</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

538
Numbers Employed

TABLE 22.—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>16,241</td>
<td>10,957</td>
<td>19,780</td>
<td>13,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>8,568</td>
<td>5,702</td>
<td>10,111</td>
<td>9,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>4,328</td>
<td>2,326</td>
<td>4,178</td>
<td>3,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>31,848</td>
<td>19,957</td>
<td>28,774</td>
<td>22,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>9,846</td>
<td>7,326</td>
<td>10,956</td>
<td>10,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>10,310</td>
<td>7,328</td>
<td>10,111</td>
<td>7,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>11,094</td>
<td>7,171</td>
<td>11,088</td>
<td>10,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>2,254</td>
<td>1,718</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>1,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>31,884</td>
<td>26,549</td>
<td>46,819</td>
<td>32,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>16,521</td>
<td>12,794</td>
<td>16,822</td>
<td>14,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>121,817</td>
<td>88,895</td>
<td>101,466</td>
<td>93,740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ Sources of data: WPA memorandum to author giving average employment on federal work and construction projects, by state, January, 1936, to August, 1939; and WPA statistical reports.

Employment in Proportion to Population

When WPA employment is considered not in absolute terms but in proportion to the population of the several states striking differences may be noted. During 1936, for example, when the monthly average WPA employment throughout the nation as a whole was about 199 per 10,000 population, the rate of incidence of WPA employment in North Dakota exceeded the national average by approximately 74 per cent. In South Dakota, during 1936, the rate of incidence of WPA employment was almost double that for the United States. In Montana, too, WPA employment, in proportion to population, has exceeded by wide margins the average for the country as a whole, exceeding the average for 1938 by approximately 70 per cent. Other states in which in one or more years WPA employment in proportion to estimated population exceeded by 30 per cent or more the average for the nation as a whole were: Pennsylvania (1937); Ohio (1938, 1939); Illinois (1938, 1939); Michigan (1938); Colorado (1936, 1937); Oklahoma (1936, 1937, 1938); and Washington (1938).

States which, in one year or another, had a relatively low rate

^ In this discussion, the monthly average number of workers employed by the WPA per 10,000 population is termed "the rate of incidence of WPA employment" or, more briefly, "the incidence" of such employment.
TABLE 23.—RELATION OF RATE OF INCIDENCE OF WPA EMPLOYMENT IN EACH STATE TO THE RATE FOR THE UNITED STATES, 1936 TO 1939, BY YEAR

(Rate for each state as percentage of that for United States)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

540
of incidence of WPA jobs were Maine, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and Iowa. In Maine the incidence of WPA employment was only about 40 per cent of the national average in 1937, about 49 per cent in 1938, and 51 per cent in both 1936 and 1939. In Maryland the incidence has ranged from only 37 per cent of the national average in 1938 to 46 per cent in 1936.

In Table 23 is presented for each of the four years here under review the rate of incidence of WPA employment in the several states expressed as a percentage of the rate for the nation as a whole.

To say that the number employed by the WPA in proportion to population is greater in one state than in another is not to say, of course, that these employment levels were either too high or too low. Conditions in different states may easily have varied enough to justify the apparent discrepancies. The same may also be said with respect to employment in comparison with cases granted general relief or with the number of workers estimated as being unemployed in the several states. Differences in the extent of unemployment, variations in the degree to which general relief programs met existing needs, differences in the characteristics of "the unemployed" and of relief recipients—such as the proportions who had been without work or receiving relief for long as opposed to short terms, variations in the proportion of these people living in rural as contrasted with urban areas, and differences

---

**Numbers Employed**

**TABLE 23.—Continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Actual rates for each state are given in Appendix Table 2.*
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

in the skills of available workers—might affect both the need for and the possibility of employing workers in any given area as opposed to another. A further extremely important factor which results in the WPA's employing relatively more workers in some areas than in others is the degree to which state and local authorities are willing to co-operate in the referral and selection of workers who might be employed and in their willingness to initiate and contribute to the cost of projects on which work might be given.¹

WPA Employment in Proportion to Number of Cases Granted General Relief

When the incidence of WPA employment in the several states is compared with data on the rate of incidence of general relief—i.e., the monthly average number of cases granted general relief per 10,000 population (presented in Table 5 in Chapter II)—wide differences become apparent.

As may be noted from inspection of Table 23, there were 16 states ² in which, during all the four years here under consideration, the number of WPA workers in proportion to population exceeded the averages for the country as a whole. In only six of these states (Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota) did the incidence of cases granted general relief also exceed the ratio for the United States as a whole during each of the four years. In Colorado and Oklahoma the rate of incidence of general relief cases exceeded the national average in three of the four years. At the opposite extreme, however, were four states—Kentucky, South Dakota, Montana, and New Mexico—in which the number of general relief cases in proportion to population fell below the national average during all four years.

In contrast with the 16 states already mentioned, there have been 19 jurisdictions in which, during each of the years 1936 through 1939, the number of WPA jobs in proportion to population has never equaled the national average.³ In this group,

¹ For further comparisons of WPA employment levels in the several states with particular reference to state resources and need, see chap. 27.
² Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Missouri, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Montana, Colorado, and New Mexico.
³ These were Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Iowa, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, and California.
for all but five states (Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Iowa, and California) the incidence of general relief also fell below the national average during each of the four years. In Maine, New Hampshire, and California, however, the incidence of general relief exceeded the national average during all four years.

From this analysis it is obvious that, although many states having a high incidence of general relief also had a high incidence of WPA jobs, there have been striking exceptions to this generalization.

Incidence of Employment by Other Federal Agencies Compared with That of WPA Employment and General Relief

Even more striking than the lack of any consistent relationship between the rate of incidence of WPA jobs and general relief in certain states is the fact that in the nine states which had proportionately fewer general relief cases in all four years and had proportionately more WPA jobs in at least two of the four years here under review, all but one (Kentucky) also had a relatively high rate of incidence of employment by other federal agencies, exclusive of the CCC and NYA.

Among the 14 jurisdictions which in all four years had both fewer WPA jobs and fewer general relief cases in proportion to population than was true of the nation as a whole, there were 10 which in all years had proportionately more employment provided by other agencies than did the country as a whole. These were Vermont, Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon. The excess ranged from not more than 40 per cent (approximately) in Vermont, Maryland, Tennessee, and Alabama to

1 Florida, Kentucky, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada.

2 In proportion to population, employment provided by federal agencies other than the WPA during the four years here under review exceeded the national average by 3 to 59 per cent in Florida; by as much as 59 per cent in South Dakota (where in only one year the proportion fell below the national average); by 249 to 383 per cent in Montana; by 62 to 225 per cent in New Mexico; by 103 to 220 per cent in Arizona; by 277 to 445 per cent in Nevada; by 36 to 67 per cent in Utah; and by 13 to 36 per cent in Nebraska.
TABLE 24.—RELATION OF RATE OF INCIDENCE OF EMPLOYMENT ON FEDERAL WORK PROJECTS, EXCLUDING WPA, CCC, AND NYA, TO THE RATE FOR THE UNITED STATES, 1936 TO 1939, BY YEAR a

(Rate for each state as percentage of that for United States)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

544
between 197 and 293 per cent in Wyoming and between 225 and 385 per cent in the District of Columbia.\textsuperscript{1}

Rates of incidence of employment provided in the several states by federal agencies other than the WPA, CCC, and NYA during the four years 1936 through 1939 are presented in Table 24.

Comparisons Between the Combined Incidence of Federal Employment and the Incidence of General Relief

When the rate of incidence of WPA employment in the several states is combined with that of employment provided by other federal agencies and the total compared with the incidence of general relief, noteworthy disparities appear. This is clearly revealed by Diagram 6, which shows for the year 1939 the rate of incidence in the various states of WPA employment, employment by other federal agencies exclusive of the CCC and NYA), and of general relief. As may be noted from this diagram, in states in which the combined incidence of WPA and other federal employment was essentially comparable, the incidence of general relief differed widely. For example, although the incidence of WPA and other federal employment during 1939 was roughly comparable in Rhode Island, South Carolina, Illinois, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Hampshire, Missouri, and Wyoming, the incidence of general relief in these states varied markedly. Even

\textsuperscript{1}The remaining four states in which the incidence of WPA jobs and general relief cases fell below the national average during all four years were North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

more striking is the contrast between the position, in 1939, of Alabama and that of Pennsylvania.

Among states in which the rate of incidence of general relief was approximately the same but in which the incidence of federal employment differed markedly may be noted Montana and Oregon, Washington and Kansas.

The proportion of federal jobs provided in the several states by the WPA as opposed to other federal agencies has differed widely. In 1939, for example, although the incidence of federal project employment in Missouri was practically the same as that in Wyoming, WPA employment constituted a much larger proportion of the total in the former than in the latter state.

Comparisons of data for years other than 1939 yield essentially the same types of variations among the several states in the incidence of federal employment and general relief cases as are here shown to have prevailed in 1939.

Whether the disparities in the incidence of WPA employment and of other federal employment as revealed in this discussion were justified by conditions prevailing in each state it is, unfortunately, impossible to say. Concrete information about unemployment and need in the several states has been so lacking that no one can say whether or not the particular way in which WPA and other federal jobs have been distributed over the country has been defensible. Failure on the part of federal agencies to develop better measures than have been devised objectively to gauge the need for employment in one area as opposed to another has been one of their most regrettable shortcomings.¹ A further cause for regret on the part of those who would like to see federal agencies left free to create jobs wherever they appear to be needed is the limitation imposed upon the WPA by Congress which prevents the employment of workers in any given area unless local or state agencies can be induced to initiate projects and contribute a substantial proportion of their costs.

Differences in Levels of WPA Employment and General Relief Caseloads in Various Localities

Keen interest frequently has focused on the relationship of WPA employment to general relief, not only among the several

¹ For discussion of such criteria as have been used in allocating WPA jobs among the several states, see chap. 24.
DIAGRAM 6.—AVERAGE MONTHLY NUMBER OF WPA WORKERS, EMPLOYEES ON PROJECTS OF OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES (EXCLUSIVE OF CCC AND NYA), AND GENERAL RELIEF CASES, PER 10,000 POPULATION, 1939, BY STATE
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

states, but in various cities and localities throughout the United States. One such comparison, as of March, 1941, presented to a House Committee, shows that although the number of cases granted general relief in a number of cities (including Buffalo, New York, Newark, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and Seattle) was greater than the number employed by the WPA, the reverse was true in many other cities (including Boston, Atlantic City, Washington, Detroit, Omaha, Denver, and San Francisco). Not infrequently, particularly in the South (as in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico, North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) the number employed by the WPA in certain cities was from five to ten times the number of cases granted relief. In two Mississippi counties where WPA employment totaled more than 4,000 not a single case was granted general relief, according to this report.

Further evidence of differences in the incidence of general relief and of employment provided by the CCC, NYA, and WPA together, is available in a 1938 report of the federal Children’s Bureau. This disclosed that, among 29 cities covered by the report, the number employed by the WPA, CCC, and NYA per 1,000 families in the population was highest in Wilkes-Barre, Cleveland, and New Orleans—cities in which the number of general relief cases per 1,000 families ranged from more than two and a half times the 29-city average (in Wilkes-Barre) to only about 30 per cent of the average for all 29 cities (in New Orleans).

At the opposite end of the scale were 16 cities in which the incidence of WPA, CCC, and NYA employment was less than the 29-city average. In eight of these the incidence of general relief cases was also below the average for all 29 cities, whereas

---

Data on WPA employment in cities or even in counties frequently do not provide a satisfactory basis for making comparisons since they relate not to the number of workers from a given area who are given employment but to the number of workers employed in the area. In instances where workers are taken outside a city in which they live to work on a park or levee in another county, for example, they would be reported as employed in that county rather than in the one in which they live.

Hartford, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Louisville, Wichita, Houston, Dallas. The degree to which the 29-city averages exceeded those in each of these eight cities differed markedly from one city to another. In Washington, for example, the number of WPA, NYA, and CCC cases was more than three-fourths of the 29-city average while the proportion of families given general relief was less than one-fourth that for all 29 cities.
Numbers Employed

in eight the number of general relief cases per 1,000 families exceeded the average for all 29 cities.

Comparisons of per Capita Expenditures for WPA Earnings and General Relief Grants

An additional favored method of analyzing the extent of the WPA, as opposed to general relief programs in any given area, has been to compare the per capita amount spent for benefits provided under each of these programs. Because comparisons of this kind are clouded by differences in standards of relief and WPA wage levels they reflect other differences than those in the number of persons benefited in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, extensive data collected by the Social Security Board from the various states and selected urban areas in the United States permit significant comparisons.

Although amounts spent for general relief in the United States in 1938 averaged only $3.68 for every man, woman, and child in the country, expenditures for wages on WPA projects averaged $13.32 or approximately 3.6 times as much. In a number of states, however, per capita expenditures for WPA earnings were more than fifty times the amount, per inhabitant, spent for general relief. This was the case in Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas. At the opposite extreme were a number of states in which per capita expenditures for WPA wages were not 3.6 times but only about twice, or less than twice, those for general relief. This was the case in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and California.

During 1940 per capita expenditures in the United States as a whole averaged $3.07 for general relief and $9.64 for WPA earnings. Again, as in 1938, the relationship between these two figures varied widely from state to state. Although per capita expenditures for WPA earnings throughout the United States as a whole in 1940 averaged only about three times the average per capita expenditure for general relief, WPA expenditures in four states (South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, and Arkansas) were from 65 to 87 times and in Mississippi were no less


1 Springfield, Providence, Bridgeport, Syracuse, Buffalo, Cincinnati, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Again, the degree to which these cities exceeded or fell below the 29-city average differed markedly.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

than 368 times per capita expenditures for general relief! Data for both 1938 and 1940 are summarized in Table 25.

Annual expenditures per inhabitant for WPA wages in some 115 to 120 selected urban areas during the years 1936 through 1939 averaged from $10.89 in 1937 to $16.90 in 1938, the range being from as little as 26 cents in Shreveport, Louisiana, during 1937 to $41.92 in Toledo, Ohio, during 1938. In Shreveport, during 1937, per capita expenditures for general relief were 52 cents—twice those for WPA earnings. In Omaha, during 1938, when per capita expenditures for WPA earnings were about eighty times those for general relief, the opposite situation prevailed.

Remarkable though the differences between one section of the country and another may be, average annual expenditures in various cities in a given state also show wide discrepancies. In Louisiana, for example, expenditures for WPA earnings during 1938 were only 83 cents per inhabitant in Shreveport, but were $24.03 in New Orleans. Wide differences may also be noted in California, where these expenditures averaged $8.93 in Sacramento, $11.30 in Los Angeles, and approximately $21.90 in both San Francisco and Oakland.

Analysis of available data for 1939 is presented in Table 26. The city in which per capita expenditures for both WPA earnings and general relief were lowest was Shreveport, and that in which they were highest, Duluth. Among the four (out of 115) urban areas in which WPA earnings averaged less than $5.00 per capita, expenditures for general relief ranged from only 44 cents in Roanoke and 71 cents in Shreveport to $14.41 in New Rochelle, New York.

At the opposite extreme, among the seven urban areas in which WPA earnings during 1939 averaged at least $25 per capita, expenditures for general relief ranged from only $2.82 per capita in Terre Haute to $10.34 in Duluth.

WPA Employment, by States, in Relation to Unemployment

Since need for WPA employment is so closely linked with unemployment, it is regrettable that comparable state-by-state data on unemployment are not available.

While it was hoped that the unemployment census of Novem-
### TABLE 25.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY PER CAPITA EXPENDITURES FOR GENERAL RELIEF BENEFITS AND WPA EARNINGS, 1938 AND 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relief per inhabitant</th>
<th>WPA earnings per inhabitant</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under $7.50</td>
<td>$7.50 to $9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50 to 2.99</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Del. Vt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 to 4.49</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00 to 7.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.50 to 8.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of states</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relief per inhabitant</th>
<th>WPA earnings per inhabitant</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under $7.50</td>
<td>$7.50 to $9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 to 4.49</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Conn. N. H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.50 to 5.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calif.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00 to 7.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.50 to 8.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>N. Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of states</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*a Source of data: Social Security Bulletin, March, 1940, p. 67; March, 1941, p. 39; April, 1941, p. 48.

b WPA earnings include earnings on projects operated by other federal agencies but financed from WPA funds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General relief per inhabitant</th>
<th>Number of areas</th>
<th>WPA earnings per inhabitant</th>
<th>WPA earnings per inhabitant, 1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>$5.00 to 9.99</td>
<td>Under $1.00 to $5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shreveport</td>
<td></td>
<td>$10.00 to 14.99</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roanoke</td>
<td></td>
<td>$15.00 to 19.99</td>
<td>Asheville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td></td>
<td>$20.00 to 24.99</td>
<td>El Paso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensboro</td>
<td></td>
<td>$25.00 to 29.99</td>
<td>Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntington</td>
<td></td>
<td>$30.00 to 34.99</td>
<td>Jacksonville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td></td>
<td>$35.00 to 39.99</td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40.00 to 44.99</td>
<td>Omaha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
<td></td>
<td>$45.00 to 49.99</td>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City, Mo.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$50.00 to 54.99</td>
<td>Kansas City, Kan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td></td>
<td>$55.00 to 59.99</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown</td>
<td></td>
<td>$60.00 to 64.99</td>
<td>Youngstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topeka</td>
<td></td>
<td>$65.00 to 69.99</td>
<td>Topeka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td>$70.00 to 74.99</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td>$80.00 to 84.99</td>
<td>Chester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td></td>
<td>$85.00 to 89.99</td>
<td>Wilmington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmington, N. C.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$90.00 to 94.99</td>
<td>Winston-Salem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. Worth</td>
<td></td>
<td>$95.00 to 99.99</td>
<td>Ft. Wayne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Britain</td>
<td></td>
<td>$100.00 to 109.99</td>
<td>Denver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontiac</td>
<td></td>
<td>$110.00 to 119.99</td>
<td>Chester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield, O.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$120.00 to 129.99</td>
<td>Springfield, O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topeka</td>
<td></td>
<td>$130.00 to 139.99</td>
<td>Tacoma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Terre Haute

552
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>City/County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.00 to 4.99</td>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>Allentown</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>Springfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Ill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Me. Sacramen</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Toledo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to, Me.</td>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>South Bend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Salt Lake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>City</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00 to 6.99</td>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Jersey City</td>
<td>Dayton</td>
<td>Brockton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>Kenosha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Fall River</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00 to 8.99</td>
<td>Malden</td>
<td>Erie</td>
<td>Altoona</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utica</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Lowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sioux City</td>
<td>Johnstown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>Racine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00 to 10.99</td>
<td>Niagara</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>Duluth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Falls</td>
<td>Worcester</td>
<td>St. Paul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yonkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 to 12.99</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00 and over</td>
<td>New Rochelle</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>Scranton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>Wilkes-Barre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of areas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Source of data: Social Security Bulletin, April, 1940, pp. 60, 61. Some of the areas are cities, others are counties. Population data used are for 1930.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ber, 1937, would yield comparable and reliable state data, differences in the degree of completeness of registration in the various states make comparisons hazardous indeed. However, regional data corrected on the basis of the subsequent Enumerative Check Census appear to be sufficiently uniform to permit reasonably fair comparisons. These are presented in Table 27. Analysis of these regional data reveals that although the number employed on emergency work (that is employment provided by the WPA, CCC, and NYA) represented about 18 per cent of the number totally unemployed throughout the United States, the proportion of the unemployed having emergency employment ranged from approximately 16 per cent in New England and the Middle Atlantic states to 20 per cent in the West North Central states and 26 per cent in the Mountain states.

A study of the relationship between unemployment and Works Program employment in Toledo, Birmingham, and San Francisco, in March, 1939, revealed that although 38 out of every 100 unemployed workers in Toledo had Works Program employ-

For states included in the various regions see tables such as Tables 23 and 24.

554
Numbers Employed

In Birmingham and San Francisco the numbers were only 23 and 24, respectively.

Unemployment data collected at the time of the 1940 census indicate that of the total number of workers fourteen years of age and over who were seeking work or were employed by the WPA, approximately 31 per cent had WPA employment. The proportion employed by the WPA ranged from only about 16 per cent in New York to no less than 50 per cent in Mississippi and South Dakota, and, in South Carolina, to 61 per cent, a proportion nearly double the national average. The proportion of the unemployed having WPA jobs in the several states is shown in Table 28.

Although these census data on unemployment are as good as there are available, there is reason to suspect that comparisons between states may need some qualification. This is suggested by the fact that preliminary data indicate that workers employed on emergency work ¹ (including that of the WPA, NYA, and CCC) represented 36 per cent of the total number reported as unemployed in urban areas, nearly 64 per cent of those unemployed in rural non-farm areas and no less than 82 per cent of the unemployed in rural farm areas. Whether emergency work did, in fact, provide employment for 82 per cent of those who were unemployed in rural farm areas or whether this high proportion resulted from failure to report as unemployed considerable numbers of workers in rural areas who were in fact unemployed is not yet known. If the data as reported are reliable, they constitute an eloquent refutation of the claim that emergency work programs have benefited primarily urban areas since every one of the states in which the proportion of the unemployed engaged on WPA work represented 40 per cent or more of the total was predominantly agricultural.²

Neither discrepancies nor correspondence between the number employed by the WPA in one state as opposed to another (or employed throughout the United States in one month as contra-

¹ Census Bureau reports include repeated warnings that too great reliance cannot be placed on data regarding “emergency workers” since the number reported as such fell far below the number known to have been employed by emergency agencies at the time the census was taken. Preliminary census reports do not indicate whether the accuracy of data on emergency workers varies from one type of area (whether urban, rural non-farm, or rural farm) to another.

² For further discussion of this point see chap. 27. See also Table 29,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total unemployed workers and WPA employes (thousands)</th>
<th>WPA employes (thousands)</th>
<th>Per cent of total of unemployed and WPA employes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>7,404.1</td>
<td>2,293.8</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>119.4</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>115.8</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>124.5</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>105.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>217.7</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>137.1</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>172.0</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>485.6</td>
<td>181.0</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>410.1</td>
<td>148.6</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>122.9</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>157.4</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>110.8</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>306.2</td>
<td>106.1</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>146.2</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>308.2</td>
<td>102.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>108.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>103.3</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>161.0</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>289.8</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>288.4</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>408.1</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28—WPA employment as percentage of total unemployment and WPA employment, March, 1940, by state (States in order of percentage)
## Numbers Employed

### TABLE 28.—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total unemployed workers(^b) and WPA employees (^a) (thousands)</th>
<th>WPA employees(^c)</th>
<th>Per cent of total of unemployed and WPA employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>721.7</td>
<td>146.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>976.5</td>
<td>158.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^b\) Figures for unemployed workers in the respective states are Bureau of the Census estimates based upon a 5 per cent cross-section of the 1940 census returns.

\(^c\) Includes workers employed on projects operated by other federal agencies but financed from WPA funds.

Contrasted with some other) can in themselves be interpreted as proof that the WPA is providing jobs for too many or too few workers. There are, as noted several times already, far too many variables to permit any easy assumptions with respect to levels of WPA employment in any one locality or in the United States as a whole at any given time merely because they are relatively high, or low, in relation to either unemployment or the number of cases granted general relief. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see why questions have been raised with respect to the validity of federal relief policies which, instead of providing for participation in a general relief program that might establish in all states a more or less comparable “bottom” upon which other programs could be built, have made it necessary to provide through public employment vastly different proportions of such assistance as was provided needy families in the several states.

### WPA Employment in Relation to Employment on War Contracts, March, 1942

In view of the extent to which it has been expected that need for WPA employment would be virtually eliminated by the unprecedented industrial activity resulting from the war, it is sig-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

significant that the 12 states\(^1\), which, by March, 1942, had the largest dollar volume of Army, Navy, and Maritime Commission supply contracts and facility projects and had approximately 55 per cent of the population of the United States, also had 51 per cent of the total WPA employment provided in April, 1942.

During the year ending with April, 1939, these 12 states had 59 per cent of the total volume of WPA employment provided in that year. During the year ending with April, 1942, these same 12 states, despite their 35 billion dollars' worth of prime war contracts—approximately 72 per cent of the total for the United States as a whole—still had 50 per cent of the WPA employment provided during the year. In explanation of the need for continuing this high level of WPA employment in areas receiving so large a proportion of the nation's war orders, WPA officials testified to a House Committee that "the contracts tend to be concentrated in a few major industrial areas." Furthermore, it was stated, there was continued need for WPA employment even in these states because "civilian industries" had been forced to curtail their activities or to close down altogether.\(^2\)

Even more striking than the situation among the 12 states already cited was the fact that the 50 war industry areas which in March, 1942, had 62 per cent of all prime war contracts, and which covered some 100 counties including approximately 22 per cent of the nation's population, had 17 per cent of the WPA employment provided throughout the United States. To observers who had hoped that war production would immediately eliminate further need for the WPA, the apparent necessity for continuing WPA employment at relatively high levels even in industrial areas benefiting most from war contracts proved a sobering surprise.

\(^1\) In order of the per capita value of prime war contracts these states were Connecticut, Washington, Michigan, California, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Illinois.

CHAPTER XXIII
DETERMINANTS OF VOLUME OF WPA EMPLOYMENT

In view of the wide variations in the numbers employed by the WPA from month to month and from year to year, one might well ask how it is that the total number given jobs at any one time is determined. Establishment of these totals involves: determining the number of man-months of employment that are to be provided in any one year and deciding what proportion of these are to be provided in each month of the year. Once these decisions are made there remains the further step of allocating among the several states their shares of whatever employment is to be provided at any given time. The determination of the total number of jobs to be provided in a given year is discussed in this chapter. The other two questions are discussed in the chapter which follows.

The Amount of Money Available

The answer to the all-important question as to how many workers the WPA will employ in any given year is determined primarily (though not wholly) by the amount of money appropriated for the WPA by Congress. Appropriations in their turn, however, are affected by the number of jobs Congress decides the WPA should provide. This decision, in turn, is affected by such questions as the following: How many jobs will the people of the United States be willing to pay for? How many jobs can the country afford to provide?

Federal authorities frequently have implied that the number of jobs the WPA has provided from time to time were about all the nation’s credit would stand. This was once suggested by President Roosevelt, who, in defense of the administration’s policy of providing employment only for needy persons rather than

1 When available funds have not permitted employment of as many workers as WPA officials have thought imperative to prevent hardship and suffering, necessary employment has, on occasion, been provided and supplementary appropriations have been asked of Congress.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

for all "who desire it," declared that such a course was necessary in order to keep the program "within the limits of the funds which can reasonably be made available for the purpose."¹ In explanation of the failure of the administration to reach even its own objective for the WPA, the President in 1938 declared that "the national economy does not today permit the Federal Government to give useful work to all the employable needy unemployed."²

Obviously, the amount that the nation can afford for work relief to utilize labor that would otherwise go to waste and to create values that otherwise would not be provided is debatable. On the one hand, there have been those who have contended that each appropriation was much too small. On the other hand, there have been those who have argued that each new fund would prove to be the fatal straw to break the Treasury's back.

In retrospect, and in view of the tremendous increase in the national debt as a result of World War II, frequently heard arguments to the effect that the relatively picayune appropriations asked for WPA jobs would wreck the nation's credit lose something of their potency.³ However, convincing data regarding what the nation could or could not afford to spend for employing unemployed workers have been lacking. In fact, this very lack has contributed to the intensity of discussions regarding the number of jobs the WPA should provide and has meant that the issue had, of necessity, to be settled on some basis other than an analysis of cold facts.

Once it has been determined by Congress how much money shall be provided, it is relatively simple to figure how many workers can be employed on a yearly basis. This is done by subtracting from the total amount enough for materials, supplies, equipment, and administration, and then dividing the remainder by the estimated man-year labor cost. Though relatively easy, this process is not without its difficulties, for man-year costs vary in accordance with the number of workers employed, with wage scales, and with the proportion of workers falling into the various

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, April 28, 1939. It is to be noted, however, that the appropriation requested was not sufficient even to employ all needy eligible workers.
² Ibid., March 12, 1938.
³ This is not, of course, to deny that the sums have been tremendous and have contributed materially to the nation's burden of debt.

560
Numbers Employed

wage classes. Material and equipment costs also fluctuate widely depending upon numbers employed, the types of projects undertaken, and the amount of supplies that can be provided from other than federal funds. Finally, administrative costs can vary widely depending upon what services the WPA is called upon to perform. Thus, although the amount of an appropriation roughly determines the number of workers that can be employed, possible adjustments in wages, expenditures for materials, or other costs can seriously affect the number of jobs that may be provided.

If, instead of starting from so hazy a base as an estimate of what the nation can afford, one preferred to start, rather, from the opposite direction—an estimate of the number for whom WPA jobs should be provided—he would still find himself in great difficulty. The first problem would be to determine who and what types of persons should be given WPA employment; the second, to estimate how many such persons there might be during any given period.

Lack of Defined Goals

The first of these all-important questions—to wit, who should be given employment—the administration unfortunately has never answered except for the first year of the Works Program. Even then only a partial answer was forthcoming. Subsequently, the administration has never declared that it would employ as many workers as met any given number of conditions. It has never said that it would either provide jobs for all unemployed workers or would provide one job for every family which had no employable member at work. Neither has the administration promised a job to every family which was in need, was receiving relief, or—as in 1935 to 1936—was receiving relief as of a specified date. Obviously, so long as neither the administration nor Congress ever reached decisions on such fundamental questions as these, vacillations and uncertainty of policy were inevitable.

Even in 1935, when the administration came closer than it has subsequently come to defining in a rational way those for whom jobs were to be provided, official statements of policy left much to be desired. These specified only that the Works Program as a whole (not the WPA alone) was to provide a total of 3.5 million jobs. This total was assumed to be enough to give one job to each
family which was then receiving relief and included an employable member.

When Mr. Hopkins, then administrator of the FERA, testified before a Senate Committee in January, 1935, he explained why the number of jobs to be created was established at 3.5 million. On January 1, he said, there were 20 million persons on relief in the United States. Of these, 8.3 million were children under sixteen years of age; 3.8 million were persons who, though between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five were not working nor seeking work. These included housewives, students in school, and incapacitated persons. Another 750,000 were persons sixty-five years of age or over. Thus, of the total of 20 million persons then receiving relief, 12.85 million were not considered eligible for employment. This left a total of 7.15 million presumably employable persons between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five inclusive. Of these, however, 1.65 million were said to be farm operators or persons who had some non-relief employment, while another 350,000 were, despite the fact that they were already employed or seeking work, considered incapacitated. Deducting this two million from the total of 7.15 million, there remained 5.15 million persons sixteen to sixty-five years of age, unemployed, looking for work, and able to work. Because of the assumption that only one worker per family would be permitted to work under the proposed program, this total of 5.15 million was further reduced by 1.6 million—the estimated number of workers who were members of families which included two or more employable persons. Thus, there remained a net total of 3.55 million workers in as many households for whom jobs were to be provided. On the basis of these estimates Congress was asked to appropriate four billion dollars to create (at an estimated average cost of approximately $1,200 per man per year) 3.5 million jobs.

A somewhat different slant from that given by Mr. Hopkins was, according to the New York Times, afforded by the President. "When asked what factors dictated the decision to set the work-relief appropriation at $4,000,000,000, Mr. Roosevelt said that these were, first, a desire not to overrun the budget unreasonably and, second, a desire to finance only such projects as could be completed within a year." ¹

¹ June 15, 1935.
Numbers Employed

While it would be impossible to say how much weight was given to any one factor rather than to another, it is doubtless safe to affirm with Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden that the amount finally decided upon for the Works Program in 1935 "rested in part upon an estimate of need" and, in part, upon "a decision by Treasury Department and Bureau of the Budget officers based upon the financial condition of the government as a whole." ¹

Though relatively clearer than most statements on such questions have been, that made in 1935 was widely misunderstood. Although the President had committed the federal government to provide only 3.5 million jobs under the proposed Works Program and those, apparently, for only one year, relief administrators, public officials, the press, and the general public jumped to the conclusion that the federal government had assumed responsibility for providing a job for every family that was then receiving relief or that might later fall into need and require relief. That this was not the intent of the President was made clear in an interview in which newspaper men asked him if the states and localities had any responsibility beyond the 1.5 million unemployables being returned to them for care. To this the President is reported to have replied, "They have complete responsibility . . . for the entire problem over and above the 3.5 million, because the latter total was the one fixed . . . by Congressional enactment [upon recommendation of the administration, it will be recalled] and that is the limit for which Federal funds are available." ²

The illusion that the federal government had assumed responsibility for providing a job for every needy unemployed person has been fostered by broad, sweeping statements made from time to time by various administration leaders. There was, for example, the President's promise during his 1936 campaign: "Of course we will provide useful work for the needy unemployed." ³

¹ The Administration of Federal Work Relief. Public Administration Service, Chicago, 1941, p. 41.
² As quoted in the New York Times, December 24, 1935. Among others, Jacob Baker, assistant WPA administrator, stated clearly the policy of the federal government. "The Federal Government," he declared early in 1936, "agreed to aid the states to take care of the employable population of the United States on relief as of November 1, 1935, but it remained and still remains the obligation of the states to care for those of their citizens who are physically incapable of work, or who have lost their jobs and resources since November 1st."—WPA Release 4-1029, January 21, 1936.
³ As quoted in the New York Times, November 1, 1936.

563
Although this declaration obviously did not commit the President to a policy of providing a job for every needy unemployed person, it is clearly subject to misconstruction. So also, a statement made by the President himself in 1938: "I believe all should accept . . . the policy of not permitting any needy American who can and is willing to work to starve because the Federal Government does not provide the work."

Typical of statements subject to interpretations that might raise false hopes about the extent of the responsibility assumed by the federal government are those made from time to time before congressional committees. There was, for example, the statement made before a House Committee in 1938 by Mr. Hopkins, who described the WPA as "a program not to provide work for . . . all the able-bodied unemployed, but to those who are actually in need."

Previously, in 1936, Mr. Hopkins had said that the program "should provide employment for substantially all of the unemployed employables on the relief rolls, leaving to the States the problem of the unemployables."

Although this declaration contains an obvious "escape hatch"—the word "substantially"—the second half of the statement, emphasizing state responsibility for unemployable persons alone, strongly suggests that states were to be relieved of responsibility for those who were employable.

Corrington Gill, in his book, Wasted Manpower, has also contributed to the continuance of the illusion that the federal government will care for all needy employables, for he clearly implies that if the states and localities would co-operate with the federal government in caring for unemployable persons, the federal government would do the rest. The role of the Works Program, he declared, was "to provide the employables [not some of the employables or only a specified number of them] with jobs. . . ."

In discussing the residual responsibility of state and local governments, he mentions only their responsibility for caring for those who are eligible for social security benefits and for "other unemployable persons," suggesting nothing of responsibility for

---

1 Ibid., January 4, 1938.
3 Idem (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 162.
Numbers Employed

employable persons not employed on the federal Works Pro-

gram.¹

Whatever the causes may have been, expectations were widely
current that the federal government would provide jobs for all
needy unemployed workers. Statements of state and local gov-
ernmental authorities, newspaper editorial writers, public wel-
fare officials, social workers, mayors in all parts of the country,
and others can be adduced to support this fact. There was, for
example, Governor Horner of Illinois, who declared that because
the federal government had failed to provide jobs for all employ-
able relief cases, it had “broken faith.” There was also the state-
ment of Governor Lehman of New York, who claimed that “in
August, 1935, when the Federal Government initiated its WPA
program, it was contemplated that it would care for all the needy
employables while the State and its communities would bear the
cost only of needy unemployables on home relief.”²

One reason, doubtless, why federal policy announced in 1935
was widely misinterpreted was that it left so many questions un-
answered. What would the federal government do about em-
ployable persons who had been on relief prior to (but were tem-
porarily not receiving relief at) the time the 3.5 million count
was made? What about needy families which by hook or by crook
—perhaps in expectation of a Works Program job—had managed
to keep off the relief rolls at least until after the time the count
was made? How long were the 3.5 million jobs to last? Although
the appropriation was to run two years, Mr. Hopkins admitted
to a Senate Committee that he expected the funds would be ex-
hausted within a year. Thus, it appeared that the 3.5 million jobs
would be created for one year.

Because the original goal clearly contemplated giving jobs to
only one member in each of the 3.5 million relief households,
there was considerable disillusionment when President Roosevelt
in a radio address in November, 1935, announced triumphantly:

Today is the twenty-ninth day of November. It gives me a certain satis-
faction to be able to inform ... the nation, that on Wednesday, two days
ago, there were 3,125,000 persons at work on various useful projects
throughout the nation. The small remaining number have received orders
to report to work on projects already under way or ready to be started. This


565
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

result, I believe you will agree with me, constitutes a substantial and successful national achievement.1

To those who had taken at face value the administration’s original proposal, the President’s announcement of qualified success came as a rude shock, since the total of something over three million persons receiving jobs included more than half a million youths enrolled in CCC camps. Since these boys were not, for the most part, heads of relief households, it had not been expected that they would be included in the 3.5 million total. From this time forward, however, it became increasingly clear that secondary workers employed by the CCC (and, later, by the NYA) were to be counted toward the goal, which had earlier been supposed to include only family heads.

More disappointing still was the fact that the goal of 3.5 million jobs (even with CCC workers included) may be said to have been attained in only five months—December, 1935, through April, 1936—whereas earlier expectations had been that 3.5 million workers were to be employed a full year.

A third consideration which contributed to the general misunderstanding was the fact that a considerable number of the total employed during the few months when the previously announced goal had been reached were workers who had not been taken from relief rolls nor certified as being in need although the federal government’s original proposal was to give jobs to 3.5 million heads of relief households.

When it is recalled that not since 1935 has the administration attempted to define in any clear way the number of workers for whom jobs should be provided during any given period, it is little wonder that employment practices have proved vacillating and unpredictable.2

1Ibid., November 30, 1935. Although the breakdown of the total announced by the President is not available, an official WPA report of the number employed in the week ending November 30, 1935, showed that of a grand total of 3,272,000 persons given Works Program jobs the WPA employed 2,484,000, while 544,000 (over 16 per cent of the total) were employed on Emergency Conservation Work projects (CCC). The remaining 244,000 were employed by other federal agencies.

2In speaking of employment goals, distinction is here made between general platitudes and carefully defined objectives seriously intended to be achieved. For example, early in 1941 President Roosevelt declared: “... even with what we call ‘full employment’ there will remain a large number of persons who cannot be adjusted to our industrial life. For this group, the government must provide work opportunities.” Though this suggests that the federal government was responsible for giving jobs to all persons who could not “be adjusted to our industrial life” no steps were taken to effectuate this policy.”—As quoted in the New York Times, January 9, 1941.
Difficulties Involved in Forecasting

Still, the lack of defined goals is not the only obstacle to the rational determination of the number of jobs the WPA should, from time to time, provide. Even if goals were clearly defined and any one of several frequently suggested criteria adopted, there would still remain the all-important question of estimating how many jobs would be necessary to realize the desired objective.

The almost insuperable difficulties involved in making such estimates is clearly apparent in the discrepancies between estimates of unemployment in any current month, to say nothing of the hazards encountered in making estimates for some future period.1 Worse still, the already complicated task of forecasting the future is made still more difficult because estimates for a given fiscal year ending in June frequently must be made for congressional purposes by the spring—or even by the first of the preceding year. Preliminary estimates for the fiscal year ending with June, 1941, for example, were made as early as December, 1939.

Speaking from bitter experience, Mr. Hopkins in 1938 admitted “it is impossible for anybody to project the employment or the unemployment curve for 15 months into the future. It is difficult,” he explained, “to forecast accurately for 7 months. I do not know anybody who guessed that employment was going to drop last year as sharply as it did. Certainly, a year ago . . . I did not expect it, and I do not know of any businessman who expected it. . . .” 2

How precarious this business of estimating the needs of WPA at some future date can be was well exemplified by some guesses

---

1 Just how hard it is to estimate economic conditions at some future time may be seen from difficulties experienced by seasoned economic statisticians in agreeing upon what goes on currently or what has gone on in the past. Taking but one illustration—estimates of unemployment—one may find wide disparities in the opinions of experts with respect to the past, let alone the future. A contributing factor responsible for part of the difficulty, of course, is the lack of agreement upon definitions of unemployment.

Widely used estimates of unemployment (made by the Alexander Hamilton Institute, the American Federation of Labor, the National Industrial Conference Board, and Robert Nathan) for two months selected at random, for example, varied from approximately 7.5 million to approximately 10.4 million (in June, 1936) and from approximately 10.3 million to about 13.2 million (in June, 1938). For a comparison of various estimates of unemployment over a period of several years, see Social Security Bulletin, vol. 2, no. 6, June, 1939, p. 80; and vol. 3, no. 3, March, 1940, p. 83.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

hazarded by Willard D. Arant, research director of the National Economy League, and published early in 1941. By January, 1942, according to these estimates, only about two to three million workers would still be without jobs.¹ This happy state, unfortunately, appears not to have come about.

According to official reports, the WPA alone in January, 1942, employed more than a million workers while another million who were eligible and wanting jobs had to go without. In addition, some 348,000 youths were employed by the CCC and on the out-of-school work program of the NYA. Unemployment compensation benefits, during the month of December, 1941, were paid to a weekly average of approximately 523,000 claimants. The total number of unemployed workers, as estimated by the WPA, was no less than 4.2 million.

Thus it may be seen that if the WPA program in 1941-1942 had been cut to fit National Economy League estimates, the number of needy workers for whom no better provision was available would undoubtedly have been even greater than it was. In fact, even as matters stood, the proportion of the nation’s unemployed who were on the pay roll of the WPA was as low as it had ever been since that agency was established.²

To say that predicting WPA needs more than a year in advance is extremely difficult is not to say that various federal officials have not given honest and creative thought to the attempt. There was, for example, the estimate made for the WPA by one of the nation’s most eminent economic statisticians. First he analyzed economic data for the period immediately preceding that for which the estimate was to be made. Historical data were then scrutinized to find earlier periods which showed the same characteristics as those observed. Three such periods were identified. Study was then made of what had occurred as to employment opportunities after each of these periods and of the trend which economic events therefore might be expected to follow during the year ahead. On the basis of conclusions reached, the volume of industrial production was estimated for the year in question. The number of workers likely to be needed to produce this volume under conditions of production then in effect was also estimated.

¹ WPA or Defense? New York, [1941], p. 5.
² See Diagram 5, chap. 22.
These computations, then, were used to estimate the probable volume of unemployment during the ensuing year.

Having gone to all this trouble to estimate as accurately as possible the probable need for WPA employment, it is indeed surprising that the result should have been so largely vitiated by the assumption that the WPA would continue—as it had done in the past—to give employment to only about one-fourth of those who were thought likely to be without jobs! No explanation for such a step was offered beyond the fact that this would result in giving jobs to approximately the same proportion of the unemployed as had previously been given WPA employment.

More recently, estimates presented to Congress by WPA officials of the number of jobs that would probably be needed in the fiscal year 1943 reveal the care that has gone into these forecasts. For example, it was estimated that during 1942–1943 war industries would need an additional ten million workers but that transportation difficulties, gasoline shortages, and shortages of materials would result in displacing some eight million workers employed in civilian industries, leaving a probable net gain of only two million jobs. This gain, it was thought, would be more than offset by the fact that the war prosperity would bring into the labor market at least three million workers in addition to the normal annual increase of 600,000. Such an increase in the labor force would raise the total to some 62 million workers or about 59 per cent of the population fourteen years of age or older, whereas in World War I 61 per cent of the population fourteen years of age or over were in the armed forces or at work. Thus, despite the addition to the armed forces of perhaps 2.5 million men, it was estimated that unemployment which was thought to be about 3.6 million at the time, would average, during 1942–1943, approximately 2 or 2.5 million. The monthly average of 400,000 jobs the administration proposed to provide during the fiscal year 1943 would give work to only about a fifth or a sixth of those who were thought likely to need work. During the fiscal year 1942 the WPA provided jobs for about a fourth of the total number estimated as unemployed.

Difficult as it may be to forecast needs, a Pennsylvania relief official responsible for estimating relief needs in his state has declared that the most difficult aspect of predicting needs was not to estimate what the probable need was likely to be, but to
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

attempt to foresee what proportion of that need the WPA—with all its vacillations in policy—was likely to accept as its own responsibility.

In view of the twin difficulties of having no agreed-upon policy as to who should be employed by the WPA and that of estimating need for WPA employment in any given future period, it is not surprising that the whole process of determining the number of jobs for which funds are made available from time to time degenerates into a giant controversy in which the chief weapons are not facts or established principles but "unknowns."

The validity of this observation is attested by the fact that Colonel Harrington in 1940 told a House Committee that the basis of determining the amount the federal government should put up for WPA employment in any given year depended largely on estimates of unemployment and the index of production. Obviously, since these figures are not available for future months, they must be based upon prognostications which, in turn, are based upon the greatest of uncertainty.

Considerations Affecting Volume of WPA Employment

Among the most important considerations which have affected the number of WPA jobs for which appropriations have been asked or voted have been: (a) the extent to which normal private employment was expected to increase or decrease; (b) the extent to which government-stimulated private and public employment was thought likely to take on workers or lay them off; (c) the extent to which such catastrophes as drought, flood, and hurricanes might throw people into need; and finally as noted already, (d) estimates of what the nation could afford or what the public might be willing to pay for employing its workless workers.

Changes in Normal Private Employment

With respect to the first of these considerations—what was likely to happen in the field of normal private employment—the administration frequently has found itself between two fires; for to acknowledge the extent to which private industry had not improved or could not soon be expected to pick up (and thus reduce to a minimum the need for WPA jobs) would have been to admit
that governmental efforts toward recovery had not proved successful. Nevertheless, administration leaders have repeatedly pointed out that estimates of WPA needs for a given period could be expected to suffice only if industry (a) continued a given rate of expansion,1 (b) improved more rapidly than it had in the immediate past,2 or (c) reduced hours of work so as to employ larger numbers of workers.3

Changes in Government-Stimulated Private and in Public Employment

Further considerations which have repeatedly affected estimates of the number of WPA jobs that should be provided during a given period have been (a) the amount of other public or government-stimulated private employment that was expected to be available during the period, and (b) the extent to which these jobs might be filled by workers who otherwise would need WPA employment.

Early in 1936, for example, when the administration requested

1 In April, 1939, President Roosevelt requested Congress to appropriate funds sufficient to employ, during the fiscal year 1940, "an average of slightly more than 2,000,000 persons," approximately one-third less than the average employed during the fiscal year 1939. "Barring unforeseen set-backs," this appeared to Colonel Harrington to be a justifiable decrease in employment despite the fact that there were then, according to his latest information, some 850,000 needy employable workers for whom no jobs had been provided, and despite difficulties such as "threats of foreign war . . . retardation of investment . . . professed lack of confidence."—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 10-12.

2 In March, 1936, for example, when President Roosevelt asked Congress for "only" 1.5 billion dollars for the WPA, he declared:

"The trend of re-employment is upward. But this trend, at its present rate of progress, is inadequate. I propose, therefore, that we ask private business to extend its operations so as to absorb an increasing number of the unemployed. . . .

"The ultimate cost of the Federal Works Program will thus be determined by private enterprise. Federal assistance which arose as a result of industrial dis-employment can be terminated if industry itself removes the underlying conditions. . . . Only if industry fails to reduce substantially the number of those now out of work will another appropriation and further plans and policies be necessary."—As quoted in the New York Times, March 19, 1936.

3 When Congress convened in January, 1937, the President reminded that body that in his message of March 18, 1936, he had warned the country that the 1.5 billion dollars appropriated for work relief would prove sufficient only if industry would "cooperatively achieve the goal of re-employment." Continuing, the President declared: "In some industries and among some employers the former maximum hours [established under the National Recovery Act] have been unreasonably increased. . . .

"It is not unfair to say that these employers who are working their employes unreasonably long hours are failing to cooperate with the government and their fellow-citizens in putting people back to work."—As quoted in the New York Times, January 12, 1937.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

an appropriation of 1.5 billion dollars to provide an average of some two million jobs a month, the United States Conference of Mayors recommended an appropriation of 2.34 billion to provide three million jobs; and a high WPA official personally advised an appropriation of 4.5 billion dollars. Congress, however, accepted none of these estimates. Its decision was influenced, in part at least, by the expectation that the appropriation for the War Department providing large sums for river and harbor work would provide considerable employment, and was made in the face of the warning by Mr. Hopkins that such employment was “not necessarily located in the places of greatest unemployment.”

Even more significant, however, was the uncertainty which prevailed in 1939 when questions with respect to the number of jobs the WPA should provide were heavily clouded by uncertainty as to what might be done with the President’s proposed “lend-spend” program, which contemplated an appropriation of almost four billion dollars for public works, housing, railroad equipment, and other recovery-stimulating measures. Obviously, this huge program would have created a vast amount of employment, and anticipation of its approval undoubtedly helped to explain the lack of greater pressure upon Congress to appropriate a larger amount to provide more WPA jobs. But the “lend-spend” proposal was defeated. This quickly brought into sharp relief the probable inadequacy of the WPA program as projected for the ensuing year.

Within a few months after the 1939 law was passed “inner government circles” were reported by the United States News to

1 Instead, the 1.5 billion dollars requested by the President was reduced to 1.425 billion dollars, to permit enlargement of the CCC to 350,000 instead of the 300,000 originally contemplated.
2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 136.
3 Defeat of this measure placed organized labor in a peculiarly embarrassing position. Labor had contributed in no small way to inclusion in the new WPA legislation of provisions forbidding that agency to engage in large building operations. The purpose behind this, obviously, was to place the erection of such buildings under the jurisdiction of the PWA or other agencies that might pay higher wages and select workers without reference to need or relief status. But only through the “lend-spend” program, now defeated, could the building program envisaged by labor have been carried out. In the attempt to salvage something out of defeat, organized labor during the summer sought an appropriation of one billion dollars, half of which might be used for housing, half for other public works. However, Congress adjourned without making further appropriations for these purposes.
be "laying plans" to secure for the WPA an additional appropriation of as much as half a billion dollars to help offset the funds lost through "rejection of the lending-spending bill." ¹

More recent, of course, have been the uncertainties regarding the extent to which the war might liquidate need for the WPA program. Those who expected a quick reduction in the need for WPA employment because of a possible war boom were amply warned in November, 1939, by Colonel Harrington, who even then made it clear that business losses as well as gains could be expected from such a boom.

At the opposite extreme may be found representatives of such groups as the National Economy League. One of these spokesmen once estimated that the number of workers who will not have been absorbed in direct and indirect defense employment, and in the armed services before June 30, 1942, "will be less than the number required to fill the work relief rolls contemplated in the [federal] budget." ² A similar claim has been advanced by the Citizens' Bureau of Milwaukee which early in 1941 sent to congressional representatives in Washington a memorandum which declared that the Bureau believed the national defense program would result "in the employment of practically all employable workers." For this reason it recommended that after full employment has been achieved, the WPA program should be liquidated. This letter agreed that even with "full employment" many persons employed by the WPA would not find private employment. In explanation of this it was said that these workers were not employable by any reasonable standard.

The WPA has stood in sharp opposition to those who have declared that the nation's war program would eliminate all need for a federal work program.³ Among reasons given as to why the defense program could not be expected immediately—and, even in the future, permanently—to end unemployment have been the following: (a) war industries employment and need for WPA

¹ August 14, 1939.
³ Considering the Economy League's predictions, Mr. Hunter bitterly termed them "baseless suppositions that cannot be reconciled with industrial and employment surveys." "The pamphlet of the Economy League," he declared, "is such a tissue of misstatements and prejudices that it is almost impossible to consider the charges seriously."—WPA Release 4-2214, March 4, 1941.

573
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

employment frequently do not coincide; (b) concentration on defense industries results in displacing labor in other industries because of lack of steel, aluminum, rubber, copper, zinc, or other materials, or because of lack of certain skilled workers; (c) vast increases in production have been realized by extending the hours of workers already employed rather than by taking on new workers; (d) new workers have been drawn into the labor market because of higher wages or ease in finding jobs. Finally, (e) the natural increase in the labor market results each year in some half million young workers being added without reducing the number already unemployed.  

Catastrophes and Acts of God

Among further uncertainties that have made it difficult to estimate the future needs of the WPA must be noted certain major disasters. These have figured several times in decisions as to the number of jobs the WPA should provide. There was, for example, the drought which during the late summer and early fall of 1936 struck various parts of the nation, particularly the Midwest and South. The WPA, declared Mr. Hunter in August, 1936, "will continue to extend assistance to those in distress so long as the need exists, no matter how high it goes."  

When the President went to Congress early in 1937 asking for additional funds for the WPA, he explained that this step had been necessitated in part by the drought, which he termed "an unforeseen factor in Federal expenditures."  

2 An analysis made early in 1941 indicated that 73 per cent of the primary defense contracts had been awarded to firms in 20 industrial areas in which only 19 per cent of WPA employment was found. For discussion of WPA employment in areas receiving the lion's share of war contracts see chap. 22.


4 WPA Release 4-1284, August 18, 1936. Drought employment in July was only 24,200, but it skyrocketed to 118,172 by the end of August, when Mr. Hopkins reported that 97 per cent of the drought sufferers being aided were farmers, farm tenants or laborers, and the remaining 3 per cent "individuals directly affected by the farmers' plight, although not farmers by occupation."—WPA Release 4-1295, August 30, 1936. The peak of drought employment (324,298) was reached in late October, after which it subsided as rapidly as it had arisen, falling to 38,710 in late December, when drought sufferers were suddenly declared ineligible for continued WPA employment. Some 250,000 of those previously employed by the WPA had, by early December, been referred to the Resettlement Administration for any further aid they might need.

Numbers Employed

for the ensuing year were presented in Congress, Mr. Hopkins was careful to explain that they could be expected to prove sufficient only if there was a "good agricultural year" that would make "drought expenses unnecessary." In 1940 estimates were qualified as tentative because of the possibility of drought, particularly in the middlewestern states.

A further disaster which affected estimates of WPA needs was the New England hurricane which, as the President said, "devastated large areas of New England" in September, 1938, and "seriously dislocated industry and trade in the Northeastern section of the country and added to the relief burden in that area." 2

Probable Numbers to Be Drawn into Armed Forces

With the war came a new uncertainty to plague the planners who were responsible for charting the future course of the WPA. This further unknown was the number likely to be drawn into the nation's armed forces within any specified period. When Acting Commissioner Dryden in 1942 presented to a House Committee his estimate of the number of jobs the WPA should provide in 1942–1943, he declared that his decision was based, in part, upon the theory that the armed forces would be increased by 2.5 million during the year. To one critic this estimate seemed too low and appeared to leave out of account some 600,000 men to be taken into the Navy and Marine Corps. Uncertainty of the size the nation's armed forces will assume within any given period—to say nothing of the secrecy surrounding such estimates as are made—contributes materially to the already difficult task confronting those who must attempt to forecast, months in advance, the number of jobs the WPA should provide from time to time.

In view of the great importance of relating WPA employment levels to needs arising from natural calamities and from changes in normal private, other public, and government-stimulated private employment, and in view, too, of difficulties involved in foreseeing future needs as they may be affected by all these factors, various observers have come to the conclusion that in addition to doing everything possible to perfect methods of estimating

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937. 75th Congress, 1st Session, 1937, p. 88.
future needs accurately there must be devised some method by which public employment may be adjusted to changing conditions more closely and more quickly than has been possible in the past.

**Forces Working for and Against More WPA Jobs**

In recurring controversies over the number of workers for whom the WPA should provide employment from time to time, the chief combatants have usually been the WPA, the administration, Congress, organizations such as the United States Conference of Mayors, labor organizations such as the AF of L and CIO, and a wide variety of professional and special interest groups. In these discussions the WPA has frequently been pitted not only against Congress but also against the administration. Sometimes WPA opinion has itself been divided.

**The Administration vs. Congress**

Among the most dramatic examples of differences between the administration and Congress was the latter's action early in 1939 when the administration requested 875 million dollars for the WPA for the remainder of the fiscal year. Instead of appropriating this amount Congress voted 150 million dollars less. Condemning this cut as wholly unwarranted, Colonel Harrington declared: "I have never known the basis on which that figure was arrived at or whether it had any relation to any proposed program or not. Obviously, it [Congress] intended that there should be a reduction below what the President proposed, but I am not familiar with the reason why it was $150,000,000 instead of, say, $100,000,000 or $200,000,000 or some other amount." 

It was experiences of this type, doubtless, which led Colonel Harrington in 1940 to beg a House Committee not to reduce the amount being requested for the ensuing year. When asked if his

---

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 209 and 246), Further Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 2. In condemnation of this same action, Mr. Hunter complained that the question "was at no time debated on the merits of the case. It [the amount by which the request was reduced] might as well have been fifty million or three hundred million as far as the debate went. It could not help but appear to be a political move simply to make what we might admit was a laudable gesture toward economy, but the arbitrary saving of this $150,000,000 means the deliberate loss of well-being for one million families."—WPA Release 4-1904, February 26, 1939.
"admonition" was "anticipatory," the Colonel admitted that it was, perhaps, "protective." ¹

Just as WPA officials have found it difficult to understand why Congress has sometimes taken such liberties with their estimates of future needs, so have congressmen been puzzled as to how responsible administrative officials arrived at amounts requested of Congress. One example of the bewilderment in which legislators frequently found themselves was that evidenced by a member of a House Committee who (early in 1939) asked Colonel Harrington "how the President . . . arrived at this specific definite sum of $875,000,000 [requested for the remainder of the fiscal year], so that not 1 cent less nor more will do the job." In replying, the Colonel admitted that it was solely a question of judgment as to how far the federal and state governments respectively should go in caring for the 3,750,000 employable persons then thought to be in need.²

Some indication of what sometimes leads legislators to discount the administration's requests for funds was once given by former Senator Byrnes who clearly indicated that it was his own wishful thinking that made it difficult to support the official request for the WPA. He declared:

I am unwilling to admit that, with the great improvement in business and the great improvement in the financial condition of local governments, that our people will go hungry unless the Federal government continues to make for work relief the tremendous appropriations such as were made during the depression.

If this year when business conditions approach the greatest boom year in our history—1929, the Federal government must, in addition to the other grants to the states, appropriate $1,500,000,000 for work relief, how much will it be necessary to appropriate should there be a recession in business? And what will we then use for money?³

Although there have been times when Congress and the administration have differed widely with respect to numbers for whom WPA employment should be provided, Congress frequently has appropriated every dime requested by the administra-
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

tion for project employment. If these amounts proved insufficient the administration had only itself to thank.

The fact that Congress has never appropriated for the WPA more than was requested by the administration has not been due to the want of suggestions on this score. Repeatedly such leaders as Representatives Voorhis of California, Boileau of Wisconsin, Marcantonio of New York, Casey of Massachusetts, and Senators La Follette of Wisconsin, Murray of Montana, and Schwellenbach of Washington have attempted to increase materially the numbers for whom WPA jobs might be provided from year to year.

Agreement between the administration and Congress, unfortunately, has not always meant that Congress on these occasions appropriated funds enough for all the jobs WPA officials thought should have been provided. It may have meant, rather, that the administration was successful only in guessing how much Congress could be induced to provide for the WPA. Furthermore, various officials have sometimes admitted that they have not even asked, formally, for funds enough to provide as many jobs as they thought should be provided. Instead, they have limited requests to what they thought they could get from Congress and to what they thought they could ask for without casting too many reflections upon efforts of the administration to bring about economic recovery.

The WPA vs. the Administration

Sometimes estimates of need presented to Congress by official spokesmen for the administration have not come even close to WPA officials' estimates of their own needs. One notable example of disagreement of this kind occurred early in 1936 when, in sharp contrast with the administration's request for 1.5 billion dollars to provide an average of some two million jobs during the year 1936-1937, a high WPA official told representatives of the American Association of Social Workers (in January, 1936) that an appropriation of 4.5 billion dollars should be sought to continue the program after exhaustion of current funds.

At about this same time Mr. Hopkins, too, had found himself in disagreement with the administration's decision with respect to the number of jobs the WPA should provide. Reaffirming his conviction that the federal government should continue to employ
approximately 3.5 million persons, Mr. Hopkins in May, 1936, told a Senate Committee that the program contemplated under pending legislation (for the fiscal year 1937) could provide an average of only two million jobs. In addition, another 800,000 were to be employed by other agencies including the CCC. This combined total of some 2.8 million jobs was, in Mr. Hopkins’ judgment, “short by about 700,000 persons on the average.”

A second noteworthy example of differences between WPA officials and the administration was that afforded in 1940 when, while testifying before a House Committee, Colonel Harrington was placed in the embarrassing position of saying that he had never thought the amount of money recommended by the Bureau of the Budget and the President for the WPA during the year 1940–1941 would be enough. Again, in 1941, Mr. Hunter repeatedly insisted that the amount requested by the administration for 1941–1942 was far short of enough to meet existing needs as he saw them.

Still another illustration of differences between the administration’s request to Congress and the WPA’s own estimates of the need for funds for providing jobs for unemployed workers was the admission in 1942 by Acting Commissioner Dryden that although the administration was asking only 280 million dollars for the WPA for the fiscal year 1943, the Federal Works Agency had recommended no less than 450 million and WPA officials estimated the need at 600 million dollars. When asked if the amount requested by the administration would “measurably take care of the situation” despite the necessity for firing some 375,000 workers in order to bring the level of employment into line with the annual average of 400,000 contemplated in the request Mr. Dryden replied, “No; I do not think that any of us can say that we will feel comfortable with an employment of 400,000.”

Among the most serious effects of the failure (or, because of established rules governing the amount of money any federal administrator may ask Congress to appropriate) the inability of WPA officials to ask for what they really think is necessary to meet probable needs, is that Congress is permitted to feel a false

---

1. U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 31.
2. U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 95.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

sense of having done all that was necessary when it appropriates the amount officially requested. During Senate debate on the 1942 appropriation, for example, when Senator Pepper of Florida questioned whether the amount requested for the WPA was sufficient to meet existing needs Senator McKellar of Tennessee, who had the bill in charge, replied:

Let me say to the Senator that this provision was recommended by the W.P.A., by the Bureau of the Budget, by the President of the United States, adopted by the House committee, by the House of Representatives, and in substantially the same form and in the same amount by the Senate committee. It seems to me that those in charge of the work should know something about it; and the sum proposed seems to me to be a very reasonable one, and they have felt that way. . . .

All the others may be mistaken; only the Senator from Florida may be correct. However, my own belief is that the Senator from Florida is mistaken, and that all these officials of the Government are not mistaken. I believe they are correct; I believe they told the truth when they came before the committee. . . .

Discrepancies between what WPA officials think (without saying openly) is necessary to meet existing needs and what the administration decides to ask of Congress have sometimes resulted in no little embarrassment to leaders in such organizations as the CIO and Conference of Mayors. Upon going to bat for funds enough to permit the WPA to provide as many jobs as appear from official estimates to be needed, such persons have sometimes found WPA officials not only refusing to stand by their own convictions but assuring Congress that some lesser amount approved by the administration would be sufficient.

Various Interest Groups Concerned with WPA Employment Levels

Though the main bouts in the recurring controversies over the number that should be employed by the WPA from year to year have been between Congress and the administration, there have been other important combatants—some pulling for larger, some for smaller appropriations. Prominent among organizations which have attempted to keep WPA appropriations at a minimum have been the United States Chamber of Commerce, the

\[1\] Requested, it should be said, under protest; the WPA's actual estimate of need was for more than twice the amount.

\[2\] Congressional Record, June 25, 1942, p. 5756.
Numbers Employed

National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Economy League.

When President Roosevelt in 1936 declared that appropriations asked for the WPA could prove sufficient only if business improved, both the National Association of Manufacturers and the United States Chamber of Commerce picked up the gauntlet hurled down by the President. The former countered with a seven-point program for recovery, the latter with a demand that government interference with private enterprise be stopped.¹

Later in 1936, when conditions had become so serious that the President announced that he would ask for additional funds for the first six months of 1937, the United States Chamber of Commerce, through its committee on employment, declared that "further advance in business activities will require the services in private enterprise of persons now on work relief at public expense," and recommended that "a policy . . . of gradually discontinuing work relief" be adopted.²

More recently the Chamber of Commerce, like the National Economy League, has advocated not only reductions in WPA appropriations but practical abandonment of the program.

Although the Chamber of Commerce has sometimes attempted to keep WPA appropriations to a minimum, local chambers of commerce throughout the United States have frequently opposed reductions in the WPA program.³ In part, at least, this is attributable to the fact that unwarranted reductions in WPA em-

1 The Chamber of Commerce declared: "However earnest its efforts, it is apparent that private enterprise cannot accomplish the desired result in the face of continuously increasing burdens of taxation and rising costs of government, of threats of punitive investigation and regulations."—As quoted in the New York Times, March 21, 1936.

2 This committee was considerably more optimistic than the AF of L which estimated that some 8,287,000 workers were unemployed. According to estimates of the National Industrial Conference Board, nearly seven million (6,676,000) were unemployed in November, 1936, and according to Robert Nathan's estimates, 6,828,000. WPA employment at the time totaled 2,546,000.

According to estimates of the Chamber of Commerce committee, on the other hand, there were then in the whole country not more than four million involuntarily unemployed persons who would work for wages and salaries.

³ In an apparent effort to dissuade local chambers of commerce from action of this kind, the United States Chamber of Commerce in its 1940 convention declared: "In the interest of economy and lower expenditures and taxes, national, State and local, business men's organizations in the States should refrain from requesting Federal funds for local or specialized purposes and should use their influence to dissuade State and local authorities from asking or accepting such funds."—As quoted in the New York Times, May 3, 1940.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

employment result in depriving needy workers of subsistence and have been found to have deleterious effects upon local business.

Among organizations which have sought more or less consistently to get Congress to appropriate funds enough to permit the WPA to employ relatively large numbers of workers are the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the United States Conference of Mayors, the Workers Alliance, a number of religious and church organizations, and other groups of individuals interested in social welfare. Such groups frequently have advocated WPA appropriations enough to provide from a half to a third again as many jobs as the administration asked funds to provide. Not infrequently some of these organizations have stood for WPA appropriations sufficient to employ an average of three million workers a month. In 1940, for example, Philip Murray, then vice president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, justified this estimate on the ground that if this number of jobs were provided, they "would increase opportunities for employment for additional millions in private industry" and "would stimulate the situation, so far as unemployment is concerned."  

By other groups the goal of three million jobs has been defended on the ground that it appeared to be a politically feasible, practicable total, since three million workers have been employed at various times in the past. Furthermore, although the figure of three million may not be any more valid than a number of other possible goals, certain organizations believe it worth while to

---

1 During the heat of the battle over the WPA appropriation in 1937, for example, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America issued a statement declaring:

"The continuation of widespread unemployment presents a national situation which will tax our economic resources . . . our creative capacity and our moral courage.

"In spite of the fact that private industry is employing more people, there is reason to believe that the grave and abnormal condition of unemployment may continue for a considerable period.

"It is elemental justice, demanded by every consideration of Christian brotherhood, that the nation stand resolutely behind our fellow-citizens who are in distress. The workers of the nation have a vested interest in its wealth, which their labor has helped to create.

"We are not unmindful of the need for economy in governmental expenditure, but we regard it as repugnant to the Christian conscience that our economies should be effected at the expense of those who are neediest . . .

"... the nation must not incur the moral shame of placing the burden of balancing the budget upon the shoulders of the unemployed and the suffering."—As quoted in the New York Times, June 7, 1937.

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 905.

582
pick a likely-looking figure and to stick to it so as to impress it unforgettably on the minds of their members.

**Compensating for Bad Guesses of Future Needs**

Deficiencies resulting from inaccurate estimates of future needs may, it is true, be made up through "deficiency," "supplementary," "further," or even "further additional" appropriations which in fact have been requested for the WPA from time to time. Supplementary appropriations, however, are likely to be requested and granted only when the need they are designed to meet can be attributed to some dramatic catastrophe such as flood, drought, or economic recession obvious even to the most ardent budget-balancing legislator. Nevertheless, once an appropriation has been voted and the size of the program adjusted to fit available funds, the tendency is to hew to the established line, letting the chips fall where they may. Unfortunately, the "chips" under circumstances like these are needy families which are deprived of jobs and which in many areas of the country have no other source of aid, public or private, when WPA employment is not available.

Furthermore, estimates for periods covered by supplementary appropriations, although usually for a shorter time, are subject to the same difficulties as estimates for periods covered by regular appropriations. Finally, supplementary, piecemeal appropriations preclude sound planning, involve delays which increase workers' insecurity, undermine morale, and sometimes necessitate the discharge of large numbers of workers before new funds become available. Thus, making up deficiencies through supplementary appropriations is no satisfactory method of compensating for bad guesses.

Rather than run the risk of spending for WPA employment more money than Congress appropriated, the administration has sometimes requested funds enough for only a part of a fiscal year, leaving to a later time (when further needs could be more clearly seen) estimates of needs for the remainder of the year. This was done in 1938, for example, and again in 1940.

These practices have been roundly condemned by critics who have charged that the administration has attempted to cover up the real amounts appropriated for relief, and to defer beyond election time certain appropriations so as to be able to put before
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

a more receptive legislature the case for increased appropriations. WPA officials, in turn, admit that whatever else may be said of them, requests for appropriations for only part of a year play havoc with efforts to do advance planning, which is so essential to the efficiency of a work program.¹

A third possible way of compensating for errors in estimating the optimum volume of WPA employment would be for Congress to make appropriations upon some sort of sliding-scale basis. This was suggested in 1940 by Representative O'Neal of Kentucky, who proposed that Congress after authorizing a given appropriation might also grant authority to exceed this by a specified percentage, depending upon future developments as revealed by data relating to unemployment, industrial production, and similar factors.

A fourth method of compensating for mistakes of those who fail accurately to anticipate relief needs is to hold that needs over and above those for which the federal government has planned should be met by states and localities, unless, of course, needy men, women, and children are themselves to bear the brunt of official miscalculations. To many observers, however, considerations advanced in Chapters XXVI through XXIX as reasons why the federal government should assume any degree of responsibility for relief needs are all the more—rather than less—applicable in times of economic recession, when catastrophe strikes, or when needs suddenly increase because of some other kind of unforeseen and unplanned-for contingency. In retrospect, one of the most amazing aspects of federal policy or, rather, the lack of policy with respect to determination of the number of jobs the WPA should provide from year to year is that decisions on this score have been made without prior consultation and agreement with state and local relief officials as to what they can or cannot do to relieve probable needs that the federal government does not propose to meet. When it is recalled that the national government claims a special responsibility for needs arising from unemployment,² the unilateral nature of this policy—which, apparently, permits the federal government to choose how much of the total need of unemployed workers it shall meet without reference to how remaining needs may be provided for—is all the more

¹ See, for example, Colonel Harrington's own testimony on this point.—Ibid., p. 544.
² See chap. 29.
Numbers Employed

difficult to comprehend. Under the circumstances it is little wonder that public welfare administrators all over the country have repeatedly complained as did Commissioner Hodson of New York City in 1941 when he declared:

As a local administrator who has to budget his expenditures on a six months' and sometimes on an annual basis, I ... express the hope ... that employment under the W.P.A. be stabilized over a period of time. Changes in W.P.A. allocations completely upset local calculations in the middle of a budget period. The W.P.A. can cause serious problems by unexpectedly laying men off or reducing the total number to be employed, thus causing an increase in applications for home relief. This is a problem in federal-local cooperation which has not yet been fully worked out but is susceptible of solution.\(^1\)

In view of the virtual impossibility of predicting in advance and with any reasonable degree of accuracy the number of people likely to need employment at any given time, and of the time required to put projects into operation even after the need for them is apparent, it is of utmost importance that federal unemployment relief measures be sufficiently flexible to meet needs as they arise. If this is not done, failure accurately to appraise needs long enough in advance to make proper provision for them is almost certain to result in "taking it out of the hides of the unemployed." Unless in the future some way can be found to avoid the mistakes of the past the inevitable result will be to continue to pit hunches against hunger.

CHAPTER XXIV
DETERMINATION OF MONTHLY AND
STATE EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

DETERMINATION OF MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

Once the level of employment for a given year is decided upon by such catch-as-catch-can methods as are used, there still remains the question as to how many workers should be employed from month to month within that year. By and large this decision has been left to administrative discretion. This, obviously, is a most important prerogative, carrying with it power to employ so many during the early months of a year that—unless appropriations are to be exceeded—drastic cuts would later be necessary. Such cuts (or even the threat of cuts) can easily generate so much pressure from unemployed workers, relief officials, and others that Congress would feel compelled to appropriate further funds to ease the situation.

On several occasions Congress, taking time by the forelock, has attempted to forestall further requests for funds by writing into law as it did in 1937 and 1939 provisions requiring that the funds appropriated were to be made to last for specified periods. Although the 1939 provision¹ seems to have worked well enough from the point of view of thwarting requests for further appropriations, the ill-fated earlier attempt proved very short-lived. Despite the congressional edict that the funds appropriated by the ERA Act of 1937 were “to constitute the total amount” to be furnished during the fiscal year 1937–1938, the WPA found it necessary to request—and Congress subsequently found itself voting—further appropriations.

A further attempt by Congress to control the number employed by the WPA was made in February, 1939. This required the WPA to apportion the appropriated funds so as “to cover the entire period” until the close of the fiscal year. It also prohibited,

¹ This requirement, usually spoken of as the “Woodrum amendment” was termed “an excellent provision” by Colonel Harrington.—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1940, p. 545.
Numbers Employed

prior to April 1, any "administrative reduction of more than 5 per centum in the number of employees upon Works Progress projects. . . ."¹ This latter provision soon proved to be a boomerang when, because voluntary separations from WPA rolls resulted in reductions in excess of 5 per cent, WPA officials chose to interpret the law as prohibiting them from allowing employment to fall by more than the percentage specified. New workers were therefore actually taken on by the WPA so as to keep employment within levels prescribed by Congress. This angered certain congressmen who accused WPA officials of deliberate violation of what they considered the clear intent of their action.

WPA Employment Levels and Politics

As already noted at several points in this volume, WPA employment in October and November, 1936 and 1938, was not only high in absolute terms but was also higher than at any other time in the history of the WPA in proportion to both the number of cases granted general relief and the number estimated as unemployed.² While it must be remembered that neither the number of cases granted relief nor the estimated volume of unemployment provide an infallible guide as to the need for WPA employment, the fact that employment during these particular months reached levels which, in comparison with general relief and unemployment, were unusually high has occasioned no little speculation among observers.

As might have been expected, the rise in WPA employment during the late summer and fall of 1936, while the presidential campaign was in progress, and the succeeding sharp reductions in December, drew widespread critical comment. Obviously, the administration had laid itself open to charges of "politics." In justifying the reductions made early in 1937, Colonel Harrington later told a House Committee that they were due to "alleviation of the drought conditions together with the improvement in employment by private industry and an investigation to determine the current relief needs of all W.P.A. workers."³ Despite gains in private employment and consequent decreases in unem-

² See chap. 22.
³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937. 75th Congress, 1st Session. 1937, p. 8.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ployment, reductions in WPA employment were even more marked. WPA employment, per 100 estimated unemployed, fell from 31 in October and November, 1936, to only about 24 in February and March, 1937.

In explanation of the high ratio to unemployment of WPA employment in October and November of both 1936 and 1938 it must be admitted that this proportion may appear to be somewhat more damaging to the WPA than the facts really warrant since increases in employment during these periods were in large measure attributable to the employment of farmers (in drought areas in 1936 and in the South in 1938) who, because of the nature of their occupation, frequently are not included in estimates of unemployment. However, even when WPA employment figures for both these periods are reduced by 300,000—approximately the number of farmers given WPA employment in October and November of both 1936 and 1938—the ratio of WPA employment to numbers estimated to be unemployed is still found to be as high or higher than at any time during the five years here under review.

Since, as already noted, a large proportion of the increase before and of the decrease after the 1936 election had been in the drought areas, critics were quick to attach political significance to this. Mr. Hopkins, however, explained to a House Committee that the approach of winter made it increasingly difficult to do any work in the drought areas, and that funds began to give out. Skeptics, however, were not easily convinced that drought conditions had been greatly “alleviated,” since some 250,000 families were referred to the Resettlement Administration, the forerunner of the FSA. Nor were they easily persuaded of the non-political nature of the policy of giving drought sufferers WPA employment at wages materially higher than grants then being paid to needy farmers.

When 1938, another election year, again brought essentially the same performance that had given rise to charges of politics in 1936, critics were quick to resume their attacks. Stanley High, an erstwhile Roosevelt supporter, for example, wrote during the spring of 1939:

The expansion of its [WPA’s] payroll went hand in hand not with the employment trend, but with the elections. In June, 1938, two million seven hundred sixty-seven thousand were engaged on its projects. Despite the
steady rise in industrial production and employment curves, the number of W.P.A. workers steadily increased until it reached a peak just prior to election of three million two hundred forty-five thousand. Thereafter it declined. In states like Florida and Kentucky—where the New Deal's big fight was in the primary elections—the rise of W.P.A. employment was hurried along in order to synchronize with the primaries.1

In defense of the increases in employment authorized during the fall of 1938, Colonel Harrington once told a House Committee that “the factor behind those increases . . . was the increase in general unemployment.” When questioned by a member of the Committee as to whether “the tenseness of any political campaigns in any of these States [Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, or Michigan] where these sharp increases appear, was not a factor,” the Colonel replied, “I do not believe so.” 2

In support of his contention that the 1938 increases had no special political significance, Aubrey Williams once stated that “more than half” of the increase prior to November, 1938, had been “in the South” where there were no election contests. Replying to further charges of political manipulation of WPA employment quotas, Mr. Williams declared:

The most flagrant omission in the analyses of partisan opponents . . . has been the failure to mention that the two largest Federal relief programs—the Civil Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration—were both started in non-election years. More than 4,000,000 persons were put to work on the Civil Works Program between November, 1933, and January, 1934, and over 3,000,000 persons were put to work by the Works Progress Administration between July, 1935, and February, 1936.3

Contentions that politics has played an important part in the allocation of employment quotas have frequently been heard but seldom backed up with solid facts. One difficulty involved in analyzing this issue is the fact that critical elections in different states come at different times. In the solid South, for example, the most important campaigns are the primaries rather than the elections themselves. Notable among such contests were the race between administration-backed Barkley versus Chandler in Kentucky, and the race between the Hopkins favorite, Wearin,

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 209 and 246), Further Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939, 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 237.
3 WPA Release 4-1815, October 30, 1938.
and Gillette in Iowa. Then, too, there have been other important campaigns including those in which the administration attempted to purge certain recalcitrant incumbents such as Senators George of Georgia and Tydings of Maryland. Further campaigns which were important to the administration included that in which the friendly Pepper won the Florida senatorial nomination in 1938, and the Tennessee primaries of the same year. Analysis (made by the writer) of WPA employment data for the months in which these various campaigns raged, does not reveal that changes in employment levels in any of these states differed significantly from those taking place in neighboring states.

In view of all the political implications of the 1938 increases in WPA employment, it is noteworthy that the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures and Use of Governmental Funds in 1938 refers to possible manipulation of WPA job quotas for political purposes in only one state—Tennessee. Here there had been a hotly contested primary campaign and charges of the political use of the WPA were rife. Of these the Committee's report states:

The investigation discloses that beginning about June 1, 1938, the Washington office of the Works Progress Administration started to increase the WPA rolls in the States constituting region III, of which Tennessee is a part. The investigation discloses that Tennessee received a smaller increase in proportion to the other States comprising region III. The increase in the rolls was distributed on a mathematical basis to each and every one of the 95 counties, based on certified relief rolls of each county. This increase, therefore, necessitated a corresponding increase of personnel in the administrative and supervisory staffs of the Administration. This increase was proportionate and apparently had no relation to the primary.

The Committee's report refers to a further use of employment quotas by an unidentified governmental agency in Illinois as a possible means of influencing votes, but this does not appear to relate at all to WPA employment, since the report states that "Federal-aid road money" was paid to 450 workers employed between March 21 and April 20, who were dismissed "the day following the primary election."

Considering the extent of the Committee's probe, the lack of

1 This committee, while composed largely of Democrats, was by no means pro-administration in majority sentiment.
3 Ibid., p. 30.
Numbers Employed

evidence regarding increases in employment quotas for political reasons suggests that such increases as there may have been did not have the political significance attributed to them by critics of the administration.

Among state elections in which the Roosevelt administration has shown special interest was the Michigan gubernatorial election of 1938, as evidenced by the fact that the President himself released a radio message in behalf of the Democratic ticket, and upon the defeat of Governor Murphy appointed him United States Attorney General. In view of the administration's interest in this contest, it is noteworthy that WPA employment in Michigan was not only not increased but was actually sharply reduced during the campaign. Employment on WPA projects fell from nearly 200,000 in August to less than 157,000 in November—and this despite the fact that WPA employment in most midwestern states (as in the country as a whole) increased rather than decreased during this period. Despite this fact, critics of the administration tried to make political capital out of the further fact that WPA employment in Michigan in the fall of 1938 was materially higher than it was the previous year—as was also the case for the nation as a whole. Before a House Committee Colonel Harrington readily admitted this but insisted that it was justified because "unemployment and the need for W.P.A. assistance were greater at the end of 1938 than 1937." 

A second state which has received more than passing notice because of increases in WPA employment for allegedly political reasons is Pennsylvania. Of conditions in this state, investigators for the House Investigating Committee in April, 1940, reported that WPA files contained "correspondence from Federal and State officials demanding increase in numbers on rolls at or near primary election period in 1938." Further correspondence between Washington and state WPA officials was also said to have indicated that an "increase in rolls would result in overmanning of projects." Extensive efforts were therefore said to have been made to secure sponsors for new projects but "without apparent success." "Notwithstanding the situation," the investigators reported, "Aubrey Williams overruled prior action and authorized

1 Including Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.
2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 209 and 246), Further Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 238.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

increase in rolls by 10,000. The files show large numbers of dis¬
missals shortly after election.”

In reply to these allegations, Colonel Harrington reported
that although these were said to have related to the primary elec¬
tion of 1938, the data to which the investigators referred actu¬
ally related to the period of the general election. Although an
increase of 10,000 had been authorized for Pennsylvania in Octo¬
ber, 1938, this was said to have been justified because of “the
seriousness of the unemployment and relief situation in that
State” and despite the fact that the increase was expected to
“place a serious burden on the W.P.A. financial situation.” The
Colonel then went on to say that Pennsylvania’s share of the total
number employed by the WPA was only 8.73 per cent of the
national total in December, 1938, whereas it had been 10.23 per
cent of the total in October, 1937.

Somewhat later Colonel Harrington explained to the Investi¬
gating Committee that “one of the most important things” the
WPA was doing was to see that it was not used politically. As
evidence of success he cited the fact that although the Pennsyl¬
vania primaries of 1940 had just been held and although there
had been some close and important contests, no Pennsylvania
newspaper “on either side” had “made any charge of improper
political activities concerning the W.P.A.”

After having been burnt twice—in 1936 and 1938—the WPA
in 1940 undertook to find ways of escaping the charge of juggling
jobs for the purpose of influencing a national election. Therefore,
when Colonel Harrington appeared before congressional com¬
mittees in the spring of 1940, he publicly announced the number
of workers he expected to employ each month during the year
1940–1941. The House thought so well of this idea that it took
the plan to its bosom and, with a view to making them manda¬
tory, wrote into the House bill the quotas announced by Colonel

1 Idem (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Work Proj¬
ects Administration. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, Part III, p. 19.
2 Ibid., p. 156. See also pp. 157-159.
3 Ibid., p. 286.
4 On the occasion of one of these announcements (made as early as April, 1940)
Colonel Harrington declared: “The proposed schedule I have already presented to
you will show an increase in the month of November, due to seasonal conditions,
most of which occur after the election; other increases are planned in December,
January, and February; certainly no decreases are contemplated after the election.”
—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief
for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 712.

592
Numbers Employed

Harrington. These limitations were turned down by the Senate, however, on the ground that it did not wish to initiate the practice of writing specific monthly employment quotas into law lest this prevent necessary adjustment to possible sudden increases of need resulting from some unforeseen disaster such as a hurricane or flood. Even though the quotas were not made mandatory the WPA elected to see them through.

Despite the fact that the WPA held closely to its previously announced quotas for the fall of 1940, critics of the administration attempted again to make political capital out of the seasonal increases that had not only been announced to Congress some six months before but had also been widely applauded as reasonable and had so recommended themselves to the House that it wrote them into the pending WPA bill.¹

Replying to critics who, late in the summer, were speculating as to what election time would bring, Howard Hunter retorted:

WPA employment in the United States for September will be held to an average of 1,700,000 and during October, the month immediately preceding the November 5 election, maximum WPA employment will be 1,800,000 persons. This is neither rumor or prediction. It is the official WPA maximum employment quota, in exact line with the clearcut testimony given by WPA Commissioner F. C. Harrington in estimates presented to Congress last April. . . .

As to normal seasonal increases in WPA rolls, always expected in the fall and winter, there is the additional factor of the great need created in southern states which have experienced disastrous storms and floods. It is safe to predict that a large part of the 100,000 national increase in October in WPA employment will be placed in the South, which anyone should hesitate to label a political move.²

Even more eloquent than Mr. Hunter’s defense is the cold fact that although previous estimates of WPA employment for the fall of 1940 provided for 1.7, 1.8, and 2.0 million jobs in September, October, and November, respectively, actual employment in each of these months fell somewhat below the preliminary estimates, the difference in November amounting to more than 220,000.

The WPA’s relatively exemplary use of employment quotas in 1940 resulted (as may be noted in Diagram 5) in employing in October and November, 1940, only 22 out of every hundred per-

¹ New York Times, October 10 and 13, 1940. For criticisms advanced by Republican candidate Willkie, see ibid., August 25 and October 29, 1940.
² WPA Release 4-2163, August 25, 1940.
sons estimated as being unemployed, whereas in October and November of both 1936 and 1938 the number had been 31. In October and November of 1940 the number employed by the WPA, for every hundred cases granted general relief, was 138 and 142 respectively. In 1936 the numbers had been 183 and 181 respectively, and in 1938, the number was 213 in both months.

Defending even the 1938 record of the WPA, Mr. Hunter once told the United States Conference of Mayors that "the high WPA employment in 1938 was simply and solely due to economic conditions. Who knows this better than Republican, Democratic, and Socialist mayors who met with me in 1938 and in a non-partisan manner secured additional money for the WPA?"

Further arguments advanced by at least some WPA officials in support of the increases during the fall of both 1936 and 1938 include the contentions (a) that, within the limits of available resources, failure to have met needs existing during the campaign months would also have had a political effect (and one which would have worked against the administration), and (b) that workers who were put to work at that time were, with but few exceptions, taken from rolls certified by local relief authorities some of whom were Democrats and some Republicans.

While most of the hue and cry has been about the political use of employment levels by the WPA, there is, according to testimony of WPA officials in various sections of the country, a reverse side to this issue. Even when it is admitted that employment quotas should be expanded because of seasonal increases in need, local governmental authorities whose political colorations differed from those of the national administration have sometimes proved reluctant to cooperate in placing workers on WPA jobs at the time of political elections. This stand, it is alleged, is attributable to fear that any expansion in the WPA rolls might increase the number of workers who, through gratitude at having work, even without political pressure of any kind, might vote the "wrong" ticket.

Finally, Republicans who attempt to make political capital out of allegations that the WPA has, at the time of important elections, employed more workers than they thought proper, would do well to remember that the Hoover administration during the

---

1 WPA Release 4-2167, September 19, 1940.
Numbers Employed

eyear 1930's placed the Republican party in a most vulnerable position. Instead of seeming to do too much for needy and unemployed persons because of allegedly political aims—as the WPA was accused of doing—the Hoover administration pursued the course of doing nothing to relieve widespread destitution lest this dispel the "prosperity as usual" and "prosperity-just-over-the-horizon" myths the Republicans found it to their political advantage to foster. When it is recalled that the worst that was said about the WPA in 1936 and 1938 was not that it handed out money to people who were not in need but only that it may have met a relatively larger proportion of existing needs than it had previously or subsequently met, the "politics" of the Hoover administration's inaction may, in the long view, be seen to have been more inimical to the public good than was the Roosevelt administration's policy of allegedly "political" action which gave work to jobless workers and to many families the means of subsistence.

Differences in Monthly Quotas

Although WPA officials, in distributing their employment over the year, know that relief needs are likely to be higher in winter than in summer, this does not change the fact that—as John Carmody, one-time administrator of the Federal Works Agency, once pointed out—the pressure upon the WPA to give workers jobs comes from people in need of employment, not from statistics.

Because economic conditions and the extent of human need vary so widely from time to time, it is not to be expected that one would find much uniformity from year to year in the proportion of the total volume of employment provided in any one month as opposed to another. That there is, in fact, no sacred bond between the proportion of the yearly total man-months of employment provided in a given month of different years is amply borne out by analysis of WPA employment data for the four fiscal years 1937 through 1940. The man-months of WPA employment provided in October, 1936, for example, represented 10 per cent of the total provided during the fiscal year 1937. That provided in October, 1937, on the other hand, represented only 6 per cent of that provided during the fiscal year in which it fell. Although WPA employment in June, 1938, represented 12 per cent of that
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

provided during the fiscal year 1938, employment provided in June of each of the other three years represented only about 7 per cent of the total volume of employment provided during these years.

When WPA officials in 1942 were asked how they expected to divide on a monthly basis the 400,000 jobs that were to be provided during the fiscal year 1943, they replied that although they had given the matter "serious thought" the many "unpredictable items that had to be taken into account" made it impossible to say more than that employment which stood at approximately 775,000 at the time would have to be cut by no less than 375,000 within thirty days. This, it was explained, was necessary in order to avoid having to make sharper cuts during the winter in order to compensate for the continuance of the relatively high level of employment prevailing at the time.

Distribution of Employment by States

Second in complexity only to the problem of determining the total number of workers the WPA should employ from year to year has been the task of determining the number of jobs to be allocated to each of the 48 states. Because of its great importance this problem has, from the beginning of the WPA program, been a storm center and has given rise to a wide variety of proposals by which Congress might exercise control over state employment quotas.

Methods of Allocating Jobs Among the States

In explanation of how state employment quotas were then being determined, Colonel Harrington early in 1940 declared: "We are giving equal weight to population and the distribution of unemployment, and . . . are distributing 80 percent of our quota for any particular month on that basis." The remaining 20 per cent, he added, "is distributed on the basis of the recommendations which are made to us by our regional directors, after consultation with the State administrators. In that process we first determine the over-all employment for a given month, and then we distribute that over-all employment by the method that I have just described."¹

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 620.
When questioned about the unemployment data used in determining state WPA quotas, Colonel Harrington replied that confidential data released by the Central Statistical Board and the Bureau of Labor Statistics were used. These data, he said, were estimates of the distribution among the several states of the total volume of unemployment thought to exist at any one time. Although prepared on a monthly basis, there was said to be a lag of three months in these statistics.¹

Colonel Harrington explained further that in determining state employment quotas the WPA took no account of a state’s attitude toward assuming what was termed “its reasonable share of its own relief load.”² The reason for disregarding this factor, continued the Colonel, was that he did not see how it could be applied. In further explanation of WPA policy, Colonel Harrington declared:

I have two cities in mind. In one of them there is adequate local relief, insofar as relief is ever adequate, and in the other one there is not.

The two cities have about the same population and have about the same number of unemployed. We employ approximately the same number of people in the two cities.

The expenditures of city A, which is the one that provides local relief, about equal the Federal expenditures. The expenditures of city B, which does not provide adequate relief, are about 10 percent of the Federal expenditures. But we give the same quota in those two cities.

I would feel that it would be impossible to administer a program in which you attempted to set up quotas on the basis of local relief standards, which, in effect, would put the Administrator in the position of punishing communities for not providing adequate relief.³

Allocation of job quotas on the basis of the 40-40-20 formula (resulting in the distribution of 40 per cent of available WPA jobs among the states in proportion to population, 40 per cent on the basis of unemployment, and 20 per cent on a discretionary basis), which in 1940 seemed to be an accomplished fact, had clearly appeared in prospect in 1939. At that time, a memorandum submitted to the House Investigating Committee by the

¹ Upon the request of Representative Wigglesworth of Massachusetts, Colonel Harrington agreed to submit for the record a table showing these state unemployment data for a number of specified months. This was not done, however. The only explanation of the omission included in the record was that “subsequent to the foregoing discussion of State unemployment estimates it was decided by Mr. Wigglesworth and others not to include such estimates of unemployment in the record.”—Ibid., p. 619.
² Ibid., p. 736.
³ Ibid., pp. 736-737.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA suggested that such a formula might be practicable but did not state that one was actually in use. Instead, it was reported that:

In determining W.P.A. employment quotas for the various States each month . . . all available statistical and quantitative reports are taken into consideration. Such reports include data on such factors as (1) the number of people who have been certified to the W.P.A. as being eligible and in need and who are awaiting assignment to W.P.A. projects; (2) the number of families receiving direct relief; (3) the number of workers receiving unemployment compensation; (4) registrations with the United States Employment Service, particularly in the States where unemployment compensation programs are in operation; (5) trends in private employment and agricultural conditions insofar as they are ascertainable; and (6) employment on other work programs, such as the C.C.C. and the work projects of other Federal agencies.

Also, recommendations are submitted each month by the State W.P.A. administrators and the field staff of the Works Progress Administration, based on their direct knowledge of changes in local conditions.

In the last analysis, therefore, the distribution of employment by States has represented the judgment of the Works Progress Administration. This judgment has been based on first-hand information and formal quantitative reports having a bearing on relief needs. This has proved to be the most practicable method of obtaining an equitable distribution of W.P.A. funds.¹

In 1941 when Congress was again considering WPA legislation Mr. Hunter told a House committee that the 40-40-20 formula, which Colonel Harrington in 1940 had said was being used in the distribution of WPA jobs among the several states, had been modified. Instead of allocating 20 per cent of the jobs on the basis of discretion, 10 per cent, said Mr. Hunter, were distributed on this basis and 10 per cent on the basis of the value of war contracts awarded to the several states. Just what adjustments were to be made within this 10 per cent range, for states having a large or small volume of war employment, was not explained. High federal officials asked by the writer, in 1942, to describe the operation of the new formula declared that it was not being used.

Disturbed by the mysticism that appeared to ensnare the establishment of job quotas for the several states, Congress on a

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part II, p. 1423.

For a discussion of still earlier practice in the determination of quotas, see U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, p. 308.

598
**Numbers Employed**

number of occasions has threatened to write into law some mandatory formula to take these matters out of the limbo of inscrutability into which they seemed to have fallen. In each instance, however, administration leaders convinced the lawmakers that although a suitable formula would be an invaluable administrative aid, the necessary statistical raw material (such as reasonably accurate and current estimates of unemployment, by states) was nonexistent.

Most significant, perhaps, of all attempts that have been made to write into law a formula to assure allegedly equitable distribution of WPA jobs was the 45-45-10 provision written into the WPA bill pending in the House in 1939. This proposal, designed to control the number of jobs made available to the several states, prescribed that 45 per cent of the jobs to be provided in any one month were to be allocated to states on the basis of population, 45 per cent on the basis of the number unemployed in each state, and 10 per cent on a discretionary basis. This proposition was, however, rejected by the Senate.\(^1\) One year later an essentially similar proposal was defeated in the House itself, though by a vote of only 88 to 85.

Among those who have consistently opposed various proposals thus far advanced to control the distribution of WPA funds or employment quotas has been the Conference of Mayors. Again and again this body has reaffirmed its opposition to any formula not based upon "relief needs wherever they exist,"\(^2\) upon "the needs and requirements of each locality,"\(^3\) or upon the number of employable persons needing work. The mayors have also insisted that distribution of benefits under the WPA program should be in terms of jobs rather than of funds.

\(^1\) Much of the opposition to this formula came from western senators who claimed that it would result in unfair treatment to western states since the latest census data then available were those relating to 1930, subsequent to which time there were thought to have been great shifts in population to the West Coast from drought-stricken states to the East. Furthermore, it was urged, the lack of trustworthy data on unemployment in the several states meant in reality that 55 per cent of the jobs allocated in accordance with the prescribed formula would be distributed on the basis of "discretion." Enthusiasm for the proposed formula also cooled noticeably when it was reported that its application would mean reductions in employment for such states as Mississippi and New Mexico and increases for New York and Pennsylvania which were already believed by many congressmen to be reaping more than their due share of benefit from the WPA program.

\(^2\) As quoted in the New York Times, January 10, 1939.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Devices and Proposals for Controlling
Allocations of WPA Funds to States

Instead of attempting to control the distribution of the benefits of the WPA program among the several states on the basis of job quotas, interest has repeatedly been expressed in devising some means of assuring equitable distribution of funds. However, controls of this type (as opposed to those dealing only with employment quotas) ran athwart a number of complicated questions such as wage rates, costs of materials, supplies and equipment, and finally, differences in types of projects undertaken in one part of the country as opposed to another.

When Colonel Harrington (in 1939) outlined for a House Committee considerations that had to be taken into account in establishing a "workable" formula he insisted that the basis of distribution should be "job quotas rather than funds. The number of people aided," he continued, "is the real measure of success in relieving destitution." He added:

Due to regional and urban-rural differences in wage scales and living standards, a formula which allocated funds would reduce Works Progress Administration employment in urbanized Northern States to a point wholly inadequate to meet existing need, while it would expand Works Progress Administration employment to excessive levels in Southern and rural States.

Suggested methods for distributing WPA funds among states, unfortunately, have not always been designed to make it possible effectively to meet state needs. Rather, they have been intended to insure impartial division of funds and to prevent possible sudden expansion or retrenchment of the WPA program in a given state and at a time when this might conceivably influence some election.

1 In fact, during the earlier years of the WPA program the WPA itself authorized state administrators to spend a given amount of money rather than to employ a specified number of workers.

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part II, p. 1423.

3 Of this the New York Times said editorially (December 29, 1938): "... it is essential to recognize ... that the kind of charges which the Sheppard Committee has been investigating are inevitable under a relief system like the present one. The allotment of WPA funds cannot indefinitely be permitted to rest upon the personal discretion of any one man or small group of men. The relief funds belong to the whole country. Their allotment must be placed upon a basis that the whole country understands clearly and accepts as fair.

"This is another way of saying that relief funds must be distributed on the basis of some definite impersonal formula. ..."
*Numbers Employed*

Methods used in allocating funds in 1938 (when it was the money rather than job quotas as such which was apportioned among the several states) were described to a Senate Committee by Mr. Hopkins. He explained:

In the first place it is done on the basis of the number of employable people in need. . . . It is based on every bit of evidence that we can get concerning the number of people who are unemployed and in need in the several States. . . .

The funds necessary to provide that employment are determined primarily by the wage schedule in the State. . . .

The second factor has to do with funds, over and above wages, for materials, supplies, and equipment. This . . . averages $7.50 for the country as a whole.

Now, the amount of money we put into the several States for materials is not entirely uniform. In places where there is a serious unemployment and relief situation and the community is in a difficult financial condition, we may be putting in more money per month for materials, than we are in a place that is not so badly off. That sometimes has to be done in order to keep an adequate employment program going. . . .

. . . we may have to give to city A $9 per month per man for other than wages, and if we give to city B $7 for other than wages, the official of city B will come to us and say, "Why do we get $7, and why does city A get $9?" That is a real administrative problem to us.

It has been necessary for us to take into account both local financial ability, and the extent of the need for employment. . . .

Not long before giving this testimony, Mr. Hopkins admitted that methods used in allocating employment quotas to states were "nothing but a matter of opinion. If somebody else were . . . dividing up these [jobs] . . ." continued Mr. Hopkins, "he might do it differently." However, Mr. Hopkins added, ". . . we can make a good case for the way the 2,600,000 [jobs] are distributed by States." 1

This explanation drew from a minority of the Byrnes Committee the criticism that it seemed "a violation of the principle of giving out relief on the basis of need and a clear invitation by Congress to the Executive to play favorites by giving out relief

---

1 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 679), Work Relief and Public Works Appropriation Act of 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, p. 159.

2 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 2, p. 1396.
money where it will help or hurt the friends or enemies of the party in power."¹

Difficulties involved in applying these methods are frankly admitted by WPA officials to be one of the most complex of all the problems confronting them.

Doubts that have been engendered in the public mind about methods used in allocating funds, as well as employment quotas, to states have from time to time been fed by the secrecy in which they were sometimes cloaked, particularly during the early years of the WPA program. Quotas for a given state, for example, were sometimes not announced publicly. District quotas in some instances were withheld, even from local public officials outside the WPA. The result in many quarters was loss of confidence in the whole process of quota determination.

Among devices already adopted by Congress to set some limits upon administrative discretion regarding amounts to be allocated to states, are such requirements as (a) that projects must have state or local sponsors before they can be undertaken; (b) that the federal government can contribute only a specified proportion of the cost of projects; or (c) that the federal government may contribute for materials and supplies only so much per man per month.²

Further proposals suggested at one time or another as checks to administrative discretion in the distribution of benefits under the WPA program include the proposition that WPA funds be distributed to states on the basis of (a) population, (b) the number estimated to be unemployed in each state, (c) numbers registered at public employment exchanges, (d) the number of "needy," (e) the number receiving relief, (f) the number of employable persons on relief rolls, (g) the amount of federal taxes collected in the several states, (h) per capita wealth, (i) living costs—and a variety of combinations of these or of other factors.

One specific proposal which received especially serious consideration was that made by the Byrnes Committee of the Senate in 1938 when it was suggested that funds appropriated for the work program which the Committee recommended should be allotted to states on the basis of "population of the States as determined

¹Ibid., p. 1397.
²These limitations are discussed in chap. 5.

602
Numbers Employed

by the census, and upon the number of unemployed in the various States as ascertained by the Unemployment Census of 1937 until such time as the Employment Service is able to currently supply such information."

In defense of formulas defined by Congress to control allocations of funds to states, Senator Byrnes declared: "I do not want the government, as a permanent policy, to annually collect from the people two billion, or one billion dollars, and give that immense sum to the head of any department to spend as he pleases."

The power given to the WPA to allocate among the several states the jobs that can be made available from month to month would seem to give that agency power to discontinue employment within a state altogether if economic conditions permitted this or if the number of jobs actually needed was so small as to make it uneconomic to continue an employment program. That the WPA would face almost insuperable obstacles if it ever attempted to close down operations in any given state was clearly disclosed in 1942 when Senate opposition to the discontinuance of some 15 or 20 state administrations resulted in a tremendous counterpressure to continue the existing state set-ups. The intense eagerness on the part of the several states to get a share of whatever benefits are dispensed by a federal agency seriously hampers such an agency's efforts to adapt its program to the relative need of the several states.

Relationship Between State Quotas and Actual Employment

A comprehensive statement of the relationship between actual employment and the number of jobs authorized for each state for each month from July, 1937, through March, 1940, discloses many instances in which states failed to employ as many as authorized. There are, however, a number of instances in which state WPA employment sometimes exceeded the established quotas. At various places and times during the history of the WPA, the program has been operated on the basis of what have been termed "open quotas" under which local WPA officials have been author-

3 See chap. 4.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ized to employ as many qualified applicants as met prescribed eligibility requirements, without respect to rigid, arbitrary maximum limitations upon such employment.

In view of the catch-as-catch-can methods used in calculating the total number of jobs to be provided in the United States in the course of a year, it seems clear that if the proportion of this total allocated to the various months or the quotas set for the several states had, by any chance, happened to coincide with actual needs existing at the time, one might well have said—in true radio and movie tradition—that any such correspondence would have been purely accidental.
CHAPTER XXV
MEASUREMENTS OF ADEQUACY OF WPA EMPLOYMENT

ESTIMATES OF ADEQUACY

SOMBER AND unromantic as figures depicting the volume of WPA employment may be, there lies behind them a stirring drama of individual hope and despair, of national success and failure in providing jobs for needy workers. Opinions have varied widely as to the role of the WPA in this drama. At one extreme are those who have maintained that the job has been done too well. Others have held that the WPA has never even approximately met the need. Differences in appraisals arise, obviously, from differences in the philosophy of the appraisers as to who should be given WPA jobs, in their knowledge of existing needs, and in the yardsticks used to measure the extent to which these needs have or have not been met.

Estimates of the WPA's adequacy have depended upon whether the estimator believed that the federal government should provide no jobs at all for unemployed workers; or whether it should provide (a) a job for each unemployed individual; (b) enough jobs to maintain a level of employment sufficient to preserve the nation's economic equilibrium; (c) jobs for a relatively constant proportion of the unemployed; (d) a comparatively stable number of jobs—say three million—regardless of minor fluctuations in unemployment; (e) one job without respect to need, for each family having no employed member; (f) one job for each family believed to be in need which includes an employable member; or (g) one job for each such family which is not only in need, but is actually receiving relief. Since the WPA has never pretended to do more than is suggested by the last two of these standards, further discussion of adequacy will be restricted to these criteria.

Even if agreement could be reached as to the standard by which adequacy should be measured, estimates would still be only relative, because of the very rough nature of available data showing.
from time to time, the extent of unemployment and the need, employability, and availability of potential workers.

Something of the practical effect of this lack of reliable data regarding the need for WPA employment was clearly revealed in 1938 when, after two days of consideration by a congressional committee of the amount the administration had recommended for the WPA, Representative Wigglesworth of Massachusetts observed: "... I am frank to say that I do not know yet how that [figure] was arrived at. ... All of us want to take care of anybody who is in need or suffering, but I think this committee should have some more specific information—information that we have not received yet—as to how that figure was mathematically arrived at."^1

Contentions That the WPA Has Employed Too Many

Claims that the WPA has employed too many workers have generally been based upon four contentions: (a) that the WPA has from time to time given employment to considerable numbers of workers who were not in need; (b) that relief rolls frequently fail to increase commensurately with numbers dismissed because of retrenchments in the WPA program; (c) that the WPA has employed considerable numbers of workers who were not really employable; and (d) that it has given jobs to workers who should not have been regarded as unemployed, because they were, or soon might be, needed for private employment. Since each of these subjects is discussed elsewhere in this volume, it is here necessary only to point out that even if the WPA had employed workers who fell into all four of these classifications, this fact might not be an indication that too many persons were being employed, but only that the wrong methods of selection were being used.

Contentions That the WPA Has Employed Too Few

Available data and indices relating to the WPA program indicate that its adequacy varies not only from time to time, but also

Numbers Employed

from place to place. The National Appraisal Committee, among others, has made this clear. "The larger the city," declared this Committee, "the less is the evidence that the need of all employables has been met." Approximately half of the replies received from officials of municipalities having a population under 100,000 answered affirmatively the question, "Have the WPA Programs Covered the Field of the Needy Employables?" From cities of 100,000 to 1,000,000 only about a third of the replies were in the affirmative. From neither of the two reporting cities having a population of more than a million each were affirmative replies received.

The adequacy of the WPA program also varies depending upon the kinds of workers for whom jobs had to be provided. This fact, too, was indicated by the National Appraisal Committee, which reported that the federal work program has had a tendency to be relatively less adequate for white-collar workers, single men and women, and skilled workers. As for white-collar and skilled workers the difficulty is usually one of providing appropriate jobs. Its inadequacy for single men and women, however, is usually due to the fact that in many areas such workers are from time to time barred from employment.

The Nature of the Program One
Cause of Its Inadequacy

Failure of the WPA to employ large proportions of those needing employment is not always the fault of small employment quotas. For this reason the phrase "inadequacy of the WPA program" must be interpreted to mean more than an inadequacy in the number of jobs available. Apart from the question of its size, the ability of the WPA to assist eligible workers is limited by the fact that it is an employment program and can therefore relieve only those needs which can be met through the provision of jobs. Consequently, needs go unrelieved when it is impossible to operate work projects because of bad weather, when workers’

---

1 For earlier reference to the National Appraisal Committee see chap. 5.
3 See chap. 13.
4 As shown in the preceding chapter, states frequently have been authorized to put to work on WPA jobs more workers than were actually given jobs.
skills are not such as can be utilized on the types of projects available, or when candidates for employment live in areas remote from projects for which their skills would make them altogether eligible. These limitations, attributable rather to the nature of the WPA program than to the inadequacy of employment quotas, strongly suggest that no work program unsupplemented by a program of cash grants can properly aid employable persons who are thrown into need from time to time.

Further limitations upon the ability of the WPA to meet the needs of eligible unemployed workers spring from various more or less arbitrary restrictions. Important among these is the policy of requiring sponsors to initiate and underwrite projects and to bear a definite proportion of their cost. The effect of these types of limitations has frequently been apparent in areas such as upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and the South where unwillingness of local authorities to initiate and contribute to the cost of projects has often made it impossible to fill employment quotas. When Congress was considering WPA legislation in 1940 and 1941, WPA officials repeatedly, although without avail, requested elimination of the legal provision requiring sponsors to contribute a specified proportion of project costs, stating that this provision made it impossible to put people to work in certain areas most in need of WPA jobs.

A second arbitrary limitation affecting the allocation of jobs to areas in which they were needed has been restriction upon amounts which the WPA might expend for administration. Because of sharp reductions in funds appropriated by Congress for this purpose, the WPA has sometimes felt compelled to close down its program in a number of counties where operating costs ran high.

Other limitations upon the ability of the WPA program to meet needs of unemployed workers come about through restrictive eligibility regulations. Single men, although capable of WPA work, have frequently been denied employment. Aliens in all parts of the country have been ineligible since 1939, although in

These issues are further discussed in chaps. 10, 13, 20.
As shown in chap. 5.
See, for example, U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942. 77th Congress, 1st Session. 1941, pp. 126, 145, 255, 369.
Ibid., p. 151.
Numbers Employed

many areas they constitute a significant proportion of the total number of employable persons in need or receiving relief. Employment of certain types of workers (such as Negroes and women) has at various times and places been restricted to specified proportions of the total number employed. Limitations of these kinds mean that WPA jobs frequently go begging, while needy persons, ineligible only because of arbitrary restrictions, are condemned to idleness.

The hampering extent of limitations imposed upon the WPA by the nature of its program was evidenced in 1939 by Colonel Harrington's testimony before a House Committee. He ventured the opinion that jobs could be provided for only about two-thirds of the 750,000 needy eligible persons then estimated to be awaiting assignments even if the WPA were to be given unlimited funds—this because of "administrative difficulties" encountered in matching available skills with project needs, and further because of the "inability or unwillingness of certain sponsors to furnish material costs." 1

Criteria Used in Measuring Adequacy

Among criteria that may be used to measure the extent to which the WPA has or has not succeeded in employing needy employable workers who have no jobs are the following: (a) the number of workers eligible for but not given WPA employment; (b) the number of employable persons in need or receiving relief; and (c) the extent of need among workers discharged from WPA jobs. Further evidences of inadequacy have been found in (d) the interest on the part of states and localities to set up programs of their own to employ relief recipients on work relief or work-for-relief (sometimes called "work or starve") projects; and in (e) the rise of widespread demands for federal participation in a national relief program of broader scope than the WPA.

Unfortunately, data relating to these criteria leave much to be desired. Many are not systematically collected and relate only to isolated periods of time and to scattered areas. Such data as are available to show something of the numbers of eligible workers not assigned to jobs, numbers of employable cases granted gen-

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 101.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

eral relief, and need among workers discharged or refused em-
ployment by the WPA are, unfortunately, so scattered and incom-
plete as to have warranted characterization by a high federal
official as “junk.” He admitted, nevertheless, that they were, for
lack of better data, relied upon heavily by WPA officials respon-
sible for determining the volume of employment the WPA should
provide at any given time or place.

Presumably Eligible Workers Unassigned
to WPA Jobs

Knowledge of the number of workers who, though certified as
eligible for WPA employment under policies in effect from time
to time, have not been given jobs would, if available, permit an
evaluation of the adequacy of the WPA program, but only in
terms of the extent to which the program gave employment to
persons presumably eligible under rules and regulations applica-
ble at the time. It would tell nothing, however, about the number
of needy employable persons who for one reason or another had
not been certified or were not regarded as eligible for employment.

Limitations upon the Usefulness
of Eligibility Data

Data pertaining to employability, need, and other aspects of
eligibility such as availability for employment are most difficult
to secure and keep up to date because conditions among needy
employable workers change rapidly. After they are certified as
eligible, workers may fall sick, may find temporary employment,
or in many other ways may be rendered temporarily or perma-
nently ineligible for assignment to WPA jobs. At best, keeping
information concerning all aspects of eligibility up to date is a
huge, complex, and costly undertaking. This is particularly true
in areas where employable persons are not given relief, and there-
fore have no cause to keep in touch with relief agencies.

A further factor affecting the validity of data regarding the
probable number of eligible workers not given WPA employment
is the wide diversity of practice followed by those agencies which
are responsible for referring and certifying applicants who, in
some areas, are referred only upon requisition or as jobs actually
become available and workers of specified skills can be put to
Numbers Employed

work. Even where this is not the normal practice, agencies sometimes suspend certification for longer or shorter periods until crowded waiting lists are thinned out by assignments. Another difficulty arises when relief agencies refuse (as they have done in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California) to certify as in need any persons not actually granted relief.

Still another factor is that unless there is some likelihood that jobs will be available, relief agencies hesitate to declare applicants to be in need of WPA employment lest this be construed as evidence that those found to be in need should be granted relief, a presumption many relief agencies are reluctant to foster. Since this reluctance is often heightened as WPA employment levels are lowered and the likelihood that eligible workers may be employed is reduced, it may be said that the more inadequate the WPA program is, the less is known about its real inadequacy.

Finally, long waiting lists for WPA assignment may in themselves discourage applications for jobs. Thus inadequacy again often masks still more the full extent of the inadequacy!

These factors make it hazardous to accept at face value data as to numbers of eligible workers unable to secure WPA jobs. It is almost impossible safely to compare data from different jurisdictions or to compare data relating to different periods of time in any given jurisdiction.

Although certain common practices (such as referring workers only when jobs are available, or referring only relief recipients) contribute to understatements of the real need for WPA employment, other factors work in the opposite direction. Failure to secure information about changes in the circumstances of workers and to cancel the certifications of those who become ineligible tends to exaggerate the need for employment; the same tendency results from the common practice of relief agencies (especially when new funds are first appropriated or when employment quotas are under consideration) of "squeezing under the wire" all possible candidates for certification, in order to establish the best possible case for large employment quotas in their respective localities. It is no secret that relief agencies make certifications or referrals in accordance with more liberal standards than those

^ See chap. 20.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

that normally apply, when they desire to show need for increased job quotas or when job quotas are somewhat less stringent.

Lacking more reliable data regarding numbers eligible for but not given WPA jobs, the WPA has undertaken on numerous occasions to secure estimates from the several states.

Estimates of Eligible Workers Not Employed, 1939–1942

Annually since 1939 the WPA has collected, and until 1942 submitted to Congress, estimates of the number of needy employable persons presumably eligible for but not yet assigned to WPA jobs. These estimates which have generally been arrived at jointly by WPA officials and state relief authorities indicate that the number of workers eligible for but not given WPA employment totaled 1,330,000 in February, 1939; 1,208,000 in February, 1940; 1,264,000 in April, 1941; and some 1,200,000 early in 1942. WPA employment, which has always fallen far below estimated needs, was sufficient in April, 1941, to give jobs to only about 55 per cent of the total number estimated as being eligible for employment. In February, 1939, and February, 1940, the proportion of eligible workers given employment was 69 and 65 per cent respectively. In testimony before a House Committee in 1942 Acting Commissioner Dryden declared that the WPA throughout the fiscal year 1942 had employed only about 50 per cent of those needing jobs. The program as planned for the ensuing fiscal year contemplated jobs for only about 40 per cent of those who were thought likely to be eligible for them. Thus, at the height of the nation’s war prosperity, the relative adequacy of the WPA program was expected to be lower than at any time since 1939.

While there are undoubtedly wide differences from state to state in the reliability of data available to the WPA and relief officials to help them in estimating the number of eligible workers for whom WPA jobs are not available, it is noteworthy that (as may be noted in Table 29) the proportion of the total number of eligible workers in the several states which has been given WPA employment has varied widely. In the month of April, 1941, for example, WPA employment was available to less than 35 per cent of the eligible workers in four states, and to less than 50
Numbers Employed

per cent in 10 additional states. At the opposite extreme were seven states in which at least 80 per cent of those who were thought to be eligible had jobs. These estimates, it must be recalled, relate only to the number of workers thought to be eligible for WPA employment under all the limitations with respect to need, citizenship, and the like which were in effect at the time. Numbers of workers in need of jobs, therefore, would have greatly exceeded the estimates as made.

TABLE 29.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY WPA EMPLOYMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF ESTIMATED NUMBER OF WORKERS ELIGIBLE FOR WPA EMPLOYMENT, THREE SELECTED MONTHS, 1939 TO 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent of eligible workers employed by WPA</th>
<th>February, 1939</th>
<th>February, 1940</th>
<th>April, 1941</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 35.0</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.0 to 49.9</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.0 to 64.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.0 to 79.9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.0 to 94.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of data: Eligible workers, U.S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration, 76th Congress, 1st Session, Part II, pp. 1370 ff.; (Hearings) Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1941, 76th Congress, 3d Session, 1940, p. 550; and (Hearings) Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1942, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 1941, p. 120. WPA employment, WPA statistical reports.

While too great reliance cannot be placed upon these estimates nor upon differences among the several states, there are two points which are worthy of note: (a) the best available means of appraising the adequacy of the WPA program, after seven years, are still far from satisfactory measures; and (b) these estimates greatly exceed the numbers reported from time to time as formally certified for but not given WPA jobs.1

1 In April, 1941, for example, the number of workers actually certified and awaiting assignment was only about one-third (approximately 413,000) of the total number (1,330,000) estimated as eligible for but not given WPA employment. Of the 1,330,000 workers estimated as eligible but not employed in February, 1939, only 869,000 were certified. Of the 1,208,000 estimated as eligible in February, 1940, only 536,000 were reported as certified. In some jurisdictions the number certified and awaiting assignment has on occasion been less than one-tenth of the number estimated as eligible for but not given a WPA job.
Earlier Estimates of Eligible Workers Not Employed

Although the probable degree of the inadequacy of appropriations to provide employment for eligible workers was not fully realized until 1939, the WPA has never been able to do more than to provide jobs for a significant proportion of those who were known to be eligible for them.

As early as May, 1936, when the Works Program was still in its heyday, Aubrey Williams in an address at the National Conference of Social Work declared: “We know that for every person to whom we have brought the renewed hope and vigor of a job there is probably another who is watching the years eat away the best part of his life while he sits in the bitterness, futility, and misery of enforced idleness.” Attacking the contention of “a New York newspaper” that there were then only 3,276,790 unemployed persons (excluding agricultural and domestic workers) in the United States, Mr. Williams retorted:

This does not explain the fact that more than that number are receiving assistance from the federal government at the present time, that 1,800,000 more are eligible for that work even under our highly restrictive eligibility requirements, that we are constantly besieged by those who are outside of these requirements, and that over nine million are actively registered with the offices of the United States Employment Service.¹

After study of some 225 cases in each of 13 cities to ascertain the status of cases certified for WPA employment, the WPA reported that on April 15, 1936, approximately 15 per cent of those who had been certified were available for but were not assigned to jobs. The proportion of workers who were without WPA employment although certified and awaiting assignment ranged from 24 per cent in Paterson and 18 per cent in Chicago, San Francisco, and Wilkes-Barre, to 4 per cent in both Bridgeport and Butte.²

Estimates made by the WPA on the basis of studies in nine

¹“The Progress and Policy of W.P.A. Administration,” in Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1936, pp. 448-449. Only a short time before making this statement Mr. Williams said that it was “incontrovertibly true” that the Works Program was not meeting “the entire need.”—As quoted in the New York Times, February 16, 1936.

²Other cities included in the study were Manchester, Baltimore, Atlanta, Detroit, St. Louis, Omaha, and Houston.
Numbers Employed

cities\(^1\) in January, 1938, indicated that, with some 312,000 employed by that agency at the time, approximately 190,000 additional jobs were required if current needs in those cities were to be met. In proportion to numbers of workers already employed, the number of additional jobs considered necessary in different cities varied from over 80 per cent in Chicago and Cleveland to approximately 27 per cent in New Orleans, the only city in which the proportion fell much below half.

About a month later (in February, 1938, when a total of 1,945,000 workers were employed by the WPA) Mr. Williams told a House Committee that another 750,000 persons were “in immediate need and eligible for work relief.” His estimates, Mr. Williams said, were based upon reports received from relief agencies where such agencies granted relief to employable persons, from reports of WPA field representatives, and upon past experience.\(^2\)

In May, 1938, when WPA employment stood at approximately 2,600,000, Mr. Hopkins told a Senate Committee that the various certifying agencies had certified as in need and employable approximately 500,000 persons who were not employed by the WPA.

When the WPA one month later completed surveys in 10 cities,\(^3\) it was estimated that there were in these cities a minimum of 160,000 cases which were in need and which included members assignable to WPA jobs. The addition of 160,000 jobs in these cities would have meant an increase of some 30 per cent above current employment levels, which, by the time of the study, had already been increased approximately 70 per cent above levels reached late in the fall of 1937.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta, New Orleans, and San Francisco.

\(^2\) However, in arriving at these estimates, Mr. Williams said he discounted reports from city relief agencies indicating that 60 per cent of their general relief cases contained employable workers able and willing to work. Past experience with these estimates, he said, “shows that they tend to be high.”—U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Supplemental Appropriation, Relief and Work Relief, Fiscal Year 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, pp. 5, 79.

\(^3\) Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta, New Orleans, San Antonio, and San Francisco.

\(^4\) In addition to the 160,000 needy cases including assignable members, there were reported to be “many” cases which, though in need, were receiving no relief and which, though including employable members, included none assignable to WPA employment because they were aliens, eligible for unemployment compensation, or were employed part-time. It was during this same month that Harry Hopkins, then
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Studies made by the WPA in a number of cities during the latter half of 1938 suggested that in order to employ all those eligible and available for jobs it would have been necessary to increase quotas in amounts ranging from approximately 10 per cent, as in New Orleans, and in King County, Washington, to 30 or 40 per cent as in Birmingham and San Antonio.

Rough estimates of numbers presumably eligible for but not given WPA employment in December, 1938, and early in January, 1939, were incorporated in memoranda submitted by mayors and other city officials to the United States Conference of Mayors. In several cities (Newark, Camden, and Schenectady, for example) there were said to be as many awaiting assignment as were already employed by the WPA. In other areas (such as Flint, Michigan; Omaha; East St. Louis; Miami; and Harris County, Texas) the number unassigned represented substantial proportions of the number employed.

Estimates made by the WPA early in 1939 indicated that there were in the United States about 800,000 families certified as in need and having one or more employable members who could be assigned to WPA jobs if such were available. By the time President Roosevelt appealed to Congress in March for a supplemental WPA appropriation, this estimate had been increased to 850,000. When the results of a much more careful and comprehensive inquiry by the WPA became available during April following, the total number eligible but not having jobs in February, 1939, was (as noted already) reported to have been 1,330,000—or nearly 65 per cent more than the best current estimate of the number of workers certified as eligible for WPA jobs.

WPA administrator, wrote that the “most glaring weakness” of the WPA was that it did not provide work “for all employables who are in need.”—“The WPA Looks Forward,” in Survey Midmonthly, vol. 74, no. 6, June, 1938, p. 197.

1 Estimates made by the Conference are usually based on reports from officials of some 80 to 100 cities throughout the country. This constitutes fairly adequate coverage for the larger cities but not for the smaller cities and non-urban areas in which (as shown in chap. 13) significant proportions of WPA workers are employed. Even for those cities which are covered, these estimates still leave much to be desired since officials responsible for making them are not always in a position to know the total number of persons in need as distinguished from those receiving relief, and frequently cannot know the proportion of employable persons among them. As for bias, it must be kept in mind that the mayors, in season and out, have advocated that the WPA provide a job for every needy unemployed worker and are not blind to advantages—improvements in city streets, sewage systems, public buildings, parks, and other public facilities and services—to be reaped from WPA employment.
Numbers Employed

Employable Persons Granted General Relief

Data presented in the previous section as evidence of the degree to which the WPA has failed to provide jobs for eligible workers are, after all, only estimates. Furthermore, they are generally estimates made by the WPA and by relief officials. The former, it is sometimes charged, has a special interest in making as good a case as possible in favor of large appropriations for the WPA so as to enhance the prestige of that agency. Relief officials, too, are said to be interested in seeing large sums appropriated to the WPA so that they can transfer to that agency responsibilities which otherwise would have to be met through expenditure of state and local relief funds. It is important, therefore, to scrutinize these data to see whether or not they are at all in line with other known facts about the extent to which WPA employment has or has not been adequate to the need. Among other possible measures that might be used to double check available estimates of need unmet by the WPA, the one single measure that should offer most promise is the number of employable persons granted relief. Such a yardstick would not be affected by any interest WPA officials might have in seeing existing needs magnified in the interest of helping the WPA to get large appropriations from Congress. Conversely, state and local relief officials would not be likely to give people relief merely to pad the rolls and thus enhance the chances of getting larger WPA quotas, which would in turn reduce the rolls again. Thus, knowledge of the number of employable persons granted relief should provide a good basis for evaluating the adequacy of the WPA program. This is not, unfortunately, the case—relief programs and statistical data about relief recipients being what they are.

In the first place, employable persons and their families,¹ are denied relief in many sections of the country. In these areas, therefore, the paucity of employable persons among relief recipients cannot be interpreted to mean that the WPA program is adequate.

Second, among employable persons granted relief there are always considerable numbers who are not eligible for WPA employment. Thus, if one is interested only in the degree to which

¹ As shown in chap. 2.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

The WPA program has failed to provide jobs for those who, under existing policies, were eligible for employment, certain allowances would have to be made when analyzing numbers of employable persons given relief. However, if one is interested in the extent to which needy employable workers (whether citizens or aliens, single persons or family heads, farmers or industrial workers) have been denied WPA employment without respect to various more or less arbitrary eligibility requirements sometimes imposed, then such allowances would not have to be made.

A further difficulty involved in using the number of employable cases granted general relief as a measure of the inadequacy of the WPA program is that reports on the numbers of employable persons receiving relief do not usually make it clear how many are already employed by the WPA and receiving only supplementary relief. Neither do they ordinarily show the number whose relief is only supplementary to inadequate earnings from private employment. To observers who are interested in the broader aspects of federal responsibility toward needy employable persons, the facts that WPA workers must turn to relief agencies for supplementary income, and that the federal government makes no provision for supplementary cash grants to workers whose earnings in private employment are insufficient to meet their needs, are evidence of inadequacies of federal relief policies if not of employment levels provided by the WPA. Nevertheless, in the following discussion of state and local reports of employable persons granted relief, distinction is made, when possible, between employable relief recipients who are and those who are not eligible for WPA employment under policies in effect at the time to which the data relate.

A final difficulty involved in using numbers of employable persons granted relief as a measure of the adequacy of the WPA program is that data regarding the employability of general relief recipients in the several states frequently are not comparable even when available.

Data from Selected States

Although practically no comparable data are to be found indicating the number or proportion of general relief recipients in various parts of the country regarded as employable, some states report more or less regularly the number of relief cases or fami-
Numbers Employed

lies including employable persons. Some also show the number of such recipients presumed to be eligible for WPA jobs, the number already employed by the WPA but given supplementary relief, or the number having some private employment.

Among states from which reports of the number of employable cases granted general relief are available over any considerable time are: California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Data for January and July (or a proximate month) during the past several years are presented in Table 30. This table also shows for each state WPA employment as of the month to which the general relief data apply.

The number of employable relief cases in the selected months exceeded 175,000 in Pennsylvania (in January and July, 1939) and in several months exceeded or approximated 100,000 in Illinois and in California. In New Jersey, in the selected months, the number of employable cases varied from approximately 68,000 to approximately 36,000, and in Wisconsin from 37,000 to some 16,000. Michigan, in the selected months, gave general relief to as many as 32,000 employable cases and to as few as 9,000. In the other states the number of employable cases granted general relief in the selected months was less significant, yet, in proportion to numbers employed by the WPA, was of considerable importance.¹

Fragmentary Data from Scattered Areas

Massachusetts. A special study of relief rolls in Massachusetts in March, 1940, revealed that there were 46,594 employable cases. Of these, 9,028 were already employed by the WPA and were being given only supplementary assistance. Among the employable cases not employed by the WPA, about 26 per cent were thought to include no available worker having United States citizenship.

New York (exclusive of New York City). Reports issued by

¹ In analyzing data presented in Table 30 it is important to recall that, as noted already, whereas some employable persons receiving general relief already had WPA jobs certain others could not, under rules and regulations then in effect, qualify for WPA employment. Some indication as to the importance of these considerations is included in subsequent sections of this chapter. See also Part III for further reference to the extent to which various eligibility requirements have barred potential workers from WPA jobs.
### TABLE 30.—NUMBER OF WPA EMPLOYEES AND OF EMPLOYABLE GENERAL RELIEF CASES, IN 12 STATES, AT SIX-MONTH INTERVALS, 1937 TO 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>105,082</td>
<td>65,188</td>
<td>85,410</td>
<td>36,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>22,263</td>
<td>.698</td>
<td>20,076d</td>
<td>14,404d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>154,334</td>
<td>96,905</td>
<td>114,540</td>
<td>80,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>23,200</td>
<td>27,651</td>
<td>17,955</td>
<td>15,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>93,539</td>
<td>47,362</td>
<td>64,206</td>
<td>36,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>65,014</td>
<td>.899</td>
<td>46,550</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>11,032</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>8,409</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>74,202</td>
<td>10,845</td>
<td>63,653</td>
<td>41,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>225,211</td>
<td>111,400</td>
<td>162,104</td>
<td>103,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>8,275</td>
<td>2,894</td>
<td>6,657</td>
<td>4,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>30,604</td>
<td>10,845</td>
<td>23,676</td>
<td>4,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>48,480</td>
<td>10,845</td>
<td>33,695</td>
<td>16,407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>107,775</td>
<td>87,473</td>
<td>97,243</td>
<td>78,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>29,456d</td>
<td>4,036d</td>
<td>22,488d</td>
<td>2,123d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>233,233</td>
<td>115,536</td>
<td>172,182</td>
<td>108,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>30,808</td>
<td>15,898</td>
<td>24,432</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>123,970</td>
<td>52,277</td>
<td>93,730</td>
<td>41,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>146,712d</td>
<td>24,546d</td>
<td>122,464d</td>
<td>21,520d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>16,634</td>
<td>12,849d</td>
<td>12,849</td>
<td>1,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>97,421</td>
<td>67,102</td>
<td>75,776</td>
<td>47,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>248,570</td>
<td>178,600</td>
<td>144,538</td>
<td>189,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>12,273</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>9,662</td>
<td>2,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>43,745</td>
<td>16,133</td>
<td>30,193</td>
<td>3,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>80,043d</td>
<td>36,056d</td>
<td>62,723d</td>
<td>31,382d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
<td>WPA employers</td>
<td>Employable general relief cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>107,775</td>
<td>87,473</td>
<td>97,243</td>
<td>78,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>29,456d</td>
<td>4,036d</td>
<td>22,488d</td>
<td>2,123d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>233,233</td>
<td>115,536</td>
<td>172,182</td>
<td>108,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>30,808</td>
<td>15,898</td>
<td>24,432</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>123,970</td>
<td>52,277</td>
<td>93,730</td>
<td>41,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>146,712d</td>
<td>24,546d</td>
<td>122,464d</td>
<td>21,520d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>16,634</td>
<td>12,849d</td>
<td>12,849</td>
<td>1,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>97,421</td>
<td>67,102</td>
<td>75,776</td>
<td>47,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>248,570</td>
<td>178,600</td>
<td>144,538</td>
<td>189,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>12,273</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>9,662</td>
<td>2,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>43,745</td>
<td>16,133</td>
<td>30,193</td>
<td>3,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>80,043d</td>
<td>36,056d</td>
<td>62,723d</td>
<td>31,382d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*a Sources of data: WPA employees, WPA statistical reports. General relief cases, official reports of the respective state relief agencies and memoranda to author from the state agencies in Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin.

*b Employment on other federal agency projects financed from WPA funds included in this month only.

c Data not available.

d Number for month preceding that specified.

e Number for September, 1937.

620
Numbers Employed

the New York State WPA from time to time have incorporated results of surveys of home-relief cases certified for Works Program employment. The sixth of these, made in January, 1939, showed a total of 48,397 cases including workers certified and presumably available for a WPA job. This number is approximately that reported in January of each of the two preceding years, although the summer months show sharp reductions in waiting lists.

A spot survey of home-relief rolls as of May 20, 1939, showed that 24,867 persons, representing one from each of 20,502 families and 4,365 non-family persons then on relief, were presumably eligible for WPA employment.

New York City. Surveys of relief recipients have been made at irregular intervals to determine the number of employable persons granted relief from time to time. An early survey of this kind showed that as of May 1, 1937, a total of 102,522 employable persons were receiving home relief. Of this number, however, only about 40,000 (39,825) were regarded as "placeable"—that is, acceptable for employment in private enterprise under competitive conditions.¹

A study made in January, 1938, showed that the number of employable persons granted home relief in New York City had risen to 139,898 and constituted 43.7 per cent of the total number of adults receiving home relief. Of 104,350 employable persons of whom information is available, about one-fifth (20.3 per cent) were regarded as ineligible for WPA employment. Another 3.6 per cent, though reported as employable, were physically handicapped.

Studies made in New York City in June, 1939, excluded employable workers who were ineligible for WPA employment because of lack of citizenship or other reasons but included all employable persons in eligible cases, although only one person per family was actually eligible for assignment. This report, therefore, exaggerates somewhat the number which under current regulations could be employed by the WPA. The study showed 77,733 presumably eligible workers of whom something less than

¹Since these data relate to employable persons without regard to the number of different households represented, they overstate somewhat the extent to which the WPA was failing to provide one job per family.
two-thirds (50,640) were males, and somewhat over one-third (27,093) females.

As of January 1, 1940, when the WPA in New York City was employing approximately 109,000 workers, some 70,000 more persons who were receiving home relief were reported as “actually or presumptively eligible for . . . [but not given WPA] employment.” These persons represented 59,550 family units to which relief could be discontinued or reduced had WPA employment been available.

Among relief recipients were another 146,677 persons (excluding those receiving home relief in supplementation of WPA earnings and of those classified as non-settled) who were sixteen years of age or over, but who were definitely ineligible for WPA employment. Approximately 38,000 of these were estimated to have been both able-bodied and available for work.

New Jersey. A census of relief cases made in New Jersey as of November, 1937, indicated that of 47,748 cases studied, 35,369 (or 74.1 per cent of the total) were regarded as “employable” cases. Of these 35,369 employable cases, 12,754 were ineligible for WPA employment—2,783 cases because they had no citizen worker and 9,971 because members were already employed. This left a total of 22,615 cases which included one or more employable persons who were citizens and apparently eligible for but not given WPA employment.

Over a third (approximately 39 per cent) of 63,615 cases receiving direct relief in New Jersey in May, 1938, were believed to include persons who were employable, eligible, and available for WPA employment. In addition there were among the total cases approximately 16,000 more cases including employable persons who for one reason or another, such as lack of citizenship

1 Among the 146,677 adult recipients who were not eligible for WPA employment “the chief cause of ineligibility” affecting 43,252 persons was reported to have been “lack of citizenship.” Next in order, affecting 15,779 persons, was “‘family care,’ which means a parent, usually a mother, who is physically able to work but who must remain at home to care for young children; the third cause [affecting 10,932 persons] was infirmity due to old age; the fourth, temporary illness [affecting the eligibility of 9,307 persons]; the fifth, permanent disability [affecting eligibility of 8,462 persons]; the sixth, ‘under age,’ that is young men and women over sixteen but under eighteen and, therefore, not eligible for WPA employment. [This factor affected 7,212 persons.]”—New York (City) Department of Public Welfare, Report to Mayor F. H. La Guardia from Commissioner William Hodson, March 1, 1940.

Other scattered reasons were responsible for the remaining cases of ineligibility for WPA employment.
and part-time employment, were regarded as ineligible for WPA jobs.

Missouri. A survey of cases receiving general relief in Missouri was made during the latter part of 1938. This study was based on a random sample of 3,091 households (cases) receiving relief in October, 1938. These represented approximately 10 per cent of the total number of households receiving relief that month. In these households were 4,741 persons aged sixteen to sixty-four.

Heads of 819 relief households, or 26.7 per cent of the cases on which information was available, were reported as seeking work. Another 8.7 per cent were reported as working, 39.8 per cent as neither working nor seeking work, while the remaining 24.8 per cent were reported as being sixty-five years of age or over.

Early Estimates of Employable Persons Granted Relief

Early in 1936 Mr. Hopkins told a House Committee that “probably more than 85 percent of those that could be assigned to work were working on January 15.” However, he added, “There are a great many other employables not on the relief rolls that we have not given work to.” Although urged to estimate the total number not provided for, he hazarded no guess. It was before this same Committee that Mr. Hopkins said, “When we are criticized for the administration of this relief fund . . . the criticism should be on the basis of the inadequacy of what we did.”

During August, 1936 (when 2,332,000 workers had WPA employment) the Conference of Mayors formally requested the President to add another half million to the rolls. This request was based upon studies carried out by the staff of the Conference and was advanced in an effort to get the federal government to employ “all the destitute employable cases” and thus “fulfill its obligation to the unemployed.”

Early in 1937 the American Association of Social Workers,

---

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, pp. 27, 85, and 156.
2 The American City, vol. 51, no. 9, September, 1936, p. 82.
WPA and Federal Relief Policy

WPA jobs may have been released because of unemployability, lack of adaptability to a work program, inefficiency, insubordination, or a wide variety of circumstances reflecting personal incapacity rather than because of the inadequacy of WPA employment quotas as such. To say this is not to deny, however, the possibility that reasons for which workers are dismissed may themselves be attributable to a lack of appropriate projects, to too few jobs, or to a lack of sufficient flexibility in the program to permit the WPA to meet needs of various kinds.

A further argument that might be raised against use of these data to illustrate the WPA's inadequacy, is that increases in relief rolls as a result of WPA dismissals are offset, to a greater or less degree, by the transfer of relief recipients to WPA employment. This is indisputable. Yet, what is significant to this discussion is that however many workers may, from time to time, be transferred from relief to WPA rolls, as intended under the WPA program, WPA employment levels have been neither sufficiently stable nor maintained at a level high enough to prevent the necessity of constantly transferring workers from WPA jobs to relief. Factors which have contributed to these shortcomings include the difficulty of maintaining project operations uninterruptedly and of planning new projects to get under way as old ones are completed. A further factor has been the requirement that workers continuously employed for eighteen months are subject to discharge for a specified period.

Data relating to the number of relief cases opened from month to month primarily because of loss of WPA employment are published periodically by a number of states and are regularly reported to the federal Social Security Board by some 15 to 20 county or city relief agencies.

States from which these data are available are, for the most part, those already mentioned as providing better measures of the adequacy of the WPA, such as the number of eligible workers awaiting assignment or the number of employable cases granted general relief. For this reason state data regarding the number of general relief cases opened from month to month because of loss of WPA jobs will here be presented only to illustrate how fluctuations in WPA employment levels contribute to the instability of general relief programs.

In Pennsylvania during 1939, for example, 186,000 cases were
Numbers Employed

added to public assistance rolls because of loss of WPA employment. In 1940, when WPA employment was much more stable, the number was approximately 79,000.¹

In Ohio during the first six months of 1940, loss of WPA employment was reported to be the “greatest single reason for adding or reopening” general relief cases. These cases accounted for 34 per cent of all openings during this period.

A similar result is noticeable in Illinois where, from January, 1939, through June, 1941, WPA discharges and hirings had an even greater effect upon relief rolls than did changes in private employment.

General relief cases opened in Utah because of loss of WPA employment represented approximately 40 per cent of all openings in 1939 and 31 per cent in 1940.

Turning from state data to those reported to the Social Security Board by 19 cities, it may be seen that the proportion of general relief cases opened in July, 1940, because of the loss of WPA jobs ranged from approximately 72 per cent in Chicago and approximately 65 per cent in Cleveland to as little as 6 or 7 per cent in Baltimore and Rochester. In the District of Columbia, where relief normally is denied employable workers, no openings were reported as attributable to loss of WPA jobs.

In the report for July of the previous year the picture was materially different. Instead of a low proportion, Rochester in that month reported the highest (66.1 per cent). Pittsburgh was close behind. Cities in which this proportion fell between 30 and 45 per cent were Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. The lowest percentages were in St. Louis, Baltimore, and, of course, the District of Columbia, where again no openings for this reason were reported.

In New York City during the year ending with June, 1939, loss of WPA jobs ranked second only to loss of private employment as a reason for opening home-relief cases, a total of 2,913 families (or 22 per cent of all additions) having been accepted for this reason.

While data relating to changes in relief rolls because of loss of WPA employment are far from satisfactory measures of the

¹ In 1939, 66 per cent of all cases added to state general assistance rolls because of loss of WPA employment had been off the state rolls for a year or longer. The corresponding figure for 1940 was only 27 per cent.
The WTA and Federal Relief Policy

extent to which WPA employment has or has not met needs current at any one time, they illustrate well why relief and public welfare officials in all parts of the country complain that some of the most unsettling elements in their official lives are the vagaries of WPA employment policy.

Need Among Workers Discharged by the WPA

A fourth measure of the adequacy of the WPA program is the degree to which workers once employed on, but discharged from, WPA jobs have fallen into need. An even better measure, of course, would be the extent of unmet need among the families of employable workers in general.¹

Striking evidence of dire need among the families of workers discharged for one reason or another by the WPA is available from many quarters.

1936

A study of workers separated from the WPA program was made by the WPA during 1936. It covered 4,552 cases separated from employment during the second quarter of that year, and revealed that although one-half the separated cases derived the major part of their July income from private employment, and one-quarter from Works Program employment on projects of agencies other than the WPA, the remaining quarter received no regular income, or was relegated to the good offices of friends, relatives, and relief agencies. For those who derived the bulk of their July income from relief the median income was $16.95. For those who received the major part of their income from miscellaneous sources the median income for the month was $27.08—an amount well below the minimum security wage rate in the areas studied.

¹ Such scattered findings as are available with respect to unmet relief needs have already been referred to in chap. 3. As suggested there, unmet need among employable workers might well be interpreted as an indication of the inadequacy of general relief measures. Nevertheless, since the whole idea of the WPA has been to provide jobs for needy workers, unmet need among employable persons may also be regarded primarily as evidence of the inadequacy of WPA employment. Extending general relief to former WPA workers would, of course, increase the number of employable persons granted relief—a measure already suggested as a means of appraising the adequacy of the WPA program.
Numbers Employed

A second early study (also made by the WPA) covered 1,370 cases separated from WPA employment in five cities \(^1\) some time between April and August, 1937. During August 13 per cent had been without income of any kind while 12 per cent received only relief and at least 11 per cent more received some relief in addition to other types of income. Slightly less than half (49 per cent) of the workers received income from private employment only. At least 14 per cent more received some income from this source. Of those who received private earnings in the month of August, 41 per cent received earnings of less than the monthly unskilled security wage rate, while the earnings of another 3 per cent were essentially the same as this rate. These findings with respect to urban areas in which the study was carried out, differed considerably from conditions in non-urban areas.

Of 1,111 cases in 45 rural counties in four states \(^2\) only 4 per cent were without income of any kind in August and only 4 per cent received general relief. More than half (52 per cent) received income from private employment and 40 per cent from miscellaneous sources. Among those who received the major part of their July income from private employment, the incomes of nearly 30 per cent of the cases fell below the median wage ($53.39) received during their last month of WPA employment.

Not all those reported in this study were separated from their WPA jobs because of the inadequacy of employment quotas. This was the case, however, in at least 44 per cent of the cases from the urban and 34 per cent of those from the rural areas. With respect to those who were dismissed for reasons other than quota reductions, it is not possible to ascertain the degree to which the particular kinds of WPA jobs provided or conditions of work contributed to the "inefficiency" or "incapacity" for which workers were discharged.

Little is said in the report to indicate how workers who were dismissed from WPA employment fared in comparison with those who left of their own volition. All that is ascertainable is that those dismissed because of curtailment of projects and quotas or because they were aliens "fared worse in every way than work-

---

\(^1\) New Bedford, Baltimore, Atlanta, St. Louis, San Francisco.

\(^2\) North Dakota, Iowa, West Virginia, and Mississippi.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ers who left WPA for other reasons. Their post-separation incomes were markedly lower, and fewer of them found private employment." ¹

1939

Several official studies made in 1939 reveal that significant proportions of workers separated from their WPA jobs either had to be granted relief or received no income of any kind for weeks after discharge. Somewhat larger proportions were reported to have found some employment. Their wages, however, frequently were lower even than those they previously received from the WPA.

A small study made by the WPA early in 1939 covered 856 workers separated from WPA employment because of quota reductions in five cities.² Only 29 per cent of these workers found any private employment at any time between their discharge and the time of interview—a period varying from approximately two weeks to a month. This proportion was lower in Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Worcester. Nearly 75 per cent of the families reporting income from employment received monthly earnings of less than the local WPA wage for unskilled labor. An average of 34 per cent of those separated had, by the time of the interview, been granted relief, the ratio ranging from none in Jacksonville and only 8 per cent in St. Louis to 80 per cent in Pittsburgh.

The families which fared worst—one-fourth of the total—were those which were found to have had no income from any source during the two weeks prior to interview.

Later in 1939 the WPA made another study which extended to 23 cities, and covered more than 138,000 (of a total of some 775,000) workers dismissed in July and August, 1939, as a result

¹ Roberts, Verl E., Survey of Workers Separated from WPA Employment in Nine Areas, 1937. WPA, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938, p. xi. Although not wholly comparable with other studies here referred to, the unemployment census of 1937 revealed striking information about the small amount of income that was available to workers who registered as totally or partly unemployed. Of the totally unemployed registrants reporting their income for the week of November 7, 82.4 per cent said they had been without income of any kind. Twelve per cent reported for the week income ranging from $1.00 to $10. Among workers registering as partly unemployed at the time of the census (November 16-20) more than one-fifth reported receiving no income during the week of November 7. Approximately two-fifths reported income of from $1.00 to $10 for the week, while one-fourth said that their income was from $10 to $20.

² Worcester, Pittsburgh, Detroit, St. Louis, and Jacksonville.
of congressional action requiring arbitrary dismissal of all workers continuously employed for eighteen months or more. Interviews made in November, two to three months after discharge, showed that 12.7 per cent of the released workers were employed in private industry; 26.7 per cent were reassigned to WPA jobs; 28.4 per cent were receiving relief; and 32.2 per cent were without employment of any kind and were not receiving relief. Of those who had private employment, nearly half were currently earning less than their former WPA wages. Even if they had not been forced to leave, most of those who found private employment, it was estimated, would undoubtedly have left WPA rolls voluntarily, as thousands of workers do each month, to accept other jobs.

Average income of the 101,180 workers not reassigned to WPA jobs at the time of interview was only $8.23 per family per week. Average weekly family income exceeded $10 only in New Haven, New York City, Buffalo, Detroit, and Milwaukee. It fell between $5.00 and $10 in eight cities. The average in Fort Worth was $4.33. In another nine cities income among those not reinstated in WPA jobs averaged less than $3.50 per family per week, falling in St. Louis to only $1.52, the lowest point of all.

Workers among that large number of persons—nearly one-third of the whole—who had no kind of employment and received no relief (except possibly federal surplus commodities) had no recourse but to borrow, dispose of personal belongings, or beg—sometimes for unsalable or left-over food.

Not long after Congress had enacted the ERA Act of 1939 which precipitated the wave of dismissals after eighteen months of employment, thus giving rise to serious needs, Howard Hunter, acting commissioner of the WPA, caused no little stir on Capitol Hill by giving to unemployed men and women throughout the nation a startling bit of advice. Replying in a radio address to a letter received from a Kansan recently discharged by the WPA, Mr. Hunter said:

... you are one of 650,000 people whom we are firing before the end of this month because of ... [a] provision in the Act of Congress. ...

You might of course apply for relief at your local relief office, but as you

1 Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Denver, Seattle, and Los Angeles.
2 Richmond, Washington, Charleston, Jacksonville, Louisville, Nashville, Birmingham, St. Louis, and Omaha.

631
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

say the relief load is very heavy. . . . You could accept the intent of Congress and the promises of many business organizations and continue in search of one of those private jobs which has been promised if the Government will quit spending money for the unemployed.

If none of these suggestions work, then you might tighten up your belt another notch and look forward to a tough winter.¹

Upon the ears of American people who had been assured again and again that the federal government would give necessary aid to needy unemployed people, this sardonic yet realistic advice from a high-ranking federal official came as a severe disillusionment.

1940

Still another official study of workers separated from their WPA jobs (in September and October, 1940) showed that by December many were in need. Findings from this study led WPA officials to estimate that approximately 125,000 workers left WPA rolls during September and October, 1940, to take other jobs and that "about twice as many left because of illness, lay-off, the regulation against more than 18 months continuous WPA employment, or other reasons."

Although these separations took place during a period of unprecedented industrial activity, the study which was conducted in 32 sample counties revealed that only a little more than half (55 per cent) of the workers had had any private employment at any time between their separation in September or October and the time of interview in December.² Even these found little security, however, for at the time the study was actually made, only 29 per cent were in private employment. Another 40 per cent had been reinstated by the WPA while the remaining 31 per cent were "completely unemployed."³

Further evidence of need among workers losing WPA jobs is available from many sections of the country. There is, for example, a small survey that was made in Hartford, Connecticut, late in 1940. This revealed that over one-third of the 328 workers arbitrarily released because of eighteen months' continuous WPA employment, received (during the period of the study)

¹ WPA Release 4-2028, August 24, 1939.
² Of the workers who left for some reason other than to take private employment only 31 per cent found jobs between the time of separation and the time of the study.
³ WPA, Employment Experience of Certified Workers Separated from WPA Projects September and October, 1940. January 15, 1941, pp. 1, 5.
Numbers Employed

assistance from a relief agency while “almost one hundred per cent found it necessary to ask friends or merchants to extend loans.” Of the 328 who had been released, 32 were reinstated by the WPA from 30 to 50 days after discharge; 185 were reinstated from 50 to 100 days after discharge; and 9 after more than 100 days.¹

Another ray of light on this question of need among workers released from WPA employment is that coming from a small study made in McLennan County, Texas, in 1940. Here there were 120 workers who were eligible for but not assigned to WPA jobs. Of these, 107 had been employed by the WPA at one time or another. Although these workers had been eligible for WPA employment for an average of nearly thirty-nine months, they had been employed, on the average, for only about twenty-two months, or but little more than half the time they were eligible for work.

During a thirty-day period covered by the study one-fifth of the 120 workers eligible for but given no WPA work had no income of any kind; two-fifths had some income but not more than $10. The remaining two-fifths had income in excess of $10, the number having more than $20 being just equal to the number having between $10 and $20.

Establishment of and Demands for State and Local Work-Relief Programs

Yet another indication of the inadequacy of the WPA is the disposition on the part of a number of state and local authorities to institute work relief, work-for-relief, or “work or starve” programs to give employment to employable needy workers not employed by the WPA. In still other states there has been much public discussion of the advisability of writing into law provisions to permit such measures.

Both the desire for and the establishment of state and local work-relief programs have been influenced by three aspects of the WPA program: (a) the insufficiency of job quotas; (b) the program’s failure to meet existing needs even when job quotas were relatively adequate; and (c) prohibitions against the employment of certain types of workers.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Of the first of these inadequacies Corrington Gill, late in 1939, declared that one consequence of the federal work program's failure to provide "work for enough of the unemployed" was the establishment in various parts of the country of what were sometimes described as "little WPA's." Under these, relief recipients were expected to work in return for aid received. Said Mr. Gill:

... these State programs have come into existence because the WPA has not had funds sufficient to provide work for all needy employables. Throughout the summer and early fall of this year, the WPA has had the largest waiting list in its history. ... There is no use trying to dodge the fact that we do not go far enough in providing employment. If we were inclined to dodge the fact, these "little WPA's" here and there over the country would be a significant reminder of our shortcoming.1

This insufficiency of WPA jobs which is thought to have contributed to the rise of the "little WPA's" is in turn attributable to a number of factors. Among these is the difficulty of getting sponsors to put up money for the type of work the WPA can and will undertake. Governmental agencies must raise money for "non-normal" work if they are to receive WPA aid, and this many agencies are unwilling to do even though they may be perfectly willing to pay relief recipients to do work that must be done anyhow.

A further factor is an unwillingness on the part of local governmental bodies to sponsor more projects the maintenance of which, upon completion, will constitute a further drain on their funds.

A third closely related consideration is that in some areas—particularly small or sparsely settled jurisdictions—the number of workers to be accommodated on WPA projects is sometimes so small that costs of supervision and transportation (in proportion to total expenditures) are higher than seem justifiable. Under such circumstances, local bodies sometimes prefer to place relief recipients in regular gangs or crews already at work in their bailiwicks rather than to establish separate WPA projects which must be given supervision and to which workers may have to be transported relatively long distances.

In view of these factors it is not surprising that studies of "little WPA's" in various sections of the country reveal that

1 WPA Release 4-2065, November 28, 1939.
Numbers Employed

maintenance and repair jobs were conspicuous among the types of work done.¹

Employment of relief recipients on local work programs is said by relief authorities to yield two benefits. First, it wins friends for the relief program by enabling various public officials to see at once that relief recipients are eager to work and are not bums and loafers. In the second place, employment of relief recipients in various governmental offices is said frequently to lead to permanent employment and their removal from relief rolls.

Among further considerations leading to demands for and establishment of state and local work-relief programs has been the feeling that if employment (as federal authorities have vigorously maintained) is so much better than direct relief, it must be better for needy employable persons who are not fortunate enough to secure WPA jobs. Furthermore, since WPA employment is denied to aliens and frequently to single persons, some local authorities have considered it bad social policy to give such persons relief without requiring work in return. Although refusal of jobs to aliens has usually been interpreted as discrimination against them, it has sometimes been regarded as discrimination against citizens, since aliens if eligible for assistance may be given relief without having to work.

One report on the extent of state and local work-relief programs (made in May, 1940, by Corrington Gill) indicated that these were in operation in at least 24 states. In nine others they were permissible. The total number of workers involved was not thought to be very large, amounting to only about 120,000 in 16 states from which data were available. For the country as a whole the estimate was 180,000 workers a month. The number of families having work-relief jobs ranged from less than 2 per cent of all relief families in Virginia to over 25 per cent in Kansas.

¹ Writing of this problem, Mr. Gill once declared that these little WPA's "perform the kind of maintenance work which ought to be a regular function of local government. . . . They do regular city work, and they do it for relief wages. The WPA avoids, and goes to much pains in avoiding, the kind of work which should be done on a regular city job for regular wages. We don't want to supply cheap labor, and thus displace normal labor. That would hardly diminish unemployment! . . . We have had to fight this very thing out with a thousand local governments. And when a local government sets up its own work program, it does things that the WPA won't do. . . . In this respect, as well as in its lower wages, the local work programs are going in the wrong direction."—WPA Release 4-2065, November 28, 1939. For further reference to this problem see State Government, vol. 13, no. 6, June, 1940, p. 120.
Among states from which information is available regarding the extent of local and state work-relief programs are Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and California.

Connecticut
Though work relief in Connecticut has been continued ever since the federal Works Program was first established, it has not involved any very great number of workers. Among those given full (as opposed to those granted only partial) relief, numbers given work relief, either alone or in conjunction with direct relief, have, during the past several years, frequently ranged from 1,000 to 3,000 cases per month. In January, 1939, for example, 2,040 cases were given at least some work relief while 9,451 cases were granted only direct relief. In July of the same year the numbers were 1,581 and 8,195, respectively. By September, 1940, the number of cases given work relief fell below 1,000 and by March, 1941, had fallen to less than 500.

Rhode Island
Like Connecticut, Rhode Island has continued in operation a work-relief program throughout the life of the WPA. In December, 1940, numbers employed amounted to 5,111 cases and in July, 1941, to 3,292. In proportion to numbers given other types of assistance in Rhode Island these numbers are comparatively large.

Pennsylvania
Among the most important state and local work-relief programs in operation in recent years have been Pennsylvania’s programs of “Relief-Work” (RWP) and “State Work-Relief” (SWRP). The latter was inaugurated only in July, 1941.

Employment on RWP projects rose rapidly from approximately 1,600 in August, 1939, to more than 8,000 in September and over 12,000 in October. The peak of employment during its first two years was reached in July, 1940 (when 26,845 workers were employed) after which employment subsided more or less.

\(^1\) For a description of these two programs see Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance, Public Assistance Statistics, July, 1941, pp. 11-12.
Numbers Employed

gradually until July, 1941, when only 14,378 were given RWP jobs. The monthly average for the two-year period is approximately 18,500 workers. Labor and service rendered is estimated to be worth more than 14 million dollars.

Impressive as the volume of work-relief employment in Pennsylvania may appear to be, RWP jobs during the first two years of the program have usually been provided for only about 20 to 25 per cent of the general assistance cases including at least one employable person.

Illinois

A second state in which work relief has assumed considerable importance is Illinois. Here two types of program have been in operation. Under the first of these work is provided on projects sponsored and supervised by local relief authorities. Under the second, relief recipients are referred to county superintendents of highways, township road commissioners, and city superintendents of streets who then may employ those referred. The only compensation permitted is the relief allowance provided by overseers of the poor. Development of this program is reported to have been retarded by difficulties encountered with regard to employment on roads and highways. Nevertheless, largely because of arrangements effected by the Department of Public Works in Chicago, the total number given work relief in Illinois increased from approximately 8,000 in April, 1939, to over 20,000 in November of the same year.

Wisconsin

Work relief in Wisconsin was instituted soon after the federal Works Program was inaugurated. This was attributed, in a report of the State Public Welfare Department, to “the failure of the Works Progress Administration . . . to absorb all employable persons receiving relief.”

Official reports do not indicate the number employed on work-relief projects from month to month although they do report separately commitments made by counties for work as opposed to direct relief. Quantitatively, these are relatively unimportant. In January, 1939, for example, when commitments for direct relief totaled approximately $1,223,000 those for work relief were

637
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

only $38,550. In April of the same year the figures were $1,065,000 and $40,672, respectively.

For the year 1938 the Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief reported that of relief grants totaling $4,902,805 in 1938 only $45,854 was expended under the county’s work-relief program.

Michigan

Although comprehensive employment data are not available from Michigan, relief recipients in Detroit (during 1938, 1939, and part of 1940) are reported to have worked for various city departments a total of 5,261,668 hours. Work done in 1938 alone was said to have been worth nearly a million dollars.

California

After a gubernatorial campaign in which the successful candidate stood for the principle of substituting a program of work relief for the “unemployment dole” in California, the State Relief Administration in July, 1939, inaugurated a statewide program to achieve this end. Prior to this time unemployment relief recipients had for several years been employed on local work projects on which in June, 1939, only about 8,000 recipients of unemployment relief were employed. Of the total employed in June, 1939, 5,428 were in Los Angeles County and 486 in San Francisco. In each of nine counties only one worker was employed, and in each of another nine counties the number of workers was less than 10. Nevertheless, the state relief administrator in July, 1939, was quoted as saying that by the end of the fiscal year work-relief employment would exceed that of the WPA.

By January, 1940, state work-relief employment totaled approximately 11,000 but by January, 1941, had fallen to about 5,700.

Even though California’s work-relief program has proved something less than a howling success, hopes for the future were still alive in 1940 when the Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Employment reported that “it should be possible for the State and the counties to create work at a wage fair to the un-

1 For a statement of policies under which this program was to be operated see California State Relief Administration, Unemployment Relief in California, June, 1939, pp. 20-28.

638
Numbers Employed

employed but not so attractive as wages in private employment.” One benefit of such a program, it was held, was that it would provide the unemployed “with work at wages higher than the dole.”

Additional states having work-relief programs about which scattered information is available include Iowa, Kansas, and Ohio.

Although relatively unimportant in terms of both numbers employed and funds expended, local and state work-relief programs are nevertheless evidence of a widespread feeling of the inadequacy of the WPA program. This is not the only factor at work, however, since there are also other ends to be served. Important among these is an interest in getting cheap labor from relief rolls to do what more highly paid workers would otherwise have to be hired to do.

Hardly less significant than these programs themselves is the increasing disposition on the part of state and local authorities to enlarge existing work-relief programs or to establish such where they are not already in effect. Perhaps the most important moves of this kind have been in New York where the legislature in two successive years enacted measures to permit local authorities to establish work-relief programs, only to see them vetoed by the governor. Undeterred by the two defeats, the many friends of work relief in New York continued to press for a new state law. Among these was Mayor La Guardia who in 1941 again urged establishment of local work-relief programs to “enrich the community and preserve the skills of persons who could not get on WPA because they were aliens or because they could not do manual labor.” Finally, these proponents had their way and

2 Sources of information on these programs include:
   Iowa Emergency Relief Administration, Reports of January through June, 1939.
   Despite the widely publicized work-relief program undertaken in Cincinnati—which the city manager, Clarence O. Sherrill, once described in the Harvard Business Review (vol. 18, no. 1, Autumn, 1939, pp. 44-49)—numbers employed on work projects in Cincinnati and other Ohio cities are not regularly reported.
3 Reasons advanced by the governor for his vetoes were that the proposals offered would increase state expenditures for relief and would disturb the existing understanding with respect to the division of relief responsibilities between the federal government on the one hand and state and local governments on the other.
when the legislature in 1942 again passed a law authorizing local
governments to establish work-relief programs, Governor Leh¬
man let it become law. The governor’s change of heart was
attributed to the vastly reduced scale of the WPA program and
to the difficulty of finding work for aliens. By mid-July, 1942, the
number of relief recipients put to work on public jobs in New York
City alone totaled nearly 5,000.

DEMANDS FOR BROADER FEDERAL PARTICIPATION IN THE
TOTAL RELIEF PROGRAM OF THE NATION

Further evidence of the inadequacy of federal relief policy may
be found in the demands often made for broader federal partici¬
pation in the total relief program of the nation so as to help
overcome its present glaring deficiencies. These demands,¹ like
other evidences of the WPA’s inadequacy, do not grow out of the
single fact that WPA employment quotas have been insufficient.
They are attributable, in part at least, to the nature of the pro¬
gram and to various limitations imposed upon it.

¹ Already discussed in some detail in chap. 3 and later in chap. 34.
CHAPTER XXVI
FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR
MEETING RELIEF NEEDS

THE FEDERAL government, especially since 1933, has accepted
more or less responsibility for aiding needy persons of many
types. While disclaiming responsibility for certain kinds of need,
it claims to have assumed a special degree of responsibility for
aiding needy persons who are employable. Yet, the federal gov¬
ernment has neither met effectively the need of the employable
unemployed nor has it maintained a completely aloof attitude to¬
ward relief needs for which it has disavowed responsibility. ¹

INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY FOR RELIEF ONLY ONE
ASPECT OF THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT

Federal responsibility for relief cannot properly be understood
apart from consideration of the increasingly important role of
the national government in a number of fields which vitally affect
the American people. As Aubrey Williams once stated, the de¬
velopment of a national program of public work for the unem¬
ployed was but one result of the belief that, since our economy is
national in character, problems growing out of that economy
should be solved by federal action.

The recent growth in the importance of the federal govern¬
ment, so greatly accelerated during the 1930's, got its start soon
after this nation was founded. ²

¹ This issue is further discussed in the succeeding chapter. Except when otherwise
specified, the term “federal responsibility,” as used in this chapter in connection
with the role various observers have thought the government should play in aiding
needy persons, connotes no particular degree of participation and implies nothing as
to whether the federal government should bear all, half, or any other specified pro¬
portion of the cost of such assistance. Neither does the term connote any particular
type of responsibility as, for example, that the federal government should or should
not itself control and operate assistance programs. Problems regarding degree of
administrative and financial responsibility for various relief programs are discussed
in chaps. 1, 30, 31.

² This is clear in what H. S. Commager has said of the long history of the growth
of federal power in the United States: “The efforts of the present Administration
[i.e. that of President Roosevelt] to extend national supervision over such matters
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In retrospect, it is interesting to note that when Walter Lippmann in 1935 wrote about the President who had extended federal power over banks, insurance companies, railroads, farms and factories "beyond anything ever known in time of peace" he was not writing of Franklin D. Roosevelt, but of Herbert Hoover.1 Though the beginning of the trend toward centralization lies far in the past there can be no blinking the fact that the process has been speeded up since 1930. Between 1930 and 1940, for example, federal aid to states (exclusive, of course, of loans and direct federal expenditures like those of the WPA) rose from approximately $135 million to over $580 million dollars. In 1930 more than one-half of the federal funds granted to states were for highways and nearly a fourth for the National Guard. The remainder went for some eight or nine other purposes. By 1940 the types of activity aided had increased to 21, most important of which was federal aid for old-age assistance, which together with other social security payments amounted to over half (53 per cent) of the total grants to states.2

As industry, labor, agriculture, power production, relief and similar activities have excited a good deal of trepidation and some dismay. It is well to remember that this is no new development, but merely the continuation of a process which has been under way since the beginning of the Republic, and that at every stage that process has excited similar dismay and inspired prophecies of disaster. For the causes of the growth of national power lie, of course, not in the ambitions of men but in the growth of the nation itself and the rapid development of national economic institutions.

"The beginnings of that process date back to the Washington Administration, when it was found expedient to use the national power to establish a national bank and to erect a tariff that had protective features—that was designed, in short, to build up a self-sufficient nation. Washington's successors, of whatever party, were equally willing to recognize realities. It was Jefferson, often thought a doctrinaire advocate of State rights, who bought Louisiana, doubling at one stroke the national territory and giving an immense impetus to nationalism, and it was the same Jefferson who did not hesitate to use the powerful weapon of the embargo in an effort to preserve peace. Madison had written the Virginia resolutions asserting the right of the State to nullify acts of Congress, but he did not hesitate to sign the recharter of the national bank nor the tariff of 1816. John Quincy Adams counted himself a Jeffersonian, but his plan for national improvements, national aid to science and education, marks him, too, as a far-sighted realist. Andrew Jackson, representative of frontier democracy, gave short shrift to the dialectics of State sovereignty. And the policies of these men were dictated, in every case, by a common-sense recognition of actualities."

—Henry Steele Commager, professor of history, New York University, "Pro—Should the Powers of the Federal Government Be Increased?" in Congressional Digest, The Pro and Con Monthly, vol. 19, no. 8-9, August-September, 1940, pp. 203-204. An arrangement of "Con" material also appeared in this number.

1 New York Herald Tribune, June 20, 1935.
The Broader Issues

Growth of the power of the federal government in the United States is no isolated phenomenon but is of a piece with similar changes in other countries and in other areas of human affairs in this country. Writing of what he termed "the movement of power from local areas to state and national centres in government," Leonard D. White has declared that this "is not an isolated tendency." Continuing, this authority adds:

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the opening decade of the twentieth, the concentration of industrial power in the great industrial capitals proceeded at an unparalleled rate and led to much hotly contested legislation seeking ways and means of dealing with the new situation. The development of chain stores in the last decade reveals the same tendency in the marketing field, while the concentration of financial power in the banking world has been frequently noted.

The industrial and business world therefore shows much the same trend toward centralization and the enlargement of areas which is characteristic of government. Our whole social organization, could it be examined in detail, would presumably show the same drift. . . .

The same underlying conditions are leaving their impress on public affairs. . . .

In a similar way the standardization of tastes, fashions, goods and habits aids the process of centralization to diminishing the sense of locality. . . .

The fact is that our whole social organization and existence is tending toward a wider and wider base. Not business alone, but the professions, labor, philanthropy, reformers, social organizations, civic organizations are reaching toward or have in fact already attained a nationwide structure with varying degrees of authority vested in the central governing body. Much further light could be thrown on governmental centralization by ascertaining the extent of corresponding non-public organization.

Considerations Favorable to Enlarging the Role of the Government in Various Social Programs

Many of the factors that have led to the gradual extension of federal activity in other areas of American life also apply to the growth of national responsibility for relief. In addition to these, however, there are a number of other considerations which, though (as noted hereafter 2) particularly applicable to the meeting of relief needs, are also important to other needs.

An important argument frequently advanced in favor of federal participation in the administration of various governmental

---

2 See especially chaps. 28 and 29.
activities is the need for equalizing, among the states, the cost of beneficial social services. This is necessary, it is said, lest states rendering relatively extensive services be penalized while other states which do not maintain an equally broad range of activities may, through avoidance of taxes, enjoy an unfair advantage.\(^1\)

So important did this consideration appear to the United States Supreme Court that in its decision upon the constitutionality of the unemployment compensation provision of the Social Security Act, it held that failure of states, prior to and immediately after 1935, to enact unemployment compensation laws was not "for the most part" due to "lack of sympathetic interest" so much as to:

... alarm lest, in laying such a toll upon their industries, they would place themselves in a position of economic disadvantage as compared with neighbors or competitors. ... The attitude of Massachusetts is significant. ... She prescribed that its provisions [i.e., those of an act establishing an unemployment insurance system] should not become operative unless the federal bill became a law, or unless eleven of the following states (Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont) should impose on their employers burdens substantially equivalent. ... Her fear of competition is thus forcefully attested.

Thus, among other achievements, Congress by passing the unemployment insurance title of the Social Security Act placed "the states upon a footing of equal opportunity" and leveled "obstructions to the freedom of the states."\(^2\) Similar questions also figured prominently in the report of the President's Committee on Economic Security which recommended to Congress enactment of the proposed social security legislation.\(^3\)

An additional factor giving rise to increased federal participation in the field of social legislation has been a desire to equalize\(^4\)

\(^1\)This is not to say that disadvantages resulting from high taxes may not, particularly in the long run, be more than offset by benefits reaped from the more extensive social program thus made possible. To those who look only to the short run, however, relatively low tax levels may be preferred to more adequate governmental service.


\(^3\)See, for example, Report to the President, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1935. The importance of equalizing tax burdens among the various states has recently been emphasized in demands made by a number of authorities for the elimination of merit rating under state unemployment compensation laws. See, for example, section on "Social Security" by Ewan Clague, in Planning for America, by George B. Galloway and associates. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1941.

646
The Broader Issues

opportunity for all the people of the nation: (a) lest people be stimulated unduly to move from one part of the country to another;¹ (b) lest those who must move away from more privileged communities be called upon to forfeit their eligibility for social services essential to their welfare and security; (c) lest health and welfare in one area be threatened by the influx of "undesirable" persons from areas in which low standards of education, public health, and general welfare might have been allowed to prevail; and, finally, (d) lest communities whose social services are of relatively high grade be called upon to make undue expenditures to bring up to par new residents coming from areas in which educational, health, and other fundamental needs were met but poorly if at all.²

Finally, extension of federal responsibility of all kinds is a manifestation of a new social consciousness which manifests itself in increased concern on the part of the nation as a whole with the well-being of all. Fundamentally, this intra-national "good-neighbor" policy or "new moral climate," as President Roosevelt

¹ Although it is frequently held that people who move tend to congregate in those jurisdictions where relief standards are highest there are few objective data to support this view. Moreover, data of this kind are most difficult to procure because of the almost insuperable technical problem of ascertaining whether people do in fact move in order to qualify for more nearly adequate relief. Even if this were an important motivating factor, reluctance to admit this to any kind of research worker would be understandable.

Despite the hazards involved, attempts are sometimes made to ascertain the extent to which people move to areas having relatively good relief programs primarily because of these measures. Noteworthy among such studies is that made by Philip E. Ryan, in New York, in 1938. This study, covering 659 relief cases having either no legal settlement or having settlement somewhere outside the state of New York, revealed that "For the State as a whole, approximately one-half of the reasons given were classified as 'seeking employment'. . . . The next largest group of reasons came under the heading, 'to live with relatives or friends.' This group accounted for 72 out of the 299 reasons reported in New York City and 161 out of the 481 reasons reported Upstate. The third largest division was that classified under the heading, 'other.' The reasons grouped under this heading included 'desertion of husband,' 'marital difficulties,' 'repatriation,' 'to return to place of birth,' 'to retain citizenship,' etc. One-fifth of the reasons given in New York City were reported as 'other,' as against 11.6 per cent Upstate. On a State-wide basis this classification included 14.9 per cent of the reasons given.

"Only a very small number of the cases indicated that the reason for coming to New York was the quest for better relief provisions. Only 10 of the reported 780 reasons were so classified, two in New York City and eight Upstate. Both the number of cases seeking medical care and the number looking for greater educational advantages exceeded those seeking better relief provisions. It should be restated here that the reasons reported were those given by the applicant and are not the result of interpretation by the worker."—The New York State Program for Non-Settled Persons. New York (State) Department of Social Welfare, January 31, 1939, p. 26.

² For discussion of further considerations of this type, see chap. 28.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

has called it, may be attributable to changing political, social, and even religious concepts.¹

Factors Having a Special Bearing on Growth of Federal Responsibility for Relief Needs

Factors already enumerated as contributing to the steady extension of federal power have not, of course, been the only forces underlying this phenomenon. Others, about to be discussed, though also applicable to the growth of federal responsibilities in general, have a specific bearing upon the evolution of federal responsibility for aid to needy persons.

Needs Unmet Through State and Local Provision

Prominent among reasons constantly advanced in support of federal responsibility for relief needs has been the contention that without federal aid a vast amount of need would go unmet. The force of this argument, put forward early in the depression and continually reiterated, has frequently silenced even those who disagreed with the principle of federal aid for relief, but who were unable to stand their ground in the face of incontrovertible evidence of unrelieved need. It was this argument which, from 1930 to early 1933, was most frequently advanced in support of federal aid for unemployment relief. Early in 1932, for instance, a score of labor leaders, social workers, and others testifying before a Senate Committee urged federal action on the ground that this was essential if needs as they saw them were to be met.² For example, Donald R. Richberg, eminent attorney

¹ In various pleas for the maintenance or expansion of federal services President Roosevelt repeatedly has appealed to religious convictions as he did in 1936 when, in a request for funds for continuance of the WPA program, he declared: “Your government is still on the same side of the street with the Good Samaritan and not with those who pass by on the other side.”—As quoted in the New York Times, November 1, 1936.

² Various witnesses appearing before this Committee urged federal aid for relief because millions were living in localities where there were no organized private charities to meet current need; because many community chests had failed to reach their goals, 47 of 200 having failed by 10 per cent or more, and because only about 30 per cent of community chest funds raised was for relief purposes; because many states, cities, and localities were unable to meet demands made upon them for relief of the need; because there had to be “some method for distributing funds from one part of the country to another” since some community chest campaigns had “fallen down very flat” and public agencies were without sufficient funds; because federal aid was necessary to the preservation not only of relief standards and living standards but also of all social services in many communities which found it necessary to divert funds from them to relief purposes.—U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures
The Broader Issues

who later became executive director of the National Emergency Council, general counsel of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and chairman of the NRA board, declared:

It cannot be suggested seriously by any honest man conversant with the situation that the army of . . . unemployed . . . workers can hope to escape privation . . . through the State, municipal, or private aid which is available in the great cities of this country . . .

. . . the demand for Federal relief of unemployment is already long overdue. . . . Too many men and women have walked the streets for too many months, looking for work. Too many men, women, and children have been hungry in the midst of plenty too long—far too long.

It may not be written in the Constitution, but it is written in the religion of America, that the wealth of America is held in trust for the people of America. And it is written in the Constitution that the power to tax the wealth of America to provide for the common defense and general welfare lies in the Congress of the United States.¹

Sweeping aside niceties of federal, state, and local relationships, Sidney Hillman, the well-known labor leader who has served in such important posts as member of the Labor Advisory Board under the NRA, member of the Fair Labor Standards Board, and as associate general director of the Office of Production Management, testified:

We ought to be concerned about providing a decent sort of living for the men and women in this country and I am not concerned whether the county of Cook or the city of Chicago will do it or whether they want to do it or not. There is one agency that can do it, and that is the Government in Washington, and not doing it is merely going back on . . . the people of these United States—it is just deserting the army of unemployed. . . .²

Though opposing the federal government's entering the relief business, in 1931 and 1932 many of the bitterest critics of such proposals conceded that if local and state governments were unable to meet the need, the federal government would have to step in. Even President Hoover, as early as 1931, admitted:

I am willing to pledge myself that if the time should ever come that the voluntary agencies of the country, together with the local and State governments, are unable to find resources with which to prevent hunger and

²Ibid., pp. 338, 340.
³Ibid., p. 345.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

suffering in my country, I will ask the aid of every resource of the Federal Government.¹

A similar position was taken by Walter S. Gifford, director of President Hoover’s Organization on Unemployment Relief, when, in testimony before a Senate Committee, he declared that he opposed federal aid for relief, not because he was opposed to the principle of national responsibility for relief needs, but rather because he felt federal aid was not needed yet.²

Ever since those controversial days of the early 1930’s down to the passage of the most recent ERA Act federal action again and again has been urged on the ground that this was essential to meeting existing needs. In 1937, for example, a group of approximately 150 prominent citizens,³ speaking for the National Unemployment League, addressed President Roosevelt as follows:

We are convinced, from the experience of the past seven years, that measures for relief of mass unemployment such as exists today, can be effective only when the initiative and major responsibility are assumed by the Federal Government. It is an immense and, apparently, a permanent national job and must be met by national legislation.⁴

In 1938 the National Emergency Council, consisting of the President, Vice President, members of the Cabinet, Attorney General, and chairman of various federal boards and agencies, submitted to a Senate Committee a report on this matter which said, in part, “it is generally conceded that local governments, and even States, can no longer bear the burden of unemployment.” ⁵

² See, for example, U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. 1932, pp. 313, 318, 321, and 332. In response to a question by Senator Costigan as to “what evidence of human need” would be required to satisfy him “that the Federal Government should make an appropriation,” Mr. Gifford replied: “I think if a State government were absolutely broke and could not raise any more money by taxes or otherwise, that would be pretty satisfactory, assuming now that the local communities and counties could not do the thing directly and State aid was asked and the State legislature met and they could not sell any bonds and the tax limits had been reached and they could not tax anybody. I think that would be pretty good evidence.”—Ibid., p. 332. For indications of sharp differences of opinion (between the administration on one hand and labor leaders and social workers, on the other) as to existing needs see Ibid., pp. 343, 345, and 346.
⁴ [Appeal] to the President and the Congress. New York, November-December, 1937.
⁵ U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 679), Work Relief and Public Works Appropriation Act of 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, p. 317.

650
The Broader Issues

Unmet needs have been used to justify claims for larger federal participation not only in various relief and public welfare programs, but in other areas as well. Of this George C. S. Benson, one-time member of the Michigan State Planning Commission, (in 1940) wrote that one of the reasons states had lagged behind the federal government during the preceding decade was that they had not been “sufficiently alert to new governmental needs. Almost none of the new functions of the federal government under the New Deal,” he wrote, “are functions which have been taken from the states. Rather they are functions which the states had neglected. Whether or not he believes in government adoption of new functions, the states-righter who ignores new social problems requiring governmental action is thereby weakening the position of the states in the Union. . . . By and large, the Washington attitude is that the federal government will do only what the states cannot and will not do.”

Since, as frequently argued, it is unmet need that justifies federal action in a given field, it is not surprising that the nation’s grossly inadequate program of general relief as well as the exigent needs born of faltering and shifting federal policies regarding the employment of needy unemployed persons have resulted in widespread demands that the federal government accept larger responsibilities in these areas.

The next several years, undoubtedly, will see vast changes in the relationships of various levels of government to each other. Nevertheless, pending a more equitable realignment of responsibility for the whole gamut of governmental services, it does not appear to students of relief problems to be unfair to ask for social security and welfare programs a degree of federal support denied to other admittedly indispensable public services. The fact that federal responsibility may later be extended to other governmental functions does not appear to justify relaxing of responsibilities in the relief field in which important roles have already been assumed by the federal government. Acceptance of relatively larger responsibilities with respect to relief as opposed to other public functions is attributable, in part at least, to the coincidence that dramatic and widespread relief needs arose at

2 See chap. 25.
3 See chap. 3.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

a time when centralization was progressing at an accelerated rate. Although it now appears to be settled that federal resources and power may properly be used to meet otherwise unmet need, this has not always been the prevailing view. In 1887, for example, President Cleveland vetoed an appropriation for ten thousand dollars for seed for distribution in drought-stricken counties of Texas. In explanation of his action, he declared, “I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution and I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit.” 1 It was this same President, it will be recalled, who once summed up his concept of government in the phrase “while the people should patriotically and cheerfully support their Government, its functions do not include the support of the people.” 2

Having rendered obsolete concepts that might once have seemed tenable, the cataclysmic upheavals that have occurred since Cleveland's day have brought wide acceptance of the view that an individual's responsibility to his government and that of his government to him do not run only one way, but involve a mutual obligation on the part of each to support the other.

Possibility of Prompt Action by the Federal Government

A further consideration urged in favor of federal responsibility for relief needs is that the federal government is in a peculiarly favorable position to meet emergencies promptly, wherever and whenever they may arise. State action, by contrast, requires not one but 48 separate and independent series of actions and as many legislative campaigns. Action by local authorities entails still further delays while thousands of independent local bodies prepare to take necessary steps.

Similarly, when expenditures for relief and work relief are 3 relied upon to “prime the pump” or to augment the national income (and thus to forestall a business recession or to counteract

1 Corwin, Edward S., The Twilight of the Supreme Court. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1934, p. 149. See also Congressional Record, February 17, 1887, p. 1875. The question as to when "the relief of individual suffering" is or is not "related to the public service or benefit" is, of course, one of extreme social importance. See chap. 1.
3 As shown in chap. 32.

652
The Broader Issues

a depression) it is important that the spending be undertaken quickly when most needed. If state instead of federal action were relied upon, each state, in the hope that spending initiated somewhere else would start its own wheels turning, might defer too long the spending needed not only for its own well-being but by other states also. Conversely, if retrenchment of relief measures were to be relied upon to restrict consumption or to hasten a deflationary tendency, quick centralized action would be needed lest each state hold back while waiting for the other to make the first move.

This very cumbersomeness of state and local—as contrasted with the expedition of federal—action, interestingly enough, has sometimes been cited as a reason why relief, as well as other programs, should not be highly centralized. Power to act quickly, it is held, facilitates doing the wrong—no less than the right—thing on a grand scale. While admitting the possibility of this danger, friends of federal action hold it is not insuperable and contend that there is no little merit in the advice said to have been given by a prominent financier who urged his friends to put all their eggs in one basket—and then watch the basket.

Freedom of the Federal Government from Inflexible Debt Limitations

Still another factor that has led to imposing upon the federal government responsibility for relief needs is its freedom from inflexible constitutional or debt limitations which sometimes hamper local and state governmental action.¹ That handicaps imposed upon other levels of government demanded federal action was an argument frequently advanced during the long battle for federal aid for relief in the early 1930’s. In 1932, for example, Donald R. Richberg, whose testimony on another issue has already been quoted, declared to a Senate Committee:

It is just paltering with a serious subject to discuss any relief except the relief by the one agency which has the power to tap the large financial resources in this Nation. . . . I know . . . that the limitations which hedge


In only 10 states, according to this report, was authority to incur debt for the general welfare vested solely in the legislature. Referendum approval was required in 15 states and constitutional amendment in 23 states.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

about the raising of money by local . . . or State governments are such as to make them entirely impotent to meet the needs of the present situation, and that the Federal Government alone has the capacity to tap the resources which are available.¹

Seven years later, in 1939, a House Committee heard a group of mayors and governors ² urge continued federal aid because, as they claimed, limitations upon their own borrowing and taxing powers precluded raising sufficient funds to meet current relief needs. Most of these witnesses admitted, in response to probing by committee members, that the financial condition of their respective cities and states had improved immeasurably since the dark days of 1932-1933. Somewhat embarrassed by these admissions they were further discomfited by questions as to whether, if balanced budgets were good for state and city governments, they might not also be good for the federal government.

In replying to questions like these, New York City’s Mayor La Guardia, while testifying before a House Committee on the federal government’s greater freedom to act, declared:

. . . a city has but limited credit. We are just municipal corporations. We are not sovereign States. We have constitutional borrowing limits. . . . We cannot go beyond those. And every city is right up to the ceiling on that. . . .

. . . the Federal Government has unlimited credit. It has no constitutional tax limitation. It has no constitutional borrowing limitation.³

When Mayor Burton of Cleveland appeared before a Senate Committee in 1938 he described difficulties encountered in Cuyahoga County because of failure, on two occasions, to win statutory majorities in favor of providing welfare funds even though the proposed measure polled approximately 53 per cent of the vote both times.⁴

¹ U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. 1932, p. 341.
² Including Mayor Kelly of Chicago and the governors of Louisiana and Tennessee.
³ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 184.
⁴ In reply to this Chairman Byrnes declared: “. . . the fix we are in is that, there being no prohibition of that kind on the Government of the United States, we have increased our bonded debt. . . . My State has reduced its debt, and my city and county have reduced their debts. That is true throughout the country. . . . And they have been able to do it because the Federal Government . . . has come to their aid and has spent money within the cities, counties, and States that they ordinarily would have had to spend. Their bonds are higher and [to Mayor Burton]
The Broader Issues

Similar pleas for increased federal appropriations for relief, on the ground that city treasuries could not stand the strain, were made to Congress by the United States Conference of Mayors in 1937. In some instances (as in Philadelphia and Detroit) the inability of the city to increase relief expenditures was said to be due to the fact that the city's budget as already established left no leeway for this. In other cities difficulties were blamed upon external restrictions on borrowing and taxing powers.

Among the factors which are frequently held to aggravate the financial plight of cities and states is the contention that state legislatures containing many “up-state” or “down-state” representatives interested in limiting cities and counties in providing funds for unemployment relief, frequently do this because of their failure to grasp the significance of needs existing in urban areas.

Obviously, statutory and even constitutional limitations upon states and their subdivisions are all subject to change, given time and willingness of the parties concerned. Nevertheless, state and county officials in 1939 were still advancing essentially the same arguments they had advanced regarding limitations in 1932-1933, despite admitted improvement in the fiscal condition of states and cities. That the United States Conference of Mayors was at least beginning to realize that the whole issue needed more fundamental study is evident in a memorandum submitted to Congress in 1939. While declaring that federal provision for the unemployed was “the only way they can be cared for,” the document admitted that charter and constitutional limitations can be changed. It added, however, “such changes would at the best take time,” and cities, “restricted and hamstrung by con-

your bonds are, too.”—U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3rd Session. 1938, vol. 1, p. 590.

1 Notably Camden, Trenton, Louisville, Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Des Moines, and Dallas.

2 In 1929 the gross debt of the federal government (16.93 billion dollars) was but slightly larger than that (16.76 billion dollars) for states and localities combined. By 1931, however, state and local governmental debt rose to a total of 19 billion dollars (an increase of 14 per cent) while the federal debt was actually reduced to 16.80 billion. This was the turning point, however, for by 1939 the federal debt had risen by some 140 per cent (to a total of 40.44 billion dollars) while state and local debt remained virtually unchanged. Preliminary data for subsequent years indicate that state and local debts have remained almost stationary whereas federal debt, which rose to some 40 billion dollars in 1939, continued to rise spectacularly as the defense program really got under way.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Institutional and charter restrictions . . . can stand no additional financial burdens . . . until such time as a more equitable and balanced Federal-State-City tax program can be effected.¹

The greater ability of the federal government to raise relief funds through borrowing rather than through imposition of new taxes in a time of economic stagnation has an important bearing upon the effectiveness of relief expenditures as a means of stimulating recovery.

Senators and congressmen frequently attempt to refute claims of those urging the greater financial capacity of the federal government by reminding them that, after all, even federal taxes are paid by those who live in the states, cities, counties, townships, towns, and hamlets of the nation and who are also the payers of local taxes. This is usually admitted, but rebutted with the dual argument that (a) local and state governments frequently raise funds for relief through levies upon real property, commodity sales, or other "regressive" taxes whereas the federal tax structure is more progressive, and that (b) even if states were to adopt progressive tax systems they would still be at a disadvantage because of inability to tax wealth beyond their own borders and because the incidence of need for relief is frequently found in inverse proportion to taxable local and state wealth.²

Though admitting that the federal government is hampered by no debt limitations not subject to change by Congress, there are many who hold that this does not necessarily mean that there are no limits to what it can afford. The mere lack of constitutional or other inflexible limits does not mean, they say, that there are no practical limits beyond which federal spending can go without danger either of national bankruptcy or ruinous inflation. Among warnings on this score which have caused considerable concern is that of the Twentieth Century Fund Committee on Government Credit.³ In 1937, when the debt of the federal government was

¹ Congressional Record, July 24, 1939, p. 9818. A memorandum prepared by the United States Conference of Mayors, "Work Relief and the Immediate Future." (Order of phrases changed.)
² These issues are discussed in the subsequent chapter.
³ This Committee was composed of: Chairman Oswald W. Knauth, president, The Associated Dry Goods Corporation; James W. Angell, professor of economics, Columbia University; Joanna C. Colcord, director, Charity Organization Department, Russell Sage Foundation; George M. Harrison, president, Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks; George M. Putnam, president, New Hampshire Farm Bureau Federation, and Donald R. Richberg, formerly chairman, National Recovery Administration.
approaching what in retrospect looks like a mere 35 billion dollars, this Committee concluded that although neither "the large increase in public debt" nor its size was a "cause for apprehension" yet:

. . . a continuance of deficit financing, although necessary in the depths of a depression, would be both dangerous and unnecessary if carried into a period of recovery. It would be dangerous because continued deficits, in the face of rising industrial activity and national income, would weaken public confidence in the willingness of the government to balance its budget under any conditions. . . .

Nothing except dire emergency should be allowed to interfere with the actual balancing of the budget (except for statutory debt retirement) in the fiscal year 1938. . . . But if . . . as appears not unlikely, the total of ordinary taxes, social security taxes and other levies falls short of meeting our needs, additional revenues consistent with a sound public policy should be provided at this session of Congress of sufficient size to bring the budget into balance.¹

A similar view, typical of those held by organized taxpayers, was that given by John C. Gebhart, director of the National Economy League, who, in 1936, declared:

Every serious inflation has resulted from repeated government deficits and we will not prove an exception to that rule. We have been financing our deficits, not by drawing on private savings, but by the sale of debt to the banks. In the long run this process spells inflation. If our dollar should eventually shrink to 25 cents or even 10 cents, the wage earners of the country, and those now on relief, would suffer most.²

Even in 1931 President Hoover's Organization on Unemployment Relief warned that issuing new bonds for public works


² "Relief and the Budget. An address delivered over the Columbia Broadcasting System, July 22, 1936, p. 7.

In fairness to critics of federal financing of relief programs it must be said that their objections center not only upon the fact that the expenditures themselves are large but also upon the further belief that they are larger than they need to be. This view is based on the conviction that the introduction of federal funds into the relief picture means a standard of relief higher than would otherwise prevail in many localities. These higher standards, obviously, permit larger numbers to qualify for relief, thus increasing relief costs. For these reasons critics urge the withdrawal of federal funds and the return of the relief function, preferably to localities, with the help of states, if necessary. This issue is discussed in some detail in chap. 31.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

“would cause serious declines in the market values of the present outstanding low-yield issues, and thus result in severe losses to the holders of such securities . . . and would result in additional bank failures, and 'impair the market' for corporation and municipal bond issues.”

President Hoover himself in December, 1930, in his message to Congress, declared that “the volume of construction work in the government is already at the maximum limit warranted by financial prudence as a continuing policy. To increase taxation for purposes of construction work defeats its own purpose, as such taxes directly diminish employment in private industry.”

In reply to contentions like these proponents of national responsibility for relief as well as other types of needs point out that it is not the volume of federal expenditures and debt that is important but the way these are handled.

Among those who have taken this view are Alvin H. Hansen, professor of economics at Harvard University, and Guy Greer who, in response to their own question as to how high the public debt of the United States can go before it results in disaster, reply:

Unfortunately the answer cannot be simple and unequivocal; but certainly a great deal higher than most people seem to think. It all depends: principally on the level of the national income and the knowledge and skill of those who direct fiscal policy. In a system of electrical transmission very high voltages may be used if all the apparatus is correctly designed and the technicians know what they are doing. Potentials up to 110,000 volts are common. But a current of 110 volts might play havoc if used by an ignoramus in a circuit designed for something like the 6 volts of an automobile battery . . .

. . . an internal debt for the United States comparable to what England has been able to manage without difficulty on at least two occasions would run to well over 200 billion dollars. Indeed, a much higher debt would be quite manageable, provided only that we succeeded in obtaining, year after year, approximately full utilization of our material and human resources. . . .

Looking ahead into the post-war period, these writers, in the same article already quoted from, declare that “there is no unavoidable danger in public debt so long as it is held to a reasonable

1 AF of L Weekly News, December 26, 1931.
The Broader Issues

ratio with the national income" and that "a reasonable ratio would permit a debt far larger than any we are likely to see, notwithstanding the enormous cost of the war and such additional borrowing as may be necessary afterward to make sure of full utilization of our material and human resources." ¹ Many of the misconceptions regarding the public debt, says Hansen, are due to failure to understand the real nature of public debt because:

A public debt, internally held, is not like a private debt. It has none of the essential earmarks of a private debt. The public debt is an instrument of public policy. It is a means to control the national income and, in conjunction with the tax structure, to regulate the distribution of income. . . .

For the individual it is important that his expenditures be kept below, or at least within the limits of, his income. For the state an increase of expenditures may frequently increase the total national income and improve the fiscal position of the state. The individual is concerned exclusively with the effect of his action upon his own business. . . .

In the case of public finance, however, it is quite otherwise. The success or failure of public policy cannot be read from the balance sheet of the public household. It cannot be determined by whether or not debt is being retired or assets accumulated. The success or failure of public policy can be determined only by noting the effect of expenditures, taxes, and loans on the total national income and on how that national income is distributed.²

Fortunately, the nation’s credit seems somehow to have weathered each successive wave of borrowing and appears fully capable of weathering many more. The American people have also taken unprecedented tax levies in stride. Neither drastic modifications in, nor failure to expand, the country’s welfare and security programs necessary to the well-being of millions of Americans appear to be compelled or justified by our present situation.

Elsewhere Professor Hansen has written: "... there are limits to the public debt which, if exceeded, will tend to affect the workability of the economy. But these limits must be conceived of, not in terms of a fixed amount or a static situation, but in terms of a dynamic process. Account must be taken of rates of change and the magnitude of the public debt in relation to other magnitudes, especially the ratio of debt to national income. . . .

"Much of the discussion about the limits of the public debt is wholly unrealistic. There are no rigid and fixed limits. The problem is a manageable one, and can best be taken care of by ensuring that taxation is adequate: (1) to prevent inflation and (2) to provide a reasonably equitable and workable distribution of wealth and income. Within the limits set by these criteria, it is possible to determine, according to varying circumstances, what proportion of public expenditures may advantageously be loan-financed and what proportion should be tax-financed."—Fiscal Policy and Business Cycles. W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1941, pp. 174-175.

¹ P. 500.
² Fiscal Policy and Business Cycles, pp. 185, 140-141.
CHAPTER XXVII
FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY: MORE EQUITABLE SPREADING OF THE COST

TENDENCY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO LEVY TAXES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ABILITY TO PAY

Federal aid for relief, as well as for other public purposes, has repeatedly been urged on the ground that federal taxes, to a greater degree than others, are graduated in accordance with ability to pay. State and local taxes, on the other hand, rest largely upon real estate, commodity sales, and other less equitable bases which do not make proportionately greater demands upon those most able to meet them.\(^1\)

Of the essential justice of levying taxes in accordance with ability to pay, Clarence Heer wrote in 1939:

Most people today believe that the cost of governmental functions, undertaken primarily in the general interest and conferring no measurable special benefits on individuals as such, should be distributed among the citizens in accordance with their respective abilities to pay. It is believed proper to apply the ability principle of taxation even in distributing the costs of governmental services that do confer measurable individual benefits when the services in question are considered vital to the general welfare and when the benefited individuals are unable to pay for the services themselves. Thus, it is believed

\(^1\) Though this policy of distributing relief costs in accordance with ability to pay has a modern ring to it, an English act passed by Parliament as early as 1563 made contributions of householders for relief purposes compulsory and provided for scaling these contributions in accordance with their circumstances. Of this law the Webbs have written: "The bishop of each diocese was authorised to bind any person or persons who 'of his or their froward wilful mind, shall obstinately refuse to give weekly to the relief of the poor according to his or their abilities', under penalty of £10, to appear at the next sessions of the Justices, and if any one refused to be so bound, the bishop might commit him to prison. At their next sessions, the Justices were again to 'charitably and gently persuade and move the said obstinate persons to extend his or their charity towards the relief of the poor'. If any one still refused, the Justices were to impose a tax on him 'according to their good discretions', in default of payment of which, 'together with the arrearages thereof, if any', he might be committed to prison until payment was made. Here, at length, we have, in germ, the legally compulsory and universally payable Poor Rate."—Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, English Local Government: English Poor Law History. Part I: The Old Poor Law. Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1927, pp. 51-52.
The Broader Issues

just and equitable that relief and welfare costs be financed through ability
taxes.\(^1\)

Taxes which have been defended as imposing the heaviest
burdens upon those most able to bear them are personal and cor¬
poration income taxes, inheritance, estate, and gift taxes. Levies
most bitterly condemned as placing an unfair burden on persons
least able to bear them include the general property tax \(^2\) and the
general sales tax.\(^3\)

In view of appraisals of the equity of various types of taxes
it is significant that whereas only 2.1 per cent of state and local
taxes in the fiscal year 1936 came from personal income taxes, and
1.5 per cent from inheritance, estate, and gift taxes, 27 per cent of
federal tax income came from these sources. Furthermore, al¬
though business taxes of one kind or another accounted for only
8 per cent of all state and local taxes they represented 25.1 per
cent of all federal tax collections.

At the other extreme, nearly two-thirds (63.0 per cent) of
state and local taxes were derived from property taxes, whereas
no federal taxes were raised in this way. While taxes on com¬
modities (apart from gasoline) constituted 43.4 per cent of
federal tax income and only 10 per cent of state and local tax col¬
clections, over half of this state and local income was from general

\(^1\) Federal Aid and the Tax Problem. Staff Study no. 4, prepared for the Advisory
Mr. Heer, professor of economics at the University of North Carolina, was one of
three experts retained by Secretary Morgenthau in 1941 to examine the entire field
of federal, state, and local fiscal relations.

\(^2\) In condemnation of the general property tax Carl Shoup of Columbia Univer¬
sity, Roy Blough, University of Cincinnati, and Mabel Newcomer of Vassar (who
collaborated in a study for the Twentieth Century Fund) reported in 1937: “In
common with practically every other observer, past or present, we deplore the obvi¬
ous injustices found under the property tax.”—Facing the Tax Problem. Twentieth

For further criticisms of the general property tax see Federal Aid and the Tax
Problem, by Clarence Heer, pp. 71-72. According to a 1928 estimate by Herbert D.
Simpson, “property taxes absorbed 8½ per cent of the entire net income of classes
with incomes of less than $2,000. . . . On the largest incomes it [the property tax]
amounted to a tax of only 1½ per cent of the net income.”—“Taxation and Its Impli¬
University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1934, p. 58. (At the time Mr. Simpson was
professor of public finance at Northwestern University.)

\(^3\) This undue incidence of the general sales tax upon those in various income groups
is evident from an analysis made in 1934 by Mabel L. Walker. This suggests that a
general sales tax (on food as well as other items of expenditure) would mean, at
a 2 per cent rate, a tax of $12.18 per $1,000 for the income class of $1,000 and under
but would mean a tax of only about 20 cents per $1,000 of income for those whose
incomes were one million dollars or more.—Where the Sales Tax Falls. General
### Table 31—Taxes as Percentage of Consumer Income in the United States, 1938–1939, by Income Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income class</th>
<th>Per cent of consumer income</th>
<th>Federal taxes</th>
<th>State and local taxes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $500</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 to 999</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 to 1,499</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500 to 1,999</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 to 2,999</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,000 to 4,999</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 to 9,999</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 to 14,999</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 to 19,999</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 and over</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Sales taxes which the federal government did not rely upon at all.

It has recently been shown by a report published by the Temporary National Economic Committee established by Congress that the actual net result of federal tax levies (at least for the year 1938–1939) was that they absorbed materially higher proportions of the incomes of those in the high income groups than of those in the lower brackets. State and local taxes, on the other hand, showed no similar tendency. Such a showing, of course, came as no surprise to students of tax problems.

Significant data from the study just referred to are reproduced in Table 31. As may be noted, federal taxes in 1938–1939 were

1 Though commodity taxes loomed relatively large among sources of federal tax revenue it is significant that they were in great measure derived from liquor and tobacco from which, in 1936, came 25.7 per cent of federal tax income but only 3.5 per cent of the state and local income. Other selected commodities taxed by the federal government included lubricating oils, motor vehicles and accessories, theater admissions, club dues, playing cards, matches, toilet preparations, jewelry, radio sets, mechanical refrigerators, sporting goods, firearms and ammunition, which, unlike articles taxed by general sales taxes, were thought to constitute comparatively larger proportions of the budgets of higher than of lower income groups.—Heer, Clarence, Federal Aid and the Tax Problem, p. 36; see also his Table 7, p. 34.

2 Temporary National Economic Committee, Who Pays the Taxes. Monograph 3, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1941, p. 6. The report from which these data are taken (and which was prepared in the Industrial Economics Division of the Department of Commerce) carries its own warning with respect to its "exploratory" nature and urges that the results be regarded as "tentative."
The Broader Issues

estimated to have taken about 9.2 per cent of all incomes. However, it was not until the $10,000 to $15,000 income class was reached that the proportion absorbed by federal taxes was more than the average for incomes of all classes. State and local taxes, on the contrary, absorbed some 11 per cent of the incomes in all classes, but took more than this proportion out of incomes of less than $500 and took a smaller proportion than this out of most classes of income in the higher brackets.

Whereas the proportion of incomes of $20,000 and over absorbed by federal taxes was nearly three times the proportion for all income classes, the proportion of incomes of $20,000 or more going for state and local taxes was actually smaller than the proportion of all incomes going for such taxes. In fact, the proportion of incomes of less than $500 given up for state and local taxes was approximately 32 per cent higher than the proportion paid from incomes of $20,000 and over.

Among prominent national leaders who have advocated larger federal responsibility for relief because such a step would be likely to impose the financial burden upon those most able to bear it the following may be noted: Gifford Pinchot, one-time governor of Pennsylvania, Frank Murphy, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (formerly Attorney General of the United States who, during the depression, was mayor of Detroit and later governor of Michigan), Senator Costigan of Colorado, and one-time Senator L. B. Schwellenbach of Washington.

1 Governor Pinchot, in testimony before a Senate Committee in 1932, urged that even if it were possible to meet existing needs through state and local taxes, these should not be relied on since they took money primarily from “the little fellows,” thus cutting down consumption, whereas through federal taxes “the people who ought to meet this problem can be made to meet it.”—U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1932, pp. 217, 219.

2 In an address before the American Public Welfare Association, Senator Schwellenbach in 1938 said that if a larger share of the burden of unemployment relief were shifted back upon states and localities “a back-breaking burden would be saddled upon the small home owners and real estate owners of America. This is a situation which the Federal government must not permit to develop.”—As quoted in the Public Welfare News, vol. 6, no. 7, July, 1938.

This same desire to avoid loading upon property owners further relief costs was one of the considerations which, in 1933, led to nationalizing responsibility for unemployment assistance in Great Britain. Of this John D. Millett writes: “Labour opposition to the Poor Law was reinforced by the concern of property owners over local rates. If the great numbers of the unemployed were to be added to those other destitute aided by the public assistance authorities, the necessitated increase in rates would have a severely deflationary effect on property values. The more varied financial resources of the central government together with the conviction that as a social
More recently, Neil H. Jacoby, professor in the School of Business at the University of Chicago, and one-time chairman of the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, declared before a special committee of the House:

As between the Federal and State Governments it seems clear that most of the States are in no position to finance their present relief loads through equitable personal taxes. Many have been forced, through constitutional or practical limitations, to adopt sales taxes which lay a heavy burden on the poor. . . . The Federal government must take the lead in providing better coordination of the national fiscal structure, and with its greater taxing powers and credit resources provide adequate funds from equitable revenue sources for the efficient performance of governmental functions.

Emphasizing this same point of view Alvin H. Hansen has written:

. . . the expanding functions of government, particularly in the field of social welfare, place upon the states financial burdens beyond their capacity without resort to heavy consumption taxes. This form of taxation runs precisely counter to the main objective of fiscal policy—that of securing reasonably full employment. Thus, in recent years, many states have been compelled to levy sales taxes in order to provide old-age assistance and other expanding social services. . . .

This situation will sooner or later necessitate a thorough reorganization and reallocation of functions and taxing powers. . . . The federal government has been able to step into the breach through the assumption of a major part of the burden of urban and agricultural relief and grants-in-aid to local public works projects. The public debt of states and municipalities has accordingly, for the country as a whole, ceased to rise. The credit position of the local governments has thereby been strengthened materially. But while we are not confronted with an immediate crisis, the cumulative effect of and economic problem unemployment could be combated only on a national scale were arguments for lodging all, or almost all, of the unemployment cost onto the national Exchequer. —The British Unemployment Assistance Board. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1940, p. 22.

1 U. S. House Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens (Hearings Pursuant to H. Res. 63 and H. Res. 491), Interstate Migration. 76th Congress, 3d Session. 1940, Part III, p. 835.

During the period when the federal government was making loans to cities and states for unemployment relief and when the desirability of making federal grants was under discussion, Simeon E. Leland, professor of government finance at the University of Chicago, told a Senate Committee: "Federal aid should not be granted on condition of repayment by extraction of taxes from people who have little or no ability to pay, which are those now reached by State and local government, but the tax should be placed on the entire nation where the ability to adjust the tax system, the capacity to pay, practically alone exists, and the job should be placed upon the Federal Government rather than upon State and local governments."—U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 5125), Federal Aid for Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 2d Session. 1933, Part I, p. 244.
The Broader Issues

growing social services, financed largely by consumption taxes, is to place an increasing drag upon economic expansion and full employment of our resources. ¹

Just as those who favor the principle of levying taxes in accordance with ability to pay have urged federal participation in the financing of relief programs, so is it to be expected that persons who oppose this basis of taxation should oppose federal cooperation in this field. That this was, in fact, the case during the Hoover administration is apparent from an observation which, according to an official WPA release, was made by Senator Walsh of Massachusetts in March, 1931. “Not a single bill for adequate relief,” he declared, “will pass this Congress, and the country might as well know it, because of the determination of the Administration that those who pay large income taxes must not be burdened with relief obligations.” ² At about the same time, Charles Warren, Assistant Attorney General of the United States during the Wilson regime, wrote:

There is . . . one great and fundamental objection to . . . statutes providing National Government funds for local relief—that they are part of an increasing movement in this country to redistribute private wealth by Legislative action. The bald fact must be recognized that the real motive underlying them is the desire to shift tax burdens from one class in the community to another. This type of legislation is an attempt by the representatives of the rural States to load the burden of paying for local or class needs in these States and communities, upon the property owners of the urban States—an attempt to make the income tax payers and the inheritance tax payers of other States assume the burden of paying for benefits conferred upon the land tax payers in the favored States.³

More recently, a report has been published by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States “in effectuation of Chamber policy declarations.” In view of all that has been said about the more equitable nature of federal as opposed to state and local taxes, this report is of more than passing interest. Urging “substantial

² WPA Release 4-1346, October 18, 1936.
³ Congress as Santa Claus. Michie Co., Charlottesville (Va.), 1932, p. 136. In retrospect, it is interesting to note that one of the arguments advanced during the 1830’s against the establishment of public schools which are now one of the great bulwarks of our democratic society was that they would prove a means for redistribution of wealth. “The scheme of universal equality in education,” declared the National Gazette in 1830, “. . . would be a compulsory application of the means of the richer, for the direct use of the poorer classes; and so far an arbitrary division of property among them.”—August 19, 1830.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

withdrawal of the federal government from the relief field” the report continues:

. . . the federal government should release to the states part or all of certain revenue sources which it has preempted, including such taxes as the estate tax which properly belongs to the states. It is to be noted that the Chamber’s Committee on Federal Finance has urged substantial modification of federal levies on estates and on incomes as well as repeal of certain federal excises with a view to increasing the tax field open to state governments.¹

Going even farther, this report urges that “the federal government’s function should be limited to financial assistance in those situations where state and local resources, not necessarily measured by a given tax system, are clearly inadequate.” ² Thus, the Chamber urges not only that the federal government relinquish certain revenue sources (such as estate and excise taxes) in favor of states which would be given larger relief responsibilities, but also that such federal funds as are granted to states be not scaled in accordance with a state’s fiscal capacity as measured by estate or income taxes (which the federal government might relinquish) or by any other specified type of tax.

Recommendations of this type were furthered, doubtless, by realization that President Roosevelt and other administration leaders have advocated that state and local no less than federal taxes should be scaled in accordance with ability to pay. In an address at the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy, for example, the President urged that instead of focusing attention on the need for federal grants for general relief, attention should rather be directed to (a) the importance of increasing income among low income groups and (b) the need for levying state and local taxes “in accordance with ability to pay.” ³

In view of the more varied tax resources available to states than to local governmental units it is noteworthy that by far the greatest proportion of the cost of the WPA program not provided by the federal government is borne by local funds. The tendency of the WPA to deal directly with local governmental units effec-

² Ibid., p. 7. (Italics not in the original.)
³ Address of the President broadcast from the White House in connection with the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy. Washington, January 19, 1940, pp. 4-5.
The Broader Issues
tively short-circuits the states and has relieved them of responsibility for contributing to the cost of the WPA program. This is all the more noteworthy in view of the importance attached to state responsibility under the Social Security Act which requires that the state must not only assure effective administration of state programs but must also contribute to their cost. Similarly, in the vast unoccupied field of general relief, the federal government has done nothing to assure the assumption of responsibility by either the national or state governments which are best able to meet the costs equitably. Thus, the very nature of the WPA program and that of federal relief policy in general have imposed a serious burden on local governments that are very largely dependent upon taxes which, tax experts agree, are regressive and inequitable.

Broader Tax Base of the Federal Government

Though much can undoubtedly be done to revise state and local taxes in accordance with ability to pay, such revision would require considerable time—especially where constitutional changes are involved—and would not solve two serious problems: the inability of state and local governments, because of their restricted jurisdictions, to prevent tax avoidance; and the uneven distribution of wealth throughout the United States, particularly in relation to relief needs.

With respect to the first of these problems Clarence Heer, in a summary of what he termed “insuperable obstacles” to be overcome by state and local governments attempting to establish more equitable tax systems, has written:

. . . radical reform of the State and local tax structure is blocked by the wide differences that exist in the respective economic situations of the various States. These economic differences make it impossible for the individual States to harmonize their systems of taxation in the interest of Nation-wide uniformity. The lack of Nation-wide uniformity . . . coupled with the mobility of certain tax sources, produces a competitive situation among the States which inhibits their individual efforts in the direction of reform. Local jurisdictions cannot afford to give up the property tax as their chief source of revenue, since real estate is practically the only source that is immobile enough to withstand the inevitable interlocal differentials in rates of levy.

The extent to which state agencies have contributed to the cost of WPA projects is discussed in chap. 5.

Federal Aid and the Tax Problem, pp. 72-73.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

In similar vein Joseph P. Harris, professor of political science at the University of Washington, and one-time assistant director of the Committee on Economic Security, once declared:

The financial limitations of State and local units of government, and the consequent need of Federal aid in order to finance adequately old-age assistance, aid to children, and other welfare activities related to economic security are clearly indicated. Because of the very great practical limitations, upon State taxation, as well as State constitutional limitations, even the wealthier States are having great difficulties in raising needed revenues. The superior position of the Federal Government as a tax gatherer is at once apparent. It is not hampered by State boundary lines, or competition between States; it has an extremely broad taxing power under the Constitution. It is the only unit of government which can effectively tax according to ability to pay, with jurisdiction reaching to the entire country.¹

In retrospect, it is significant to recall that the ability of the federal government to levy taxes without regard to state lines has been one of the primary considerations urged in favor of national responsibility for relief needs since, from the onset of the 1929 depression, it has been obvious that the need and the resources required to meet it were frequently found in inverse ratio to each other. To meet this situation, Donald R. Richberg, demanding federal aid for relief, declared:

A national taxing program is the only program which can reach the wealth which is available and ought to be put to this service.

I do not understand the philosophy which seems to assume that . . . wealth in New York, for example, is peculiarly the wealth of the State of New York, because, as a matter of fact, the great financial centers and the great commercial centers and great manufacturing centers accumulate their wealth from the entire country and they simply happen to be storehouses in New York and Chicago and Pittsburgh and elsewhere of wealth which has been taken from the entire population and there is no way of sending any part of that back to an emergency service for the whole population except to tax the wealth . . . where it is found.²

The one section of the United States to which considerations like these are particularly applicable is the South where already serious problems arising from the lack of wealth are further


² U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. 1932, pp. 342, 341.


The Broader Issues

aggravated by outside control of much of the wealth and resources it does have. Of this, the National Emergency Council in a report to the President in 1938 declared:

Lacking capital of its own the South has been forced to borrow from outside financiers, who have reaped a rich harvest in the form of interest and dividends. At the same time it has had to hand over the control of much of its business and industry to investors from wealthier sections.

The efforts of Southern communities to increase their revenues and to spread the tax burden more fairly, have been impeded by the vigorous opposition of interests outside the region which control much of the South's wealth. Moreover, tax revision efforts have been hampered in some sections by the fear that their industries would move to neighboring communities which would tax them more lightly—or even grant them tax exemption for long periods.

So much of the profit from Southern industries goes to outside financiers, in the form of dividends and interest, that State income taxes would produce a meager yield in comparison with similar levies elsewhere.

When Mayor Richard W. Reading of Detroit appeared before a Senate Committee in 1938 he declared that, although various proponents urged that it would be better to hand the unemployment relief problem back to the states and localities, this would not be practicable for his city because, as he said, "we have in Detroit many wealthy men whom the Government can reach by taxation and get revenue, where we cannot do that by local taxation."

Similar testimony was given before a conference of the American Public Welfare Association when a spokesman, after describing the relatively satisfactory welfare program worked out in a given state, added:

This same state, however, finds itself faced with the problem of financing, since most of its industries are controlled by financial interests in New York City, with the result that employment and the source of public revenues remain in the hands of out-of-state persons. There has developed, consequently, a feeling that the federal government must step in to return to the state some of the money which is lost in the form of industrial profits.

Raising funds on a national basis has been held to be indispensable not only to assure an equitable distribution of the costs

---

1 Report on Economic Conditions of the South. Washington, pp. 49, 23. (Order of paragraphs changed.)
2 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session, 1938, vol. 1, p. 604.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

of needed services but also to provide the necessary funds “with a minimum of expense and inconvenience to the taxpayer”; to reduce to a minimum “tax avoidance or evasion”; to keep down costs incident to assessing, collecting, and otherwise administering tax provisions; and finally, to avoid “economic repercussions of such kind as to nullify the intended effects of public spending.”

In the prevention of such repercussions the federal government, because of its control over the Federal Reserve banking system, over credits, banks, interstate business and commerce, is in a much better situation than are state or local governments. Furthermore, the federal government can act effectively by spending for relief or other public purposes and can gear tax policies with controls over consumer spending for materials or products needed by the government in time of war or other national emergency.

In an attack upon those who oppose the principle of national responsibility in the hope of escaping the ubiquitous federal tax gatherer, Nels Anderson of the national WPA staff in 1938 declared:

The best minds of industry and business know very well how far-reaching are the operations and the organization of the economic system, which is the reason many industrial leaders favor local relief. It would serve them better to have unemployment relief operate on a local basis, while the wealth-taking operation of industry functions on a national basis. What better method could be found for dodging the burden of caring for the unemployed of private industry?

Speaking specifically of the importance of national responsibility for unemployment and other relief needs in Canada, the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations declared that the burden of relief expenditures from 1930 to 1937 “was very unevenly distributed,” and that:

Unemployment was concentrated in metropolitan communities and one-industry towns, while agricultural relief was concentrated in the three Prairie Provinces, especially Saskatchewan. In 1935, for example, 53 per cent of the number on relief were concentrated in urban and metropolitan communities comprising some 32 per cent of the population, and the total direct relief costs in these communities were 75 per cent of the total for all Canada. In the same year 20.8 per cent of the total relief expenditures were incurred

---

1 For a discussion of these and other desirable objectives of tax systems see Heer, Clarence, Federal Aid and the Tax Problem, pp. 45, 50.

2 WPA Release 4-1757, September 8, 1938.
The Broader Issues

in the metropolitan area of Montreal which had only 9.6 per cent of the total population of Canada; 19.18 per cent were spent in the metropolitan area of Toronto which had 7.6 per cent of the total population; and 15.5 per cent in eight other Ontario urban areas with 7 per cent of the total population. The burden also often fell very unequally on different municipalities in the same region, and even within the same metropolitan community. Exclusive residential suburban municipalities escaped with virtually no additional relief burdens. Working-class municipalities, on the other hand, in many cases became completely bankrupt because of the huge load which suddenly fell upon them at the same time that real property values were shrinking and taxes on real estate were becoming increasingly difficult to collect.

On the basis of facts like these, the Commission finally arrived at conclusions which, because of their applicability to conditions in the United States as well as in Canada, are presented here at some length. These were as follows:

Under the conditions of local responsibility the appearance of a serious problem of unemployment or destitution in any province means that large additional expenditures have to be met out of sharply falling revenues. The taxation powers of the provinces and municipalities are limited by the constitution, and in many cases they are unable to use effectively such powers as they have because of the tendency of the national surpluses or large net incomes to concentrate in certain areas. These governments are virtually forced to make all manner of imposts on consumption, on costs of production and on small incomes; imposts which are detrimental to business, discourage investment and render even worse the situation which they are trying to meet. If they fall back on continuous borrowing, their credit is soon destroyed. And they lack sufficient power over economic activities to enable them successfully to alleviate the burden or to promote recovery.

The Dominion is the only government which can meet, in an equitable and efficient manner, the large fluctuating expenditures due to unemployment. Its unlimited powers of taxation give it access to all the incomes which are produced on a national basis regardless of where they may happen to appear, and it can obtain the needed revenues therefrom in a manner which is the least harmful to welfare and productive enterprises. With its control over the monetary system the Dominion is able to finance the temporary deficits that may arise from sudden increases in expenditure without suffering such a drastic weakening of credit as occurs when the budgets of local governments get seriously out of balance.


These recommendations were wholly consonant with proposals which had previously been incorporated in a research report presented to the Commission itself. This report had declared: "The highly variable liability of unemployment aid, which may be practically non-existent one year and a major burden another, makes it a logical responsibility for the government with the widest and most resilient system of taxation. The municipalities, if they are to preserve their financial integrity, should have non-variable liabilities as far as possible because of their rigid tax-basis.

"The size of the financial costs of unemployment aid requires a new approach to
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

What is said here of the Dominion of Canada, the provinces, and municipalities, might also be said of the United States, the states, and lesser political subdivisions.

Uneven Distribution of Resources and Need

Differences in the Extent of Unemployment

One of the most useful indexes of state needs and resources, if it were available, would be reliable comparative data indicating what proportion of the labor force in any given state was employed and what proportion unemployed. Though reliable data of this type are extremely scarce, such as are available reveal wide variations in the incidence of unemployment in the several sections of the United States.

The Enumerative Check Census of 1937, for example, revealed that throughout the country as a whole approximately 20 per cent of the total labor force was either totally unemployed, or was employed by the WPA, NYA, or CCC. Although state data (as already noted) were not regarded as sufficiently reliable as a basis for interstate comparisons, data compiled on a regional basis are thought to be usable in this way despite the fact that errors in sampling may make even regional differences somewhat greater or smaller than are here indicated.

In the Middle Atlantic states, totally unemployed and emergency workers (as shown in Table 27) represented 23.7 per cent of the labor force. This rate exceeded the national average by about 18.5 per cent and exceeded the lowest rate (that in the West North Central states) by approximately 44 per cent.

Preliminary reports of the 1940 census revealed that 15.2 per cent of the nation's total labor force was unemployed during the week March 24-30, 1940. The range, however, was from only 8.8 per cent in North Carolina to 21.5 per cent in New Mexico.

public finance if solvency is to be maintained, namely, the balancing of budgets over the period of the business cycle. . . . It seems reasonable to expect that if one government has the responsibility for unemployment, it will stand a better chance of realizing the necessity of providing for the bad years in the good and of formulating its policy accordingly, than will nine provincial governments and a host of municipal governments."—Grauer, A. E. Public Assistance and Social Insurance: A Study Prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. J. O. Patenaude, Ottawa, 1939, Appendix 6, pp. 30-31.

That is, was seeking work or was engaged in emergency employment exclusive of those receiving NYA student aid.

672
In seven^1 states the total number unemployed (in proportion to the total labor force) was from 30 to 38 per cent below the average for the United States as a whole. At the opposite extreme were six states^2 in which the proportion of the total labor force reported as unemployed was from approximately 25 to 50 per cent higher than the United States average, the proportion in New Mexico exceeding the national average by approximately 53 per cent. The distribution of states in accordance with the percentage of the labor force unemployed at the time of the 1940 census is shown in Table 32.

^1 The District of Columbia, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Virginia.

^2 New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and West Virginia.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Differences in Numbers in Need of Relief

Although unemployment causes a vast amount of need among the families of those who have no jobs, still not all those who are unemployed are in need. It has often been held, therefore, that the number of persons or families actually receiving relief in the several states provides a better basis than data on unemployment for analysis of state differences. Unfortunately, however, the number of families or persons given one kind of relief or another in the various states, though frequently used, is no really reliable gauge by which to measure state needs since state and local policies (many of which are directly attributable to the lack of resources within a state) often result in denying relief and even WPA employment to families even though they may be in desperate need. It is this fact which explains the apparent anomaly that it is often the relatively wealthy rather than the poor states in which the proportion of the population in receipt of relief runs highest.

In the absence of better and more comprehensive data on relief needs official estimates have been made from time to time of the number of workers eligible for but not given WPA employment. Thus, by combining these estimates with the numbers employed by the WPA at the time to which the estimates apply one can arrive at a rough approximation of differences in conditions thought to prevail in the several states.

According to estimates as of February, 1940, the total number of workers employed by or eligible for employment by the WPA throughout the United States represented about 263 per 10,000 population. This proportion varied widely from state to state, ranging from less than 150 in two states to 350 or more in five. Table 33 shows the distribution of states by the estimated number of eligible workers per 10,000 population in February, 1940.

Differences in Per Capita Income Payments

If differences among the respective states are measured by variations in average per capita income payments, it is found that

---

1 According to WPA officials themselves, these estimates are (as explained in some detail in chap. 25) none too reliable and comparisons between states are of limited value because of great differences in the statistical material with which to
The Broader Issues

whereas the average for the United States as a whole in 1939 was approximately $536, there were three states\(^1\) in which the average was less than half this amount. In six states\(^2\) the average was but 50 to 60 per cent of the national average.

At the opposite extreme were three states\(^3\) in which the per capita income was at least half again as much as the United States average. In another five states\(^4\) the average was from 19 to 50 per cent above that for the nation as a whole. Per capita income in Delaware was four times that in Mississippi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible workers per 10,000 population</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 150</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 to 199</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 to 249</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 to 299</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 to 349</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 and over</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) For source of data see Table 29.

Table 34 shows for both 1937 and 1939 the states in which average per capita income payments fell within the limits set forth.\(^5\)

Differences in Distribution of Consumer Income

Wide as they are, variations in average per capita income payments in the several states show nothing about existing disparities in the way income is distributed within the states. Estimates made

\(^1\) Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas.
\(^2\) Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and New Mexico.
\(^3\) New York, Delaware, and Nevada.
\(^4\) Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Illinois, and California.
\(^5\) Because of technical difficulties involved in their computation, estimates of per capita income payments in New Jersey and the District of Columbia are not available. For this reason the number of states for which per capita income payments are presented in this chapter totals only 47.
### TABLE 34.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY ANNUAL INCOME PER INHABITANT, 1937 AND 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual income per inhabitant</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Number of states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>$200 to 299</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala. Miss.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ala. Miss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ark. N. C.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ark. S. C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ky. Tenn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>300 to 399</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La. S. D. Va.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ky. Okla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. D. Va.</td>
<td></td>
<td>N. M. Va.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. D.</td>
<td></td>
<td>N. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>400 to 499</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fla. Nebr.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ariz. Maine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho Texas</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fl. Mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind. Utah Vt.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Idaho Nebr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa W. Va.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ind. Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kan. Vt.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iowa Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>500 to 599</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariz. N. H.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Colo. N. H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mont. Wis.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mont. Wis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>600 to 699</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill. Ohio Wash.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ill. R. I. Wash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>700 to 799</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conn.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Calif. Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>800 and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calif. Nev.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Del. N. Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del. Nev.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On the basis of extensive studies conducted by the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that families receiving incomes of less than $500 a year, in 1935–1936, represented approximately 14 per cent of all families in the United States. In the New England region, however, the propor-
The Broader Issues

tion of families falling in this income group was only half the national average. In the Southern region, on the other hand, no less than 23 per cent of all families were estimated to have incomes of less than $500. This meant that, in the Southern region, the proportion of families having annual incomes of less than $500 was more than three times that in the New England region. Pertinent data from these studies are presented in Table 35.

Even within regions the proportion of families having very low or very high incomes varied widely from place to place. Within the New England region, for example, families having annual incomes of less than $500 represented only about 9 per cent of the families in New Britain, Connecticut, but represented approximately 18 per cent of all families in Haverhill, Massachusetts, a city of approximately the same size as New Britain.

Comparison between two middle-sized cities in the North Central region reveals that although only about 13 out of every 100 families in Muncie, Indiana, had incomes of less than $500 in 1935–1936, approximately 21 out of every 100 families in Dubuque, Iowa, fell in this group. Among small cities in the North Central region was Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, where approximately 17 per cent of the families received incomes of less than $500 while in Mattoon, Illinois, this proportion ran to slightly more than 28 per cent.

In the Southern region, the proportion of families having incomes of less than $500 a year in 1935–1936 was estimated at some 26 per cent of all the families in Gastonia, North Carolina, but constituted approximately 49 per cent of all those in Albany, Georgia—a city of approximately the same size as Gastonia.

If the proportions of families in high rather than in low income groups in the various cities are compared, wide differences may

---

1 These studies were made through a WPA project conducted in co-operation with the National Resources Committee and the Central Statistical Board. The findings of the study and estimates made on the basis of these findings are reported in Consumer Incomes in the United States: Their Distribution in 1935-36. National Resources Committee, Government Printing Office, Washington, August, 1938. The term “family,” as used in this study, meant “two or more persons living together as one economic unit, having a common or pooled income and living under a common roof.” Income was defined as “the total net money income received during the year by all members of the economic family, plus the value of certain items of nonmoney income.” Nonmoney income included such items as the net value of the occupancy of an owned home and rent received as pay, the estimated value of direct relief received in kind and the net imputed value of food produced at home by farm and village families for their own use.—Ibid., pp. 40-41.
TABLE 35.—PROPORTIONS OF TOTAL FAMILIES WITH LOW AND WITH HIGH ANNUAL INCOME, 1935-1936, FIVE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS AND SELECTED CITIES IN EACH REGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and city</th>
<th>Type of city</th>
<th>Per cent of families in income class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Under $500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Britain</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haverhill</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallingford</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Metropolis</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Metropolis</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muncie</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Castle</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubuque</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver Falls</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connellsville</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logansport</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattoon</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastonia</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain and Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butte</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billings</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen-Hoquiam</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellingham</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Sources of data: National Resources Committee, Consumer Incomes in the United States: Their Distribution in 1935-36, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938; and U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, reports of the consumer purchases studies, 1935-36, in the specified cities. The geographic regions are those used in the source material and include more areas than the cities reported here.*
The Broader Issues

also be noted. Although only 1.8 per cent of all families in the Mountain and Plains region were estimated to have received incomes of $5,000 or more, the proportion in the New England region was 3.5 per cent, nearly twice that in the former area. Again, wide variations may be noted within regions and even between cities of nearly the same size. In Pueblo, Colorado, less than one-half of one per cent of all families had incomes of $5,000 or more. Yet, in Butte, Montana, another middle-sized city in the same region, the proportion was slightly more than four times that in Pueblo! In Columbia, South Carolina, a middle-sized city in the Southern region the percentage of families having incomes of $5,000 or more was just twice that in Mobile, Alabama, a city of comparable size.

Differences in Estimated Tax-Paying Ability

The great disparities in income distribution among the 48 states make it clear why the friends of federal participation in the financing of relief programs have urged this as a means of equalizing existing differences. It is clear, too, why they have said that even if state tax systems were to be revised so that they would impose relatively heavier burdens upon those most able to pay, this could not, because of the unequal distribution of income among the several states, mean any real improvement in the situation.

Concrete illustrations of just what might be expected to happen even if all the states adopted a uniform and progressive tax system, are provided by estimates that have been made of the amounts such a system might be expected to yield in each state.¹ According to the estimates made, the hypothetical tax system envisioned would, in 1935, have yielded an average of $21.18 for every man, woman, and child in the United States. In seven states,² however, the yield was estimated at less than $10 per capita.

In two jurisdictions—Delaware and the District of Columbia

¹ The tax structure here applied to the various states consisted of a personal income tax, real estate tax, business income tax, stock transfer tax, a severance tax, and a corporation organization tax. See Mort, Paul R., and Lawler, Eugene S., and associates, Principles and Methods of Distributing Federal Aid for Education. Staff Study no. 5, prepared for the Advisory Committee on Education. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939, pp. 46-53.
² Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

—this uniform tax system was estimated to be capable of bringing in more than $45 per capita.

The distribution of states in accordance with their estimated tax yield is shown in Table 36.

**TABLE 36.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY ESTIMATED COMBINED YIELD OF SIX SELECTED TAXES PER INHABITANT, 1935⁸

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated yield per inhabitant</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $10.00</td>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14.99</td>
<td>Arizona, New Mexico, North Carolina</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oklahoma, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24.99</td>
<td>Maryland, Montana</td>
<td>Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 29.99</td>
<td>California, Connecticut, Massachusetts</td>
<td>Rhode Island, Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 34.99</td>
<td>New Jersey, New York, . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44.99</td>
<td>Nevada, New York, . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 and over</td>
<td>Delaware, Dist. of Columbia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Delaware, Dist. of Columbia</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁸ The six taxes are: personal income tax, real estate tax, business income tax, stock transfer tax, severance tax, and corporation organization tax. Source of data: Mort, Paul R., Lawler, Eugene S., and associates, Principles and Methods of Distributing Federal Aid for Education. Staff Study 5, prepared for Advisory Committee on Education. Government Printing Office, 1939, pp. 46-52.

**Differences in Federal WPA Expenditures in Relation to State and Local Tax Collections**

The importance of using federal funds to compensate for the wide differences among the several states in need and resources available to meet that need is clearly apparent in comparisons.
The Broader Issues

of WPA expenditures with state and local tax collections. For the country as a whole, WPA expenditures in fiscal 1940 represented approximately 17 per cent of all taxes collected by state and local governments. Thus, if the states and localities in 1940 had paid from their own tax receipts all the costs met by the WPA this would have required, on the average, 17 out of every 100 dollars collected. In Maine, New York, and Maryland, however, this would have absorbed fewer than 10 of every 100 dollars. In South Carolina, Alabama, and New Mexico, on the other hand, WPA expenditures represented between 30 and 40 per cent of all state and local tax collections, and in Arkansas amounted to no less than 44.5 per cent. The distribution of states in accordance with the proportion of WPA expenditures, from federal funds, to all state and local taxes is shown in Table 37.

Thus it may be seen that without federal contributions a work-relief program providing earnings comparable with those paid by the WPA in 1940 would have imposed tremendous additional financial burdens upon state and local governments and, in proportion to all taxes collected by such governments, would have meant materially greater burdens for some states than for others.

Relationship of Resources to Needs

Although there are differences in state needs and resources, it does not necessarily follow from this fact alone that the federal government should step in to help level existing unevenness in the incidence of resources and need. Federal participation in this area might, for example, be rendered unnecessary if states having relatively great needs were those possessing relatively great resources also. However, reliance upon the chance that a state's resources will neatly match its needs appears to most authorities to be wholly unwarranted. Rather than to leave matters in the lap of the gods, therefore, it is almost unanimously agreed that it is better to rely upon the federal government to help strike a balance between the need that exists in a given state and the resources available to meet that need.

If, as suggested here, the federal government should assume the role of evening-up interstate differences in the incidence of resources and need, one might well ask what actual experience with a federally operated program like that of the WPA shows with respect to the importance of such a role. Unfortunately, the lack
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>State and local tax collections (million dollars)</th>
<th>WPA expenditures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amount (million dollars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>8,494.5</td>
<td>1,448.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>379.5</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>143.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1,468.8</td>
<td>137.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>495.5</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>635.8</td>
<td>112.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>452.0</td>
<td>102.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>196.6</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>619.0</td>
<td>119.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>340.2</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>207.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>190.9</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>153.7</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>190.7</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>113.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>128.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>114.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>116.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>102.9</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>294.4</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The Broader Issues**

**TABLE 37.—Continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>State and local tax collections (million dollars)</th>
<th>WPA expenditures</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount (million dollars)</td>
<td>Per cent of tax collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>111.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>627.6</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a Not available.

of reliable and comparable state data, particularly with respect to the extent of need in the several states, makes it impossible accurately to measure the degree to which the WPA program has helped to equalize differences among the several states. Such data as are available, however, clearly suggest that the WPA has gone far toward such an equalization. That this is the case may be seen from comparisons of the incidence of general relief cases (i.e., the number of cases granted general relief per 10,000 population) and the incidence of WPA employment in states in which average per capita income payments are high as compared with states in which they are low.

Directly contrary to what the uninitiated might think—since it would seem logical that in the “poor” states the proportion of people granted relief would be higher than in the “rich” states—the states in which per capita income payments are high are those in which the incidence of general relief is also high, not because relief is not needed in the “poorer” states but because it is not available. Analysis of data for 1939 clearly reveals that, except in states in which per capita income payments were highest, the larger the average per capita income in any given state, the higher the incidence of general relief was likely to be. This
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

is evident from Table 38 which presents both the number of cases granted general relief and the number employed by the WPA per 10,000 population in states in which average per capita income payments fell within the stated limits.¹

Unlike the incidence of general relief, the incidence of WPA employment in the several states, as shown in Table 38, does not increase with the amount of the state's average per capita income payment.

It will be seen that the average incidence of WPA employment as shown here was actually somewhat higher in the 15 states in which average income payments were under $400, than it was in states in which per capita income payments averaged $700 or more. By contrast, the average incidence of general relief in the states in which per capita incomes averaged $700 or more was several times that in states in which per capita incomes averaged less than $400.

When WPA employment is related not to population but to the proportion of the population which is unemployed it is found to bear a much more direct relationship to average income pay-

¹ Averages for more than one state represent the arithmetic mean of the respective state averages. The number of states for which data are included in this and other tables in this section is only 47 since comparable data on income payments in New Jersey and the District of Columbia are lacking.

684
The Broader Issues

ments. This is clearly apparent in Table 39 and Diagram 7 which present, for the several states, the relationship between the percentage of all unemployed workers employed by the WPA and the average per capita income payment.

The very fact that, as shown in Diagram 8, the incidence of WPA and of other federal employment in the several states is not, like the incidence of general relief, low in the "poor" and high in the "rich" states itself represents a step in the direction of evening-up interstate differences in resources and need. However, various observers have expressed surprise that variations from the average, even among states in the same income class, have been as wide as they have been and that distribution of WPA jobs

TABLE 39.—RELATION OF WPA EMPLOYMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN MARCH, 1940, TO INCOME PER INHABITANT, 47 STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual income per inhabitant (1939)</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
<th>Per cent of unemployed employed by WPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of state rates*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 to $299</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300 to $399</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$400 to $499</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 to $599</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$600 to $699</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$700 to $799</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$800 to $899</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Arithmetic average of rates of states in each income class. For sources of data see Tables 28 and 34.

has not gone farther than it has appeared to go in equalizing interstate differences. That this latter end has not been achieved is attributable in part, at least, to the fact that the WPA is not completely free to provide in any given state or locality as many of its jobs as might be needed there since projects may be undertaken only as state and local governmental bodies initiate them and agree to bear approximately 25 per cent of their cost. Thus, states which might be too poor to pay at least a quarter of the cost of WPA projects cannot benefit from the readiness of the WPA to use federal funds to equalize differences between their needs and resources as opposed to those of other states.

When expenditures for WPA earnings in the several states are
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

related to the average income of the states, the results vary from those obtained through analysis of the incidence of WPA employment. This is attributable to the fact that WPA earnings in the various states are affected not only by the volume of employment but also by differences in wage scales which are usually lower in what might be termed "poorer" states than in "richer" states. Thus, even if the incidence of WPA employment in two states was the same, variations in wage rates would result in different total earnings per inhabitant. Nevertheless, although the absolute difference between expenditures for WPA wages per

DIAGRAM 7.—DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY INCOME PER INHABITANT, 1939, AND BY WPA EMPLOYMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL UNEMPLOYMENT, MARCH, 1940

Numbers in circles in the diagram refer to states as listed below. New Jersey is omitted because of lack of data. District of Columbia is omitted because of its wholly urban population. In the following list the states are arranged in order of the proportion of population which is urban, that is, in places having 2,500 or more inhabitants.

1 Mississippi 13 Georgia 22 Oregon
2 North Dakota 14 Arizona 23 Texas
3 Arkansas 15 Tennessee 24 Minnesota
4 South Carolina 16 Virginia 25 Missouri
5 South Dakota 17 Wyoming 26 Delaware
6 North Carolina 18 Oklahoma 27 Delaware
7 West Virginia 19 Montana 28 Colorado
8 Kentucky 20 Nevada 29 Washington
9 Alabama 21 Nebraska 30 Wisconsin
10 New Mexico 22 Maine 31 Indiana
11 Idaho 23 Louisiana 32 Illinois
12 Vermont 24 Kansas 33 Wisconsin

686
DIAGRAM 8.—STATES HAVING HIGH, MEDIUM, AND LOW RATES OF INCIDENCE OF GENERAL RELIEF CASES, OF WPA EMPLOYEES, AND OF OTHER FEDERAL PROJECT EMPLOYEES, 1939

Figures show the state rates as percentages of the United States rate.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

inhabitant in states having high as opposed to low per capita incomes did not vary greatly from the dollars-and-cents difference in amounts spent for general relief in these two classes of states, the differences in expenditures per inhabitant for general relief were vastly greater when considered in proportion to the actual amounts involved.

For example, in the six states in which per capita income payments in 1939 averaged $700 or more, per capita expenditures for general relief averaged from 42 to 56 times those in states in which income payments averaged less than $300. On the other hand, WPA wages, per inhabitant, in the former group of states were less than twice the amount of those in the latter group.

In Table 40 are presented the average expenditure, per inhabitant, for general relief and that for WPA wages in 1939 in the several states, arranged by size of average per capita income payments.

When total federal expenditures on WPA projects are compared with total state and local tax collections it is found that the former were much higher in proportion to the latter in states in which per capita income payments were low than in states in which average income payments were high. This is evident from Diagram 9 and from Table 41. As may be noted from Table 41, 688

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual income per inhabitant</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
<th>Amount per inhabitant (Average of state rates)</th>
<th>Relative rate (Rate for lowest income class = 1.0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>WPA earnings</td>
<td>General relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 to $299</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$8.06</td>
<td>$.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 to 399</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 to 499</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 599</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.16</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 to 699</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.65</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700 to 799</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.86</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 to 899</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Arithmetic average of rates of states in each income class. For sources of income data see Table 34. Sources of WPA and general relief data: Social Security Bulletin, March, 1940, p. 67.
DIAGRAM 9.—STATES HAVING HIGH, MEDIUM, AND LOW RATES OF ANNUAL INCOME PER INHABITANT, 1939; OF WPA EXPENDITURES FROM FEDERAL FUNDS TO STATE AND LOCAL TAX COLLECTIONS, IN FISCAL YEAR, 1940; AND OF WPA EMPLOYMENT TO UNEMPLOYMENT IN MARCH, 1940
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Federal expenditures for WPA projects in the six states having the lowest average per capita income in 1939 represented about 32 per cent of all state and local tax collections whereas in the six states in which average income payments were highest WPA expenditures represented less than half this proportion of state and local tax collections. Diagram 9 also shows that states having a low average income per inhabitant in 1939 not only had a high ratio between federal WPA expenditures and state and local taxes, but also a relatively large proportion of their unemployed employed on WPA projects in March, 1940.

Were comparisons made of needs and resources among political subdivisions of states rather than of one state as opposed to another, disparities might well be expected to be even greater than those revealed by state data.

If, as proponents of local control sometimes insist, responsibility for relief should rest upon small political units, it is to be expected that (as in New York State where responsibilities for general relief may be assumed by towns rather than by counties) wealthy people living in one section of a political subdivision will attempt to limit their responsibility to the care of needy persons in their own small communities. If they are successful in this they may escape the burden of paying, out of their abundance, any part

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual income per inhabitant (1939)</th>
<th>Number of states</th>
<th>WPA expenditures from federal funds as per cent of tax collections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$200 to $299</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Average of state rates $31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 to 399</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Range of state rates 22.5 to 44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 to 499</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 599</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 to 699</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700 to 799</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 to 899</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) Arithmetic average of rates of states in each income class. For sources of data see Tables 34 and 37.
The Broader Issues

of the cost of helping their less fortunate neighbors across the tracks. Thus, purely local responsibility for relief raises again the old story of great industries which establish themselves just outside the boundaries of a city (or county) and thus escape taxes which must be relied upon for the care of their own employees who fall into need because they lose their jobs or are taken sick.

Historically, failure to match resources against needs is symbolized by the old principle of parish responsibility, which early in the history of this country was taken over bodily from still earlier experience in England. However, the gradual broadening of the base of responsibility finally bridged this gulf between jurisdictions that had vast wealth and almost no poverty and those which had almost nothing but poverty.

1 Of the English parishes Sidney and Beatrice Webb have written: "The fifteen thousand separate parishes and townships, each one having to maintain its own poor, varied in area from a few score acres to thirty or forty square miles; in the number of inhabitants, from a few dozen to tens of thousands of households; in financial resources, from a barren common to the densely congregated residences, shops, banks, warehouses and wharves of the parishes in the City of London."—English Local Government: English Poor Law History. Part II: The Last Hundred Years. Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1929, vol. 1, p. 3.

Even in the early years of the twentieth century basic responsibility for relief needs rested upon groups of parishes or unions which still perpetuated such anomalies as the coexistence—sometimes in juxtaposition—of wealthy unions or "cities of the rich" in which there was relatively little need and, on the other hand, unions in which (as in Poplar and West Ham) need was great and resources meager.—See Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 896-934.
CHAPTER XXVIII
FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY (CONTINUED)

Precedents for Using Resources and Power of the Federal Government to Aid Disadvantaged Groups

Among arguments most frequently advanced in support of federal responsibility for relief needs is that such responsibility is but a logical extension of the government's long-recognized role of using its power and resources to help groups among the American people who can convince Congress that they need special help at any given time.

Thus, the federal government has established tariffs to aid struggling and infant industries, and has made direct and indirect subsidies to other far from infant industries, including railroads, airlines, shipping companies, and publishing concerns. It has sometimes fostered and sometimes restricted immigration, depending upon whether the nation's labor supply needed to be increased to meet demands of expanding industry, or needed to be limited because of increasing unemployment.

Even more important, perhaps, has been the use of the public domain to help individuals to get a new start in life. Precedents most closely related to national responsibility for relief needs are found in the long list of appropriations of federal funds for disaster relief in this country and also in foreign countries.

Finally, just before the federal government went into the relief business in a really big way, there was established President Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation which even during his regime lent, invested, or allocated nearly three billion dollars. Although the bulk of these funds—concrete evidence of the use

1 In a detailed report, Government and Economic Life, published by the Brookings Institution (and written by Leverett S. Lyon, Victor Abramson, and others) there are enumerated various kinds of help given from time to time to some of the nation's most important industries. According to this report, special aids have not been limited to struggling industries of a more primitive stage of America's economic development but have, with the passage of time, been extended to a "greatly increased" number of industries. Writing of tariffs, one of the forms federal aid to industry has taken, these writers termed them "a dole de luxe." Then, too, there were the many types of governmental aid to railroads. These have included freedom from restrictions upon rates, outright grants of funds and land, the latter being primarily from the federal government.—Washington, 1940, vol. 2, pp. 609-610, 751.
The Broader Issues

of federal financial power to help alleviate distress—went to banks, railroads, insurance companies, and other business enterprises, some, however, were lent to states and cities for unemployment relief—a clear admission that the federal government could no more refuse to use its resources to help its unemployed than its capitalists.¹

Among leaders of the Roosevelt administration none has done more than Harry Hopkins to show that federal aid for needy people is but an extension of the practice of helping special groups. In an address in 1938, for example, Mr. Hopkins declared:

From the very first years of Washington's administration the national government intervened with all its resources frequently and aggressively in order to develop commerce, agriculture and industry.

Pump-priming in those days took forms which kept us from recognizing it for what it was.

It took the form of giving away the national domain in free land to veterans and then to all settlers, of giving away vast areas to railroad companies to help them build their systems. It took the form of great internal improvements, of building roads, subsidizing canals, dredging waterways and building harbors all with government funds. It took the form of a protective tariff to subsidize infant industries and expand American employment. It took the form of giving away certain sovereign powers of the people—those intangible parts of the public domain—such as franchises to public utility enterprises, the power to issue currency and create credit to banks, and exclusive patent rights for inventions—by means of which we deprived others of the right to engage in these enterprises but enlarged our industries, put men to work, created buying power.

These are a few examples of the pump-priming which our American Government has engaged in for a hundred and fifty years. Pump-priming is as American as corn-on-the-cob.²

Writing of the public domain which he calls "the original re-

¹ Commenting upon the activities of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Stuart Chase, as early as June, 1935, wrote: "Its activities have centered upon relief for capital and relief for the wayfaring man. Capital received first attention under Mr. Hoover, while under Mr. Roosevelt the common man has fared better. But the two are not altogether separate and distinct. In a high energy economy, capital and the common man are tangled up together. Relief to banks and insurance companies has prevented millions of common men from losing their savings. Relief to farmers and home owners has prevented the destruction of creditors who held their mortgages. Capital has undoubtedly had the lion's share. . . . The RFC is deep in the vaults of the banks, deep in agricultural credit, deep in the real estate business, in railroads, insurance companies. It has underwritten the bank accounts of upwards of 90 percent of us who have bank deposits."—Government in Business. Macmillan Co., New York, 1935, p. 38.

² WPA Release 4-1729, July 16, 1938.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

...ief fund of the United States, and by far the greatest that the country has ever had," Walter Prescott Webb declares that the railroads of the West, "practically every great cattle fortune of the early days," and many a mining fortune were, in large measure, founded upon direct assistance provided by the federal government.¹

Most important, however, among precedents for using national resources to meet the needs of the American people, was, as already noted, the way the federal government used its land to give families and individuals a new start in life.²

However, it was not only those who took up homesteads who were thus emancipated from the iron law of misery, for the drawing off of the vast supply of laborers who ultimately went west undoubtedly helped to protect if not to raise the wage standards of those who remained behind.³

Although the giving of free land to homesteaders has frequently been recognized as an important milestone in the use of federal power and resources for the benefit of disadvantaged groups, attention is but seldom focused on the fact that the original acquisition of a vast portion of the public domain—through the Louisiana Purchase—was in itself one of the earliest uses of the nation’s resources to help certain classes of its people, whose

¹ Mr. Webb gives some suggestion of the extent of this aid to railroads in the following: "For every mile built in the prairie and plains regions the government gave [the Union-Central Pacific] twenty sections favorably located along the right of way. In addition, the government advanced $16,000 for each mile built on the plains, $32,000 for the foothills country, and $48,000 for the mountains. The two roads received 33,000,000 acres, an area greater than New York State. All the land grant roads received about 242,000 square miles (154 million acres), an area greater than France."—Divided We Stand: The Crisis of a Frontierless Democracy. Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1937, pp. 173-174.

² Of this Webb has written:

"The frontier was above all else an outlet, a safety valve when pressure was too high. . . . It was a haven of refuge for brokenhearted lovers, escaped criminals, defeated politicians, bankrupts, and unemployed. . . ."

". . . [it] did not solve the problems of government, but it removed them from the government's presence and actual jurisdiction. . . ."

"[When] The Homestead Act was adopted . . . the government still had half of the national domain (half of the present United States) to use as a relief fund. . . ."

"In twelve years, 1868-1880, more than 19,000,000 acres of land had been alienated in free homesteads. . . . In forty-nine years the government gave an average of 23,340 homesteads, or 3,812,000 acres, annually."—Ibid., pp. 167-172.

³ Precedents for the use of the nation's resources as a means of meeting social needs were not limited to the people of any one country. As Jonathan Daniels once put it, "The settlement of this country amounted to the WPA project of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."—Survey Midmonthly, vol. 67, no. 3, March, 1941, p. 73.
The Broader Issues

“very existence,” according to Charles and Mary Beard, “depended upon the navigation of the Mississippi without let or hindrance.”

Just as the young federal government was moved to pay some 13 million dollars for the Louisiana territory so as to provide, among other things, a way to float lumber, tobacco, hemp, wheat, corn, and pork to markets, so also was it induced (in 1806) to authorize construction of the first section of the Cumberland Road which was built as a fair counterpoise to eastern producers’ ability to ship their products by water.

Precedents which have probably been cited more frequently than any others in support of federal responsibility for relief needs are those congressional appropriations which have been authorized from time to time over a long period of years for relief of disaster victims in all parts of the world. Among types of disasters whose victims Congress has aided are those caused by fire, flood, grasshoppers, storms, drought, earthquake, volcanic eruption, war, pestilence, and famine. Kinds of relief offered have ranged from granting individuals exemption from meeting certain obligations to the federal government to outright grants of cash totaling many millions of dollars.

Exemptions from Certain Obligations to the Federal Government

As early as 1803 and 1804 sufferers from fire at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Norfolk, Virginia, were given an extension of time within which to discharge bonds given for customs duties.


2 Whereas use of federal power and resources for meeting relief needs has frequently been justified on the ground that this was only the logical extension of the federal government’s time-honored policy of using its resources to aid disadvantaged groups, it is noteworthy that the boot was once on the other foot. Instead of attempting to justify expenditures for relief on the ground that federal funds had previously been used for other types of aid, Calhoun in 1817 (when the constitutionality of using federal funds for roads and canals was in question) defended the propriety of such expenditures on the ground that Congress by unanimous vote, or nearly so, had granted “fifty thousand dollars to the distressed inhabitants of Caracas, and a very large sum, at two different times, to the Saint Domingo refugees.”—Annals, 14th Congress, 2d Session, February, 1817, p. 855.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Similar relief was given in 1836 to sufferers from fire in New York City. Somewhat comparable was the waiving of imposts, in 1866 and 1872, respectively, for relief of sufferers from fire at Portland, Maine, and at Chicago. In both instances legislation was enacted to permit suspension of internal revenue taxes to persons suffering material loss by fire.

Outright Relief

The first outright relief granted by the federal government appears to have been that for fire sufferers at Alexandria, Virginia, for whom $20,000 was appropriated in 1827. This amount was dwarfed in 1874 by the more than half a million dollars appropriated for food and clothing for persons affected by the overflow of the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers. Ravages by grasshoppers led in the succeeding year to the appropriation of $30,000 for seeds and $150,000 for food and clothing.

The Secretary of War was authorized in 1880 to distribute 4,000 rations to Macon, Mississippi, which had been struck by a cyclone. In subsequent disasters the Secretary of War was authorized to use army tents, medical and quartermaster’s supplies for sufferers of floods primarily along the Mississippi and its tributaries. It was a whimsical turn of fate that led Congress in 1890 to rule that funds earlier made available for flood relief along the Mississippi might be used for the relief of citizens of the Territory of Oklahoma rendered destitute by drought!

The largest appropriation for disaster relief reported during these early years, was that for $3,000,000 made in 1903 to alleviate distress in the Philippine Islands. Having fallen into the stride of voting funds in seven figures, Congress in 1906 appropriated $2,500,000 for sufferers of fire and earthquake in San Francisco and along the Pacific Coast.

It was not only Americans at home who were granted federal relief in time of disaster. Congress in 1897 voted $50,000 for the relief of American citizens in Cuba; in 1922 authorized four times this amount for American citizens and their relatives who were “Smyrna victims”; and in 1916 appropriated $300,000 for the relief of destitute American citizens in Mexico.

While Congress was voting funds for disaster relief at home and in the Philippine Islands and to Americans abroad, federal funds were also made available for the relief of citizens of other...
countries. An earthquake in Venezuela led Congress in 1812 to appropriate $50,000 for Venezuelans. Further appropriations for citizens of other countries included $100,000 (in 1899) for destitute inhabitants of Cuba; $200,000 made available in 1902 for citizens of Martinique; $800,000 in 1909 for earthquake sufferers in Italy; and $50,000 for Chinese famine victims in 1911. The largest appropriation Congress had yet made for relief either in this country or abroad was in 1919 when $100,000,000 was appropriated for food relief in war-torn Europe. Three years later $20,000,000 was made available to famine victims in Russia. Relief to the Near East in 1919 cost Uncle Sam well over $600,000; that to Japan, after the 1923 earthquake, cost the federal government more than $6,000,000.

American aid to foreign countries did not always take the form of outright relief. Sometimes it consisted of facilities (such as naval vessels or chartered ships) to transport provisions and supplies for famishing or other suffering people in various countries. Transportation of supplies for the famishing poor of Ireland and Scotland was authorized in 1847; for destitute people in France and Germany in 1871; and for starving people in India in 1897.

Despite this long line of precedents for using federal resources to relieve need arising from disaster, the Hoover administration in the early years of the Great Depression refused to look upon it, or upon the resulting unemployment and economic chaos, as a disaster, and long refused federal aid for the hapless victims.

Precedents for Creating Jobs

Among the factors which finally induced the national government to assume at least some responsibility for relief needs during the depression in the early 1930’s was the recalling of earlier steps taken to provide jobs for the unemployed. Interestingly enough, comparatively little was said during the first dark years after 1929 about federal aid for relief. As in previous depressions, however, much was being said of the need for the federal government to assume responsibility for creating jobs.

Just as responsibility assumed by the federal government in providing first disaster relief and then relief of other types, so responsibility for providing employment has also grown by a devious course, passing through a number of phases characterized
by the acceptance of ever-broadening obligations and by increasing centralization of control. Since no attempt is here made to present a complete history of federal efforts to provide employment for unemployed workers, reference will be made only to various types of responsibility the federal government has from time to time assumed.1

Perhaps the earliest phase of the federal government's attempts to provide employment for unemployed workers was through the voluntary initiation by various federal agencies of authorized public works falling under their jurisdiction. An early example of such scheduling was the inauguration by the War Department of construction of fortifications around New York City in 1808 so as to provide employment for seamen and dock workers thrown out of work as a result of the Embargo Act prohibiting shipping between American and European ports. Castle Garden, later adopted by New York City as its aquarium, was part of these fortifications. The Navy Yard in New York also agreed to receive unemployed seamen for service. These actions, which were not demanded by Congress, represented voluntary efforts on the part of federal agencies to synchronize their undertakings with the need to alleviate distress arising from the nation's foreign policy.

A second stage in the development of federal responsibility for providing jobs for unemployed workers is that represented by the timing of congressional appropriations for road and construction projects so as to provide jobs in times of extended unemployment. Representative of this stage was the appropriating of $200,000,000 by Congress in 1919 for highway and construction work to offset unemployment and business depression expected to result from the end of hostilities and disbanding the Army at the close of World War I. This second stage involved deliberate action.

1 For detailed discussion of the development of federal public works policy see:
The Broader Issues

on the part of Congress to make funds available when needed to
give jobs to unemployed workers.\(^1\)

In the light of the many precedents for using federal power to
aid a wide variety of different groups which, at one time or another
since the nation's founding, had received special help from the
federal government, it appears to many observers that federal
action in behalf of needy persons is wholly in line with American
traditions and completely justified as a means of relieving need
that otherwise would probably have gone unmet.

This position is not unanimously supported, however, and there
are still some who—though they would probably be the first to
decry discontinuance of aids to business—deplore use of the
nation's resources for aiding the needy. Commenting on the fact
that unemployed workers during the depression were often
criticized because they “come demanding and speaking of their
rights,” Nels Anderson once declared:

Such behavior on the part of the unemployed was shocking chiefly because
it was strange conduct for American workers who traditionally went their
ways with dignity and quiet. It is not strange behavior for groups of Ameri¬
can citizens, however, to approach their Government with demands. . . .
Some industries get preferential tariffs, which is a form of public dole. . . .
The government has granted subsidies to mining companies and to trans¬
portation companies. These are special benefits demanded by certain citizens.
The Government has often aided business through the purchase of surplus
commodities. That is a form of relief. We know how previous administrations
have given away to corporations most of the natural resources of the nation.
We know how newspapers, who condemn the unemployed, have benefited
through preferential postage rates. The list of special groups that have re¬
ceived benefits is long. When the unemployed come demanding they are but
following a pattern of conduct which has long been in vogue.\(^2\)

In retrospect it is significant to note that the long delays in
securing federal aid for relief were in part at least attributable to

\(^1\) The principle of appropriating increased funds for public employment in times
of depression, effectuated in 1919 by a Democratic administration, was endorsed in
1921 by Republican President Harding's Conference on Unemployment. This con¬
ference (under the chairmanship of Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce)
recommended a congressional appropriation for roads which "together with State
appropriation amounting to many tens of millions of dollars already made in ex¬
pectation of and dependence on Federal aid, would make available a large amount
of employment." The same conference also recommended that "Federal authorities,
including the Federal Reserve Banks, should expedite the construction of public
buildings and public works covered by existing appropriations."—Report of the
President's Conference on Unemployment, September 26 to October 13, 1921. Gov¬

\(^2\) Labor Relations and Public Welfare. Paper presented at the conference of the
Iowa Association for Social Welfare, Des Moines, April 18, 1940.
by the acceptance of ever-broadening obligations and by increasing centralization of control. Since no attempt is here made to present a complete history of federal efforts to provide employment for unemployed workers, reference will be made only to various types of responsibility the federal government has from time to time assumed.  

Perhaps the earliest phase of the federal government's attempts to provide employment for unemployed workers was through the voluntary initiation by various federal agencies of authorized public works falling under their jurisdiction. An early example of such scheduling was the inauguration by the War Department of construction of fortifications around New York City in 1808 so as to provide employment for seamen and dock workers thrown out of work as a result of the Embargo Act prohibiting shipping between American and European ports. Castle Garden, later adopted by New York City as its aquarium, was part of these fortifications. The Navy Yard in New York also agreed to receive unemployed seamen for service. These actions, which were not demanded by Congress, represented voluntary efforts on the part of federal agencies to synchronize their undertakings with the need to alleviate distress arising from the nation's foreign policy.

A second stage in the development of federal responsibility for providing jobs for unemployed workers is that represented by the timing of congressional appropriations for road and construction projects so as to provide jobs in times of extended unemployment. Representative of this stage was the appropriating of $200,000,000 by Congress in 1919 for highway and construction work to offset unemployment and business depression expected to result from the end of hostilities and disbanding the Army at the close of World War I. This second stage involved deliberate action

The Broader Issues

on the part of Congress to make funds available when needed to give jobs to unemployed workers.\(^1\)

In the light of the many precedents for using federal power to aid a wide variety of different groups which, at one time or another since the nation's founding, had received special help from the federal government, it appears to many observers that federal action in behalf of needy persons is wholly in line with American traditions and completely justified as a means of relieving need that otherwise would probably have gone unmet.

This position is not unanimously supported, however, and there are still some who—though they would probably be the first to decry discontinuance of aids to business—deplore use of the nation's resources for aiding the needy. Commenting on the fact that unemployed workers during the depression were often criticized because they "come demanding and speaking of their rights," Nels Anderson once declared:

Such behavior on the part of the unemployed was shocking chiefly because it was strange conduct for American workers who traditionally went their ways with dignity and quiet. It is not strange behavior for groups of American citizens, however, to approach their Government with demands. . . . Some industries get preferential tariffs, which is a form of public dole. . . . The government has granted subsidies to mining companies and to transportation companies. These are special benefits demanded by certain citizens. The Government has often aided business through the purchase of surplus commodities. That is a form of relief. We know how previous administrations have given away to corporations most of the natural resources of the nation. We know how newspapers, who condemn the unemployed, have benefited through preferential postage rates. The list of special groups that have received benefits is long. When the unemployed come demanding they are but following a pattern of conduct which has long been in vogue.\(^2\)

In retrospect it is significant to note that the long delays in securing federal aid for relief were in part at least attributable to

\(^1\) The principle of appropriating increased funds for public employment in times of depression, effectuated in 1919 by a Democratic administration, was endorsed in 1921 by Republican President Harding's Conference on Unemployment. This conference (under the chairmanship of Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce) recommended a congressional appropriation for roads which "together with State appropriation amounting to many tens of millions of dollars already made in expectation of and dependence on Federal aid, would make available a large amount of employment." The same conference also recommended that "Federal authorities, including the Federal Reserve Banks, should expedite the construction of public buildings and public works covered by existing appropriations."—Report of the President's Conference on Unemployment, September 26 to October 13, 1921. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1921, p. 20.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

fear lest such aid might invite further demands on the part of needy Americans to use their government to improve their economic welfare. So serious an obstacle did fears like these seem to proponents of federal relief early in the depression that they attempted to allay them by assuring the opposition that they were "invalid . . . because the unemployed (in contrast with war veterans) are not a stable and cohesive group, with political power and pride of organization." ¹

It might also have been said, however, that even if federal relief were to develop a community of interest among needy people who might thus find a way of making their voices heard in Washington, this would be giving them no more than was already enjoyed by other groups, for example, trade associations and the various organizations of businessmen, farmers, and veterans. In fact, failure to make it possible for that large proportion of the population which for so long has been ill-fed, ill-clad, and poorly housed to get together on a program of action might be said to be depriving them of their due and playing into the hands of those special interest groups which did have the means for discovering and promoting their common aims.

Stating the issue editorially, the Nation—with its tongue in its editorial cheek, no doubt—in 1931 declared:

If the people learn that the government can help them in times of distress, if the people learn that the government is really their servant, the people may decide to use the government for their own purposes at other times as well. . . . The question is not one of whether relief shall be extended by Congressional or private charity; the question is whether government belongs to the people or to a few private individuals.²

Somewhat earlier the New Republic, too, had commented on this possibility, declaring: "If the voters once get the habit of using the State to transfer wealth from the opulent to the indigent, or employ State machinery in any other way for an equalitarian economic purpose, there is no telling where they might stop." ³

More recently, Eveline M. Burns, lecturer in economics at Columbia University and director of the nationwide relief study

made by the National Resources Planning Board in 1941 has written as follows of attempts to take British unemployment programs out of politics: "... those who believe in economic as well as political democracy may properly question the desirability ... of attempts to remove from politics questions which in recent years have involved very substantial expenditures and have vitally concerned the lives of between 1.3 and 2.3 million workers and their families." ¹

To those who support this view, the possibility that federal relief may help people who need it to add their voices to the already mighty choruses shouting their proposals at Congress, will not seem cause for alarm. On the other hand, those who would deny federal relief to needy people in an attempt to forestall the possibility of forming interest groups might find that they were only playing into the hands of leaders eager to rally people whose destitution and desperation might serve as a basis for common action.

**Better Understanding Among Federal Officials and Legislators of Existing Needs**

A further reason why, in the minds of some proponents of national responsibility for relief needs, the federal government should play an important role in this field, is that federal officials and legislators are in a better position than state and local officers and legislative bodies to understand these needs and what should be done about them.

Speaking particularly of needs arising from unemployment in 1938, Harold H. Burton, while serving as mayor of Cleveland, once told a Senate Committee: "It is difficult, if not impossible, for many State officials to appreciate the nature of this industrial calamity because in the smaller towns and agricultural areas it is not present. Many a State government, therefore, is unable to see the situation in as true or clear a perspective as is the Federal Government." ² It is this factor, perhaps, which led Paul V.

² U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 1, p. 597. Further testimony on this issue was presented in 1936 to a conference held under the auspices of the American Association of Social Workers by a representative who declared: "Putting the relief problem back on Ohio has thrown..."
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Betters, executive director of the United States Conference of Mayors, to say that the cities were not willing that relief be turned back to the states because "nearly every State Legislature is controlled by rural delegates who don't understand the problem of relief in urban centers."¹

State legislatures are often dominated by "upstate" (as in New York), or "downstate" (as in New Jersey and Illinois) legislators who, because they come from rural areas, frequently fail to grasp the social needs of more populous districts. Unlike the United States House of Representatives, which reapportions its membership after each decennial census, state legislatures whose makeup may be controlled by obsolete constitutional provisions or by some other inflexible practice frequently fail to give due representation to rapidly growing centers in which social needs are likely to be concentrated.

Among those who have recognized this problem is George C. S. Benson who has declared that if states are to meet their responsibilities properly they:

... must reapportion their legislatures to give the great metropolitan communities a more decent break. The present tendency to legislate against the metropolis encourages direct federal-local relations and in the long run will operate against the state governments. The Republican who votes against reapportionment because he doesn't want the Democratic politicians in power in the state capitol is thereby voting against his own party's position of keeping power in the hands of the states. A unit of government which does not represent the people or meet their problems is bound to lose out in the long run.²

One reason why those coming from rural areas may find it difficult fully to grasp the nature and extent of urban needs is that the very nature of certain programs designed to meet rural needs fails to bring local awareness of their real extent. For example,

the situation into the hands of an unsympathetic and politically minded governor, who provides no leadership in meeting the serious problems faced by a large urban community like Cleveland. Since the federal government withdrew from the direct relief picture, the removal of federal standards and supervision has meant that the new relief program in Ohio has been built up by this governor. The relief program has been polished off by the rural group of legislators who predominate in our state legislature and who are ignorant of the conditions in urban communities."—Johnson, Margaret, "Unmet Needs as Shown in Practice," in This Business of Relief: Proceedings of the Delegate Conference. New York, 1936, p. 41.

¹ As quoted in the Baltimore Sun, December 3, 1938.
various kinds of rural needs have for several years been met through the federal Farm Security Administration which, as already noted, is administered from Washington and which is financed wholly from federal funds. Thus, neither local nor state action or money is required. Leaders from rural areas, therefore, may be unaware of the needs in even their own bailiwicks and, as a result, may well underestimate the needs in urban areas.

Another reason why federal legislators and officials may be in a better position than state officials to grasp the extent and nature of relief needs is that federal agencies frequently have far greater research facilities than are available to state and local governments and make more use of public hearings and other devices that yield extensive information which is invaluable to the understanding and meeting of public problems.¹

Still another reason why the federal government might be in a better position than state and local governments to understand (and also to act upon) social needs is that poll taxes, racial and other discriminations, which in some sections of the United States effectively deny a voice in government to the very groups most likely to be in need, do not muffle the voice of the dispossessed throughout the nation as a whole.² Thus, although potential voters who are denied the right to vote have no more opportunity to vote for federal than for state or local officers and legislators, they may nevertheless find themselves represented in Congress—

¹ That these considerations are applicable to other problems than those in the field of relief has often been suggested. Enumerating changes that should be effected if state governments are to compete successfully with the growing role of the federal government, George C. S. Benson mentioned “the development of aids for the hard-pressed state legislator,” “bigger salaries, longer sessions,” and “more research aids.”—Ibid.

² Unlike schools and other general public services, which reach all the people of a community and which all classes would be likely to want well administered since their own interests are affected, relief and public welfare programs often serve only socially or economically disadvantaged groups. If these persons are denied an effective voice in determining the nature of such programs, they are automatically left to other groups which have a much less direct interest in them.

The importance of considerations like these was emphasized in 1938 by the National Emergency Council's report on Economic Conditions of the South. Reporting upon the effect of the poll tax, not in its relationship to the delay of vast social improvements in the South, but to such difficulties as resisting so simple a matter as a sales tax, the Council declared: “The poll tax keeps the poorer citizens from voting in eight southern States, thus they have no effective means of protesting against sales taxes.”—Washington, p. 23.

For a recent analysis of the practical effects of poll taxes upon exercise of the franchise by economically disadvantaged persons, see “War at the Poll Tax Front,” by Robert E. Martin, in Opportunity, vol. 20, no. 4, April, 1942, pp. 100-105.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

as they are not represented in their state capitals—by representatives elected by people like themselves, and with ideas like their own, in other areas where race, poverty, and social position are not insuperable barriers to the exercise of the franchise.

While disadvantaged persons everywhere could be said to be represented in Congress so long as disadvantaged persons anywhere succeeded in electing their representatives, it is easy to exaggerate the importance of this representation and to overlook the opposite possibility which was pointed out in 1941 by Representative Geyer of California. He declared:

... so long as so many of our States require the payment of a poll tax as a prerequisite to voting, the unemployed anywhere in the United States will not get the proper consideration due them in a democracy where all men are supposed to have equality of opportunity. . . .

... if certain restrictions are put into the laws governing the WPA, largely by means of the votes of one section of the country, all WPA workers will suffer from these restrictions, regardless of how their own particular Representatives might have voted on that issue. . . . The Casey amendment providing for an increase in the WPA appropriation was defeated largely by the 78 Representatives of the poll-tax States. In other words, had the Representatives from these 8 poll-tax States had the same percentage for the amendment as did the other sections of the country the amendment would have carried, and a greater number of the already certified needy could have been cared for than will now be possible. . . .

It has always been the same. The section of the country which has been called our No. 1 economic problem has given the least support to the measures which would benefit their unfortunate people the most.

At first this seemed strange to me, but when I realized that these people had little money on which to live, let alone pay for the right of voting for their elected representatives, I could readily see that their interests would be sacrificed for the interests of those who pay the poll tax.

The WPA bill has two strikes against it before it ever gets out of committee, for the chairman of the subcommittee handling the bill comes from one of our poll-tax States. He is one of the ablest men in the House and thoroughly believes in and practices the American principle . . . that in representative government the representative must serve his voting constituents.

Thus we see that justice to our unemployed of the Nation can be obtained only when they are able to go to the polls in all sections of the country with the power to reward or to punish according to the treatment their segment of society has received.1

In direct conflict with the foregoing is the counter-claim that increased control over relief matters should be given local authori-

1 Congressional Record, Appendix, July 9, 1941, p. 3544.
The Broader Issues

ties because it is they who know best what is needed. Typical of statements favoring this position is that of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. This body declared:

Conceding that in extreme emergencies the federal government should assist temporarily state and local governments unable to cope with relief burdens they are compelled to assume, it is apparent from the methods thus far pursued by the federal government that it is remote, too large and too clumsy for efficient administration of local relief. It cannot have an adequate understanding of local conditions and is unable to determine satisfactorily either the type or amount of relief needed, if any. . . .

One fundamental issue posed by this head-on clash of ideas is the question: Granted that, under a democracy, the majority should rule, which majority should rule? If a given issue were put before the people of the entire United States, the majority might decide one way. If the same question were put to the voters of a single state, it might be decided in another. If put to the people of one particular county, or of one town, to those living on one side of a street, the answer might be something quite different. With respect to relief standards and decisions as to whether people who would otherwise be without work should or should not be given public employment, there are some who contend that these issues may safely be left to the judgment of the voters of almost any jurisdiction, however small. On other questions, such as war, tariffs, and slavery, however, it would probably be admitted that local or even state opinion must yield to the position taken by the nation as a whole. The difference, obviously, is the degree to which questions are thought to be invested with national as opposed to merely local or state interest.

While the constitutionality of the old-age benefits title of the Social Security Act was being contested before the United States Supreme Court, counsel for the respondent declared that aid from a paternal government may sap the sturdy virtues of self-reliance and frugality and breed a race of weaklings. "If Massachusetts so believes and shapes her laws in that conviction, must her breed of sons be changed . . . because some other philosophy of government finds favor in the halls of Congress?" To this the Court replied:

. . . the answer is not doubtful. One might ask with equal reason whether the system of protective tariffs is to be set aside at will in one state or another

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

whenever local policy prefers the rule of laissez faire. The issue is a closed one. It was fought out long ago. . . . When money is spent to promote the general welfare, the concept of welfare or the opposite is shaped by Congress, not the states. So the concept be not arbitrary, the locality must yield.¹

Thus, the question as to what responsibilities the federal government should assume for relief needs appears to involve a further question: To what extent is the meeting of relief needs invested with “national interest”?²

The “National Interest” and Federal Responsibility for Relief

Providing relief (like providing employment for workers who would otherwise be without jobs) is widely thought to constitute a proper federal responsibility because it is invested with a peculiar “national interest”—a term which in itself represents ever-changing concepts.

Federal expenditures for relief have, for example, been justified on the ground that they were essential not only to those persons for whom they purchased food, clothing, shelter, and fuel, but also to grocers, businessmen, landlords, and indeed, to the whole American economy. Similarly, it has been held that preservation of the health and living standards of needy people everywhere has been important to the well-being of the entire nation.³

² The wide variety of considerations advanced from time to time as being in the “national interest” is well illustrated by the history of federal public works, which at one time or another have been justified on the ground that they contributed to the national wealth; that, as in the case of highways and canals, they contributed to the unification, settlement, and development of the nation; or, like highways, harbors, and fortifications, were essential to the nation’s defense and through facilitating its settlement prevented its being occupied and claimed for a foreign government.
³ Although construction of lighthouses is among the oldest types of public work undertaken by the United States government, this was early attacked as not being in the national interest. However, it was argued that except for lighthouses and other aids to shipping, prices of merchandise needed by those living far inland in the new states would inevitably have been higher, thereby affecting the entire nation’s interest.

Likewise, when construction of forts along the seaboard was attacked by statesmen from the hinterland on the ground that these did not contribute to the defense of their communities, proponents of federal expenditures for coastal fortifications supported these expenditures on the ground that if an enemy were not turned back from the shores of this country it might not be long until he would have had to be driven out of the interior.

The Broader Issues

Of this mutual dependence of all sections of the country upon other sections Jane Perry Clark has written:

... the ill fate of one section of the country is reflected in other sections. Not all states have been equally endowed by nature and fortune, but they nevertheless may hinder the development of the country as a whole if they are not helped to come up to the level of those which are more fortunate. What Sidney Webb wrote in 1911 is even more true today: "a community which neglects sanitation, education and public safety is a menace not only to itself, but to the entire nation"; the freedom of the inhabitants of any particular place "to do what they like with their own is incompatible with the national well-being." And it grows increasingly less sure that their own is theirs to do with as they like.1

As the United States became more and more involved in World War II increasing emphasis was placed upon the nation's interest in relief programs because of their importance both in keeping hundreds of thousands of Americans physically capable of being useful to their country and in giving disadvantaged people more reason to want to defend it. Had the nation done nothing to help them meet their elementary needs, it would not be surprising if they were to "reason why," or to question what, in such a nation, they should be glad to defend.

The claim has also been made that relief, in the last analysis, is a form of riot insurance, preserving the very existence of the nation against possible assault by millions of desperately needy and hopeless Americans.

With the growth of world unrest, relief programs have become newly invested with national interest, because, in a day of power politics and bitter competition of conflicting politico-economic ideologies, any form of government that can promise security may be expected to win support more easily than one which offers none. Furthermore, in a world torn with conflicting interests, unfriendly critics may pounce upon even atypical examples of neglect to show up another nation's failure to guarantee security to all its citizens.2

2 That this danger is no will-o'-the-wisp has often been illustrated by the way unfriendly nations have publicized news about lynchings and discrimination against Negroes in the United States. According to press dispatches from Germany, the practice of requiring Jews to ride in special sections of public conveyances was defended on the ground that this practice of requiring members of minority groups to ride in separate accommodations was in conformity with a custom observed in "a great democratic country." Similarly, when Neville Henderson, British Ambassador to Berlin (from 1937 to 1939), challenged Nazis on their use of concentration
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Thus, new importance attaches to what happens to relief and work programs in any part of the United States.

Of this, President Roosevelt once declared: "The ability of the democracies to employ their resources of man power and skill and plant has been challenged. We meet this challenge by maximum utilization of plant and man power and by maintaining government services, social security, and aid to those suffering through no fault of their own." However, since relief in itself is no proper answer to those who are without work, it is to the nation's interest that need for relief be reduced to a minimum so that democracy may successfully meet every challenge from any quarter whatever.

In passing, it should be noted that the same national interest that has dictated large federal responsibility for relief and employment programs in this country may also require the federal government to assume definite responsibilities for helping to provide needed relief in other nations, too. For example, many of the considerations advanced to support national responsibility for relief might, with almost equal logic, be extended to support international responsibility. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the post-war world saw further developments in this field. These, it is suggested, might be defended as no more than a logical continuation of the current practice of using, in the national interest, the superior resources of the United States to supply friendly nations with arms and other implements of war. When the need for tanks and armaments has passed, however, it is not unlikely that this nation may find itself under obligation to continue to use its vast resources to give some help to those who, as a result of war against a common foe, find themselves in desperate need. In fact, if this were not done, this country would be doing

camps, these were justified by a high German official on the ground that the British had at one time used similar methods in South Africa.

When, in 1939, Edward Corsi, deputy commissioner of welfare in New York City, in a public address told about the inequitable distribution of income among people of the United States, this was avidly seized upon by the Berlin press as a further evidence of the breakdown of democratic government.

WPA Release 4-2197, January 15, 1941.

Such as the uneven distribution of resources and need, the importance to democratic institutions of proving that democracies can provide social security to all people, and, finally, the fact that both the cause and cure of conditions giving rise to unemployment and relief needs lie far beyond the control of any county, state, or even nation. See chaps. 27 and 34.
The Broader Issues

less than it did at the close of World War I, when it voted large
sums for European relief in response to the pleas of President
Wilson, who declared:

The high mission of the American people to find a remedy for starvation
and absolute anarchy, renders it necessary that we should undertake the
most liberal assistance to these destitute regions.

The situation is one of extreme urgency, for foodstuffs must be placed in
certain localities within the next 15 to 30 days if human life and order are to
be preserved. I therefore request . . . an immediate appropriation of $100,-
000,000 for the broad purpose of providing foodstuffs and other urgent sup-
plies. . . . While the sum of money is in itself large, it is so small com-
pared to the expenditures we have undertaken in the hope of bettering the
world that it becomes a mere pittance compared to the results that will be
obtained from it and the lasting effect that will remain in the United States
through an act of such broad humanity and statesmanlike influence.¹

Division of Opinion with Respect to Federal
Responsibility for Relief

Though constantly decreasing in importance, there are still
heard occasional protests against any federal participation in
relief matters. These are but faint echoes, however, in compar-
sion with such bitter attacks as were made a number of years ago.
Typical of these attacks was one made by the Manufacturers
Record, a recognized southern business authority, when it de-
declared in June, 1936: “Relief has become a monstrosity. ‘No one
in America shall starve.’ When was it decided that that is a bus-
iness of Federal Government?” ²

Somewhat more recently (in 1937) a committee of the Newark
Chamber of Commerce reported that:

Informed public officials recognize that as long as more or less easy money
is forthcoming from state and federal treasuries, relief costs may well be ex-
pected to remain at present levels in most instances. . . . It is reasonable
to suspect that this rather anomalous situation can not be corrected until
local communities are forced as quickly as possible to administer and even-
tually to finance their own relief.³

Opinions like these, however, are but rarely encountered in
recent years, their holders being reduced to a mere corporal’s
guard. Even as early as 1934 Aubrey Williams could say: “A

¹ U. S. House, Report No. 892 (to accompany H. R. 13708). 65th Congress, 3d
² Vol. 105, no. 6, p. 19.
³ As quoted in the Newark Star-Eagle, May 19, 1937. (Sentences rearranged.)
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

very short time ago, few would have believed that the Federal Government would ever assume the responsibility of keeping its citizens alive. Yet at this moment that responsibility is scarcely questioned."¹ More recently, Senator L. B. Schwellenbach of Washington declared that the question of whether "in a democracy, government has the responsibility of assisting those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to find employment in private industry . . . is not even a subject of dispute today."²

With this view the American people as a whole appear to be in substantial agreement. Evidence of this was afforded by two surveys reported by Fortune in its issues of June, 1939, and April, 1940.³ The earlier survey indicated that 69.1 per cent of persons canvassed considered it a proper responsibility of the federal government to "provide for all people who have no other means of subsistence." A somewhat smaller proportion agreed that the federal government should also see to it "that everyone who wants to work has a job." The only other function which a larger proportion thought to be a proper responsibility of the federal government was the providing of an army and navy. In the later survey, persons canvassed were asked whether, in the building of "the strongest nation possible," the federal government should spend most money on increasing armaments, dealing with agricultural problems, reducing poverty and unemployment, or public construction. In the final vote first place was given to reducing poverty and unemployment, 43 per cent of all voters having indicated that they thought this to be of paramount importance in making the United States a strong nation.⁴

Even severe critics of Rooseveltian relief policies have sup-

¹ "Standards of Living and Government Responsibility," in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 176, November, 1934, p. 37. Two years later, however, after a poll by the American Institute of Public Opinion had revealed that 55 per cent of those interviewed opposed federal participation in relief measures, Mr. Williams expressed concern that the dissenting segment of public opinion was so large.

² Congressional Record, Appendix, June 26, 1939, p. 2840.

³ Both of these dates, it will be remembered, were prior to the fall of France and before national defense developed into the all-consuming interest it later became.

⁴ Speaking of the preferences expressed by those interviewed in the course of this poll, A. A. Ballantine once declared: "There is little to suggest any quarrel with them; like the majority of the voters in the poll, most of us would put first the calls for relief of poverty and unemployment." Of this same issue Henry S. Dennison also agreed that the part of the Fortune question relative to government spending for relief admitted of but one answer since "the relief that is needed must be furnished." —"What Should Government Spend For—Armaments, Agriculture, Relief, Construction?" in Town Meeting, vol. 5, no. 24, March 25, 1940, pp. 7 and 13.
The Broader Issues

Reported the principle of national responsibility for relief needs. The Republican party, in its platform of 1940, recommended federal grants-in-aid to states for relief purposes. Wendell Willkie, that party's candidate, announced during the campaign: "We believe in Federal relief. . . . Our Administration, if we are elected, will continue and will reinforce Federal relief so long as any man in America is without a job." ¹

Some months before the convention in which he was nominated for the Vice-presidency, Senator McNary of Oregon declared that: "Relief can only be effectively handled . . . with Federal assistance equal to about two-thirds of the entire cost." ²

No less rugged a critic of federal relief policies in the 1930's than Charles P. Taft frankly conceded the need for continued federal participation in relief programs and, in 1937, in an address before the National Conference of Social Work, declared:

To put our people back to work is going to cost money, and the money has to come from every agency concerned, private and public. . . .

In that partnership . . . our national government must contribute its fair share. We cannot let Washington run out on us . . . neither can we do this job without federal subsidies.³

Abandonment by the federal government of all responsibility for relief needs is not advocated even by such stout critics of the Roosevelt administration as the Chamber of Commerce and the National Economy League.⁴

In view of the long opposition by the Hoover administration to any vigorous federal action to relieve urgent needs arising

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, October 17, 1940.
² Congressional Record, Appendix, January 8, 1940, p. 76.
⁴ See, for example, Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Public Relief: Its Fiscal Importance for State and Local Governments, Washington, 1939, pp. 8, 9, 12; also, resolutions adopted at the national convention, as published in the New York Times, May 3, 1940. Realization by the Chamber of Commerce that federal responsibility for relief is a national necessity is all the more remarkable when it is recalled that in 1932 (when federal aid for relief was still only a proposal) the Chamber submitted a referendum to its constituent agencies which voted overwhelmingly—about 13 to 1—in favor of the principle that "relief should be provided through private contributions supplemented by State and local governments, and without any Federal appropriations for such purposes."—U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. 1932, p. 378.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

from drought and the depression during the early 1930's, it is noteworthy that in recent years—when federal relief has been more in vogue—former President Hoover on a number of occasions has staunchly extolled what little federal action was taken during his regime. In 1939, for example, he boasted that it was he who in 1930:

... announced the formation of a national organization for unemployment relief under Colonel Woods, stating at the time, "as a nation we must prevent hunger and cold to those of our people who are in honest difficulties." At that early stage in the depression at my recommendation Federal public works were doubled and other necessary organized relief was established. On February 3, 1931, on suggestion that these measures might prove inadequate, I stated, "I am willing to pledge myself that if the time should ever come that the voluntary agencies of the country together with the local and State governments are unable to find resources with which to prevent hunger and suffering in my country, I will ask the aid of every resource of the Federal Government."

When with the deepening of the depression it became evident that support was necessary from the Federal Government, it was provided through large distribution of commodities to the States, and in 1932 the Reconstruction Finance Corporation upon my recommendation furnished large cash aid to the States ...

Approximately a year later in an address to the Republican National Convention, Mr. Hoover again boasted that "It was a Republican Administration in 1930 that first announced we cannot allow Americans to go hungry and cold from no fault of their own. We organized and prevented it."

While there may be some differences of opinion as to how well hunger and cold were "prevented" during the early years of the depression, how adequate Mr. Hoover's relief program was, and how much longer he would have temporized with further timid proposals before initiating measures which were anywhere near adequate to the rapidly mounting need, his eagerness, in later years, to appear on the side of national responsibility for alleviating distress is unmistakable.

Looking back on those almost forgotten early years of the depression, one is impressed by the fact that there was not a wide divergence between Mr. Hoover's views and those expressed at...

1 Congressional Record, June 27, 1939, p. 7936. The aid furnished to the states by the RFC, it must be remembered, was, at the time at least, on a loan basis.
2 As quoted in the New York Times, June 26, 1940.
3 See chap. 26.

712
The Broader Issues

the time by Franklin D. Roosevelt. During his first campaign for the presidency, for example, Mr. Roosevelt stated it to be his belief that:

... [the] primary duty rests on the community through local government and private agencies to take care of the relief of unemployment. ... 

I am very certain that the obligation extends beyond the States and to the Federal Government itself if and when it becomes apparent that States and communities are unable to take care of the necessary relief work.¹

Even as he was signing the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933, President Roosevelt declared:

The principle which I have on many occasions explained is that the first obligation is on the locality; if it is absolutely clear that the locality has done its utmost but that more must be done, then the State must do its utmost. Only then can the Federal Government add its contribution to those of the locality and the State.²

A month later, on June 14, 1933, in an address to the conference of relief administrators summoned to the White House, the President again restated in clear and forceful terms his interpretation of the role of the federal government:

It is essential that the States and local units of government do their fair share. They must not expect the Federal Government to finance more than a reasonable proportion of the total. ... 

This $500,000,000 the Federal Government is putting up for relief ... is only to be used where it is honestly shown that the localities have done everything they possibly can be asked to do, both through local and private charity and public appropriations, that the State governments have done everything they can possibly do.³

In keeping with these statements of policy announced by the President, the federal government’s responsibility for relief under the program of the FERA was defined as “residual.” It was premised upon the expectation that states and localities would do all in their power to meet their own needs.

In extenuation of the Hoover administration’s failures it may be recalled that it lacked a realistic picture of how great was the nation’s need and continued to hope that the states would aid localities in meeting what both Mr. Hoover and Mr. Roosevelt then agreed was primarily a local responsibility. Though meas-

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, October 14, 1932.
² Ibid., May 13, 1933.
³ Ibid., June 15, 1933.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ures adopted by the Hoover administration were found to be inadequate there is no way of proving that any other administration might not have had to pass through essentially those same stages before adopting more comprehensive measures. Thus, the time-lag between the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations may account, to some degree at least, for some of the differences in their policies.

Although there is all but unanimous agreement with respect to the obligation on the part of the federal government to help meet the relief needs of the nation, it does not follow that there is equal unanimity on such questions as the proportion of relief costs the federal government should bear or the degree of administrative control it should exert.¹

¹ Considerations which have a bearing on these issues are presented in the succeeding chapters.
CHAPTER XXIX
“SPECIAL” FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEEDS ARISING FROM UNEMPLOYMENT

Relief policies of the Roosevelt administration from the very first, but particularly since 1935, have been based on the assumption that, although the federal government had a certain degree of responsibility for needy unemployable persons, it had a peculiar responsibility for needy persons who were unemployed and presumably employable.

The Principle Stated

Upon signing the first federal relief act of his administration, President Roosevelt, in May, 1933, stressed the fact that the appropriation authorized by Congress was for “unemployment relief.”¹ When Harry Hopkins spoke before the National Conference of Social Work in June, 1933, he explained:

... the intent of this act is that relief should be given to the heads of families who are out of work and whose dependency arises from the fact that they are out of work; single men and women who are out of work, and to transient families, as well as the transient men and women roaming about the country. Those are the persons for whom relief is intended. I am not going to hide behind the cloak of the intent of Congress as to what federal funds can be used for. It is my belief that the people who fought for this bill, who tried to get this money, were trying to get it for relief for the unemployed, and not for a number of other perfectly fine and worthy social objectives.²

One month later, regulations issued by the FERA prescribed that relief administered under the federal relief act was for “needy unemployed persons and/or their dependents.”³

¹See the New York Times, May 13, 1933.
³FERA, Rules and Regulations, No. 3. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1933, p. 2. In explanation of federal policy, Mr. Hopkins in April, 1934, wrote state relief administrators that “the emphasis of the FERA program is being placed upon work relief or subsistence activities for normally employable people. We feel, particularly now, that it is important that States and localities continue responsibility for various types of chronic cases and also continue and extend such services as pensions for widows, aged, etc.

⁴There has been some intimation that in a number of States many widows with
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Perhaps the most dramatic statement of this policy was that made by President Roosevelt himself, when, in January, 1935, he broached to Congress the plan for a vast work program. Of the 1.5 million family heads and single persons on relief who were believed to be “unemployable” the President said:

Such people, in the days before the great depression, were cared for by local efforts—by States, by counties, by towns, by cities, by churches and by private welfare agencies. It is my thought that in the future they must be cared for as they were before. . . .

Local responsibility can and will be resumed, for, after all, common sense tells us that the wealth necessary for this task existed and still exists in the local community, and the dictates of sound administration require that this responsibility be in the first instance a local one.¹

He promised that the security legislation then in prospect would help states and localities meet these responsibilities. The President then turned to a consideration of employable people on relief, of whom he estimated that there were 3,500,000. “With them,” he declared, “the problem is different and the responsibility is different. This group was the victim of a nationwide depression caused by conditions which were not local, but national. The Federal government is the only governmental agency with sufficient power and credit to meet this situation. We have assumed this task and we shall not shrink from it in the future.”²

The Principle Breaks Down

Despite the administration’s stand in 1933, relief officials soon found it almost impossible to deny relief to needy persons whose need could not be attributed directly to the nationwide depression. To have done so would have worked great hardship.

Though attempting to maintain the distinction between employable and unemployable persons, official rulings permitted the granting of federal relief even to unemployable persons provided they were thrown into need because of unemployment or the depression. These interpretations were wholly in line with federal law which permitted granting to states funds “to aid in

² Ibid.
The Broader Issues

meeting the costs of furnishing relief and work relief and in re-
lieving the hardship and suffering caused by unemployment. . . .” ¹
Whether or not a person’s need resulted from the causes speci-
ified was, of course, most difficult to prove. Although federal
officials never attempted strictly to enforce their own ruling,
various efforts were made during FERA days to maintain the
doctrine of special federal responsibility for employable, and
state and local responsibility for unemployable persons.²

Something of the extent to which unemployable persons were
permitted to continue in receipt of unemployment relief is indi-
cated by the numbers transferred from unemployment relief to
old-age assistance and aid to dependent children rolls from time
to time and by the fact that in January, 1935, when President
Roosevelt proposed to Congress his plan for a work program
there were among those already receiving what was supposed to
be “unemployment” relief approximately 1.5 million unemploy-
able persons who were either heads of families or single persons
living alone.

The Principle Is Given a New Lease of Life

When the report of the Committee on Economic Security was
made public early in 1935 it was seen that the federal officials
making up the Committee had (as might well have been ex-
pected) given their official blessing to the division of responsi-
bility suggested by the President. The Committee recommended
that:

As for the genuine unemployables—or near unemployables—we believe
the sound policy is to return the responsibility for their care and guidance
to the States. In making this recommendation we are not unmindful of the
fact that the States differ greatly as regards wealth and income. We recognize

¹ Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933, sec. 4(a). The previous law authorizing
loans to states and cities for relief purposes was even more clearly intended to meet
needs of all kinds since it prescribed that the loans might be used for “furnishing
relief and work relief to needy and distressed people and in relieving the hardship
resulting from unemployment.”—Pub. No. 302 (H. R. 9642). 72d Congress. July 21,
1932, Title I, sec. 1(a).

² More serious efforts in this direction were made in some areas than in others.
Late in 1934, for example, one FERA field representative announced that all unem-
ployables on the relief rolls in five states (Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Okla-
ahoma, and Texas) under his jurisdiction were to be removed from the rolls. Such
removal had already been effected in Louisiana some six months previously. In
Massachusetts, where work relief was federalized in March, 1934, direct relief was
administered by local authorities. This division of the field was essentially that
applied to the country as a whole in 1935.
that it would impose an impossible financial burden on many State and local
governments if they were forced to assume the entire present relief costs.
That, however, is not what we propose. We suggest that the Federal Gov-
ernment shall assume primary responsibility for providing work for those
able and willing to work; also that it aid the States in giving pensions to the
dependent aged and to families without breadwinners. We, likewise, con-
template the continued interest of the Federal Government for a consider-
able time to come in rural rehabilitation and other special problems beyond
the capacity of any single State. With the Federal Government carrying
so much of the burden for pure unemployment, the State and local govern-
ments we believe should resume responsibility for relief. The families that
have always been partially or wholly dependent on others for support can
best be assisted through the tried procedures of social case work, with its

In making this proposal, the Committee failed to act upon the
conclusions of its own Advisory Committee made up of a number
of the nation's leading social workers and leaders in the public
welfare field. This group had advised strongly against dividing
responsibility in the relief field on the basis of the employability
of those concerned. "The social hazards to which millions of
persons and families are subjected," said the Advisory Com-
mittee, "are too varied and too complicated to make it safe to
assume that work would remove the need."

"Health problems, the social and personal results of long con-
tinued unemployment, lack of adaptability to work available, and
other problems," continued the Committee, made it "unsafe" to
assume that a work program could provide for more than 50 to
60 per cent of the families then receiving relief. The Committee
therefore recommended federal participation not only in old-age
pensions and mothers' aid but also in general home assistance,
care of homeless children and adults, and in other parts of a uni-
fied welfare program.\footnote{Report of Special Committee on Employment and Relief Advisory to the Presi-
dent's Committee on Economic Security, December 4, 1934, p. 3.}

In fearing dire results from division of responsibility on the
basis of people's employability, the Advisory Committee was not
alone. The Committee on Economic Security itself evidenced no
little fear of what might happen to unemployable persons turned
over to the mercies of state and local agencies. Nevertheless, the
Committee made no specific recommendations for federal aid to
help care for persons who were not eligible for the special types
of assistance proposed for the aged, the blind, or for dependent children. Neither did it suggest ways in which the federal government might help states and localities to meet responsibilities imposed upon them by failure of the federal government to establish the broad program of work assurance which had been recommended. Instead, the Committee was content to voice a number of pious hopes which it did nothing to put into effect beyond urging that the federal government condition its grants-in-aid upon assurance that states make decent provision for unemployed needing aid.

Fears as to what might happen to needy persons turned over to state and local care were soon confirmed by reports of suffering and hardship first in one place and then another as the transfer was effected. While many criticized the administration’s policy, others acclaimed it. Among the latter group was the United States Conference of Mayors, which even claimed credit (or responsibility—depending upon one’s point of view) for suggesting to the President in September, 1934, what they termed a “new approach to the relief and welfare responsibilities of the Nation and of the cities, counties and States.” Specifically, they had proposed that:

The unemployed . . . be divided, for the purpose of fixing the responsibility of their care, into two classes: Those people able to work, but unable to find employment, and those mentally, physically, or otherwise unfit for regular gainful employment. The latter eventually again must become the charges of the State and local communities (except men disabled in the military, or naval service, which always have been a Federal responsibility). The permanently involuntary unemployed, by reason of changed conditions, must be cared for in an established system, supervised by the Federal government.¹

¹ Notable among these were the hopes that “the people who . . . need relief shall be given humane and intelligent care”; that gains in relief administration made under the stimulus of federal grants might not be lost; that state and local relief might be administered “on a much higher plane than that of the old poor laws”; that the states might substitute for their “ancient, outmoded poor laws . . . modernized public assistance laws”; that states would replace their “uncentralized poor-law administrations with unified, efficient State and local public-welfare departments”; and finally, that the federal government would insist “as a condition of any grants in aid that standard relief practice shall be used and that the States who receive Federal moneys, preserve the gains that have been made, in the care and treatment of the ‘unemployables.’ ”—Report to the President, pp. 44, 45.

² For further discussion of these reports see chap. 3.

³ Congressional Record, February 18, 1935, p. 2105.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Considerations Advanced in Support of "Special" Responsibility for the Unemployed

In support of the principle of special responsibility for need arising from unemployment, it is frequently urged that this is proper because of the national nature of the underlying problem of unemployment, because an effective solution of this problem must be nationwide in its scope, and because this division of responsibility is necessary to compel states and localities to bear their fair share of the entire relief burden.

National Character of the Problem

Wherever the idea of dividing responsibility on the "employable-unemployable" basis may have originated, administration leaders have reiterated again and again that the principal reason for this policy was the national character of unemployment and what they called the "peculiarly local flavor" of other relief needs. Mr. Hopkins, for example, declared in 1935:

The Federal Government, through the Works Program, has recognized that the problem created by unemployment is primarily national. On the other hand, local and State financial responsibility for the unemployables [such as the aged, the physically handicapped, and dependent children] is based on the obvious local character of this aspect of relief needs.

... the Federal Government assumes the responsibility for employable persons whose need is caused by the national problem of unemployment.1

To observers less devoted to and less closely identified with the nation's current relief policy, the logic by which needs of unemployable persons suffering from physical handicaps, loss of breadwinner, bank failures, stock-market losses, sickness, industrial accidents, industrial senescence, broken homes, family desertion, or a thousand other causes were said to have a peculiar "local character" was something less than compelling. To many, these problems appeared to be no less national in character than unemployment, and appeared to be as little affected by township, county, or state lines.

Although it may be doubted whether unemployment is any more national in character than are other factors which give rise to human needs, it can hardly be questioned (a) that unemployment results from causes which are nationwide (and even

1 WPA Release 4-278, August 29, 1935.
The Broader Issues

worldwide) in scope, or (b) that its abolition depends upon na-
tional if not international action.

The first of these considerations has long been advanced as a
reason for participation in relief administration by the federal
government,¹ and figured prominently in the Supreme Court's
decision on the constitutionality of the old-age benefits title of the
Social Security Act. In this opinion the Court declared:

The purge of nation-wide calamity that began in 1929 has taught us
many lessons. Not the least is the solidarity of interests that may once have
seemed to be divided. Unemployment spreads from State to State, the hinter-
land now settled that in pioneer days gave an avenue of escape. . . . Spreading
from State to State, unemployment is an ill not particular but general,
which may be checked, if Congress so determines, by the resources of the
Nation. . . .

The problem is plainly national in area and dimensions. . . . Only a
power that is national can serve the interests of all.²

¹ The Advisory Council to the Committee on Economic Security, in 1934, for
example, declared: "American economic society is national in nature. It is not or-
ganized according to geographical or political subdivisions. Industries reach across
States, sections, and even the continent. In this economic society labor is mobile.
Workers move from industry to industry, from State to State, from an industry in one
State to the same industry in another State, and from an industry in one State to a
different industry in another State. In a society of fluid capital, migratory industries,
shifting labor markets, seasonal, technological, and cyclical forces, unemployment
is a social hazard of our dynamic industrial life.

"Unemployment is, thus, a problem of industry and the Nation. . . ."—U. S. Senate
Committee on Finance (Hearings on S. 1130), Economic Security Act. 74th Con-

² Helvering et al. v. Davis, 301 U. S. 619, 641, 644; 109 A. L. R. 1319. While this
decision clearly supports national responsibility for needs arising from unemploy-
ment, it appears to give equal support to the nation's responsibility for those who are
unable to work because of "the disabilities of age" or for those who are in need of
"rescue . . . irrespective of cause."

Illustrating concretely how happenings in one part of the country can harm
workers in another, Nels Anderson, director of the Section on Labor Relations of
the WPA in 1938 described a worker "with more than average intelligence and
integrity," who lived in Mississippi. He found a job in Louisiana, but was "laid
off, for reasons that had nothing to do with his work or local conditions," the layoff
order coming from New York City "because of a strike in Detroit." Finding himself
on the sidewalk, this man's resources dwindled. Not wanting to go on relief, he
eventually found a job with the WPA. Had he sought relief instead, he would
have been rejected since there was none in Louisiana. Even if there had been, he
would have been ineligible because of his short residence there. But, had he re-
turned to his home in Mississippi, he would still have been unsuccessful for there
only the aged were eligible for public aid. Because of the intricate interrelatedness
of our economic life, proposals to decrease federal responsibility for unemployment
relief, insists Mr. Anderson, "hark back to the days when men were bound to their
masters, and the two were expected to share their fortunes. . . . The master and
the man are now separated. The master has moved to another state and the jobless
man languishes in the local community."—WPA Release 4-1757, September 8, 1938.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

With the entry of the United States into World War II this argument that the causes of unemployment are national in character took on a new cogency. The power of the federal government to create unemployment through rulings on priorities of either materials or labor; through change-overs from peacetime to war production; and through giving war orders or facilitating industrial expansion in one area instead of another, might well be thought to give the federal government new responsibilities for need arising from its own acts. Nor is it likely that the cessation of war will automatically end responsibilities of this kind.

As late as 1934—some fifteen years after World War I—the British Minister of Labour, while speaking in defense of the government’s Unemployment Bill by which the national government proposed to assume responsibility for unemployment assistance, declared:

Certain industries are still suffering from wartime expansion in excess of normal peace-time requirements. . . . As a direct result of the war, there was an . . . artificial stimulus of production in certain industries, and a movement of population from one district to another to satisfy demands which were made upon us. Other industries . . . have suffered since the war a very large loss of their overseas markets. . . . If, therefore, unemployment is due to something which is quite without the control of the locality . . . then there is every reason why its victims should be treated nationally.1

If the same philosophy prevails in this country, it is likely that, for a long time to come, the federal government will have to assume responsibility for needs and industrial dislocations resulting from World War II.

Canada, no less than the United States and Great Britain, has seen considerable agitation for nationalizing responsibility of unemployment relief on the ground that the problem is national, and indeed international, in scope. Of this the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations reported:

Mass unemployment in Canada, as in the past ten years, is largely the result of depression or economic changes abroad which are communicated to this country through the fall in export prices and demand. In the integrated and interdependent Canadian economy, the volume of capital investment largely depends on the anticipation of an export market, and the export income determines the size of the internal market for manufactured goods. A rapid decline in export incomes produces a sharp contraction in

The Broader Issues

construction activity and in industrial output thus creating a nation-wide problem of unemployment. . . .

The high degree of interdependence between country and town, between the primary and secondary occupations, between the exporting and domestic industries, is one of the most significant facts of our economic life. . . . Now that the economic structure of the country is fundamentally national with respect to the attainment of economic welfare and opportunities for employment, it can no longer be compartmentalized for the purposes of meeting the costs of widespread destitution and unemployment—except at the price of financial chaos and enormous waste.

The extent of the unemployment in any industry or area has virtually no relation to purely local conditions. The local municipality or province can do practically nothing to ameliorate the problem nor to hasten its disappearance.1

The Cure Must Be National

Stating the case in favor of the federal government’s assuming special responsibilities for need arising from unemployment because remedies for unemployment must be at least nationwide in scope, Howard Hunter once declared, “There is no local community in America today which can do anything about unemployment.” 2 An equally emphatic, if somewhat less sweeping, observation is that of Mordecai Ezekiel, noted economist of the Department of Agriculture. One cause of failure of the National Recovery Act, he writes, was that it “provided merely a series of single-industry plans, without interindustry coordination, and with no provision or means for concerted expansion.” Thus, he concludes, if planning to provide jobs for all is to be fully effective, “it must be planning on an industry-wide scale.” 3

2 WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1939. A strikingly dissimilar view has been expressed by Walter D. Fuller, president of the Curtis Publishing Company, and one-time president of the National Association of Manufacturers, who declared: “… relief and unemployment are not national but local problems, requiring local knowledge of the situation, local experience and local application of our intelligence.”—“Relief—A Local Problem,” in State Government, vol. 13, no. 1, January, 1940, p. 9.
3 Jobs for All: Through Industrial Expansion. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1939, pp. 206-207, 208, 211. To illustrate his thesis, Mr. Ezekiel quotes a high railroad executive as saying: “If industry were running at full production, we would have plenty of freight to haul. We could reduce our freight rates to reasonable levels. We could pay higher wages. We would have jobs for more men. We’d make good profits at the same time. Those are things we could easily do if the whole country could keep running at the 1929 level, or higher. But if we reduced freight rates by ourselves, that won’t do the job. Lower freight rates alone won’t make the auto factories, the steel plants, the lumber mills, and the cement and gravel plants run at full capacity. If we cut rates by ourselves, our traffic would go up little if at all, and we’d be in even worse shape than we now are.”
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Again, as in so many other respects, Canadian experience has brought serious students of the problem to much the same point of view as that held by observers in the United States. For example, the Canadian Royal Commission which has been alluded to several times already, reported that:

Perhaps the most serious indictment of the whole system of handling relief is that it has prevented the concentration of responsibility for remedial policies. The underlying assumptions were that, in the first place, relief was essentially a municipal and, in the second place, a provincial responsibility, and that the Dominion was assisting other governments only as a matter of grace. Yet it was obvious that the municipalities were quite unable to take effective remedial action because of limited resources and lack of control of economic activities. . . . The provinces were little more able to take effective action. Virtually the only methods available to them were those of public works and land settlement. Yet both types of policy were highly costly and neither policy, nor both together, could take care of large numbers of the unemployed. Those provinces which attempted either policy on an extensive scale soon found their credit resources badly strained. . . . The principal difficulty has been that many Dominion schemes required co-operation from the provinces and municipalities, and usually proportionate contributions from them. On occasion the views of provincial governments as to the proper remedial policies differed from those of the Dominion, and co-operation was not forthcoming. In all cases where Dominion remedial policies required contributions from the provinces or municipalities the effect was to increase their immediate financial burden, a condition which frequently deterred them from co-operation. Thus co-operation between the Dominion and other governments was often absent and frequently the Dominion and the provinces worked at cross purposes. . . .

It is not suggested that it is within the powers of government to do away with depressions, particularly in a country like Canada which is so largely dependent upon foreign markets, but governments can do a great deal to minimize the huge losses in national income. The planning of public works and developmental expenditures, an intelligent and co-ordinated use of credit, foreign exchange, trade, transportation and taxation policies are powerful instruments with which to combat unemployment and to reduce fluctuations in income. The Dominion is the only government which can use these instruments effectively. So long as the responsibility for unemployment rests with the nine provinces (and their creatures, the municipalities) which may follow different and conflicting budgetary, taxation, development, and public works policies, Canada will be unable to eliminate the avoidable economic wastes and social consequences of mass unemployment.1

Since federal action is regarded as indispensable to the liquidation of unemployment, it is frequently held that the federal government should bear most if not all the cost of providing for

The Broader Issues

those who fall into need because they have no jobs. Only thus, it is argued, can Congress be brought to realize the urgency of doing enough to eliminate the real source of trouble. This view was expressed early in the depression by a group of nationally known social workers and public welfare officials who declared: “It is only when Congress recognizes its direct responsibility for unemployment relief that it will be ready to adopt other and more constructive methods of dealing with the problem.”

This same point of view was emphasized in 1939 by the Canadian Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations which reported: “If the Dominion assumes full responsibility for relief of employables, it should have much stronger incentive than under the present system of divided financial responsibilities to adopt vigorous remedial policies to prevent unemployment from arising. . . .”

“Special” Responsibility for the Unemployed as a Means of Compelling States and Localities to Carry Larger Responsibilities

Although official statements of the administration’s policy of assuming special responsibility for needs arising from unemployment have usually emphasized such factors as have already been presented, there is strong indication that at least one further consideration lay behind the decision to adopt the policy which has been followed since 1935. This was clearly indicated in testimony presented to a Senate Committee by Harry Hopkins in 1936.

“One of the reasons why the Government got out of the direct-relief business,” he explained, “was because we believed in some cases the States were not bearing their fair share of this burden, and this was a method to assure that in certain sections, so far as this whole relief field was concerned, that the States particularly and the local communities, would provide their fair share of this burden.” Thus, it appears that the current national relief policy

1 U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 5125), Federal Aid for Unemployment Relief, 73d Congress, 2d Session, 1933, Part I, pp. 31-32.
3 U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H.R. 12624), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936, 74th Congress, 2d Session, 1936, p. 53. Paul Webbink, one-time FERA official, has written that the 1935 attempt to distinguish between employable and unemployable relief cases is attributable in part to “the search of federal relief officials for some tenable formula by which a portion of the
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

was motivated at least in part by the failure of legislative and administrative devices to secure from states and localities what were regarded as fair contributions toward the cost of the entire relief program.¹

That difficulties of this kind should have been encountered by the FERA is understandable enough in view of a serious defect in the legislation under which that agency operated: the FERA had no legal basis for compelling states or localities to contribute any particular amounts or proportions toward the cost of emergency relief. Furthermore, the immediate emergency had to be met, and advance planning was often impossible. Since the FERA was so seriously handicapped by the various obstacles confronting it, there seems to be ample room for questioning whether the administrative problem of getting states to do their fair share in maintaining relief programs—which appears to have contributed to the new division of responsibility effected in 1935—might not have been solved without recourse to so drastic a step as abandonment by the federal government of an area of need in which it had previously functioned.

Withdrawal of the federal government from the scene left needy people without a champion to urge states and localities to contribute to the cost of such relief as might be needed; there remained no responsible governmental agency to call attention to general relief needs and to urge states and localities to contribute to the cost of such general relief as might be needed. In many states this lack of a responsible agency has resulted in suffering on the part of people whose needs are inadequately met and for whom the federal government no longer goes to bat. And, if controversies with subsidiary units of government were indeed a primary reason for the change, they were not, in fact, successfully avoided. In no time at all, the WPA was embroiled with state and local governments on two new fronts—the vexed question of sponsors' "contributions" to the cost of projects and, secondly, the ever-perplexing question of how many jobs should

¹ See Federal Aid for Relief, by Edward A. Williams. Columbia University Press, New York, 1939. The files of the FERA, according to this report, "attest to the constant and at times embittered discussions which took place between . . . [the FERA] and states which it conceived to be 'lying down on the job.' "—p. 171.
The Broader Issues

be provided in a given state or local subdivision. Thus, difficulties encountered by the federal government in getting local and state governments to carry a fair share of the burden were solved by the federal government's arbitrarily deciding what part of the burden it would bear, leaving all needy people not provided for in this way to their own devices or to the mercy of state and local authorities.

Opposition to the Principle of "Special" Responsibility

Like most other aspects of federal relief policy, the doctrine of "special" federal responsibility for unemployed persons has been attacked as bitterly as it has been warmly defended. Attacks upon this principle are usually based upon three contentions: first, that to distinguish between persons who are employable and those who are unemployable is frequently so difficult that it offers no sound basis for any division of responsibility between governmental agencies; second, that to class persons as unemployable—an inevitable concomitant, unfortunately, of dividing responsibility on the basis of employability—is cruel; and, third, that to give to employable persons provided for by the federal government more liberal treatment than is given to other classes of needy persons, is unfair.

To distinguish between an employable person and one who is unemployable is, admittedly, frequently quite difficult. Whether it is, as some critics aver, so difficult as to make this an impracticable basis for dividing up responsibility in the relief field is not clear. Difficult though they may be to make, distinctions between "employable" and "unemployable" persons are being made every day—by employers who turn down as unadaptable to their needs workers applying at their gates; by workmen's compensation authorities who rule not only on whether a man is disabled or physically fit, unemployable or employable, but also on varying degrees of disability or employability; and finally, by officials administering unemployment compensation benefits which are available only to workers who are unemployed and employable, and are therefore denied to workers who may be temporarily or permanently incapacitated for work.

One important factor frequently overlooked by those who

1 See chaps. 5, 24, and 25.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

think experience under the WPA program teaches that, in the division of responsibility for relief administration, it is impossible to rely upon differentiating between employable and unemployable persons, is that difficulties encountered during the past several years have been greatly aggravated by the vast disparities in the quality and extent of services and assistance available to the one group as opposed to the other. To declare a man employable sometimes meant depriving him of all practicable hope of effective aid. Sometimes, to be declared unemployable was tantamount to being robbed of hope for assistance of any kind.

Typical of the grave consequences resulting from being caught between two fires are those revealed in the report of a survey of relief administration in the District of Columbia in 1938. This declares:

No more graphic illustration of the inadequacy of the present relief funds is possible than the picturization of this tragic group caught in the marginal zone between two nonmeshing welfare programs. Refused on one hand because of employability and on the other for unemployability, the consequences cannot fail to induce a sense of utter futility and frustration on the part of these families.1

Hardships imposed upon needy people are often attributable to discrepancies in standards used by different agencies in determining employability. In one southern state, for example, relief normally has been denied not only to the families of those who were employable but also to families of those who were “able-bodied.” Thus, many able-bodied persons who were ineligible for relief also found themselves ineligible for WPA employment since to be able-bodied did not necessarily mean that they could be employed by the WPA.

According to an official report of the Department of Public Welfare in Louisville, Kentucky, many applicants have been refused direct relief in that city because of their ability to do light work. However, since the number of WPA projects on which light-work employes could be assigned was extremely limited this meant that a person might be ineligible for both direct relief and work relief because he could do only a limited type of work. In view of results like these, can one wonder that decisions affecting such vital issues may sometimes have turned on something less

The Broader Issues

than completely objective analysis of a person's employability?

A further factor that has complicated decisions regarding employability has been that, in the absence of a broad integrated relief program, one agency might, by declaring a worker employable or unemployable, be able to escape and, at the same time, to saddle upon some other agency the responsibility for assisting him. The obvious remedy for difficulties arising from this cause, of course, would be for the federal government at least to share the cost of caring for unemployable persons. This would place less of a premium upon classifying people in such a way as to escape responsibility for their care.

If there were established a broad program to provide assistance for any kind of person regardless of the cause of his need, and if, instead of each going its own way, the various social agencies (notably the WPA, relief agencies, public employment offices, and vocational training centers) concerned with meeting human needs agreed to pool their resources and to co-operate in "doubtful" cases, practically all difficulties of the kind experienced over the past few years could undoubtedly be eliminated.¹

Already relief agencies responsible for aiding needy employable persons have resorted to a number of different devices to avoid, if possible, inflicting undue hardship upon needy persons rejected by the WPA as unemployable. The California State Relief Administration, for example, ruled (in 1938) that persons not deemed employable by the WPA were not to be automatically rejected for unemployment relief since "WPA standards of employability vary in different counties and even from time to time in the same county."²

Abandonment of attempts of the federal government to provide a special form of assistance to employable persons has sometimes been urged on the ground that an inevitable concomitant of this policy is to "brand as unemployable" those who cannot qualify for the services provided. Former Governor Landon of Kansas, for example, once declared: "That is a terrible thing—

¹ Any provision that might be made for the co-operative classification of persons as to employability would, of necessity, have to be sufficiently flexible to permit such reviews as might be needed because of changing circumstances and the successes of the "unemployables" who confound the experts (as they are forever doing) by finding —and holding—jobs.

² California State Relief Administration, Manual. [Los Angeles], Interpretation no. 3, chap. 1, sec. C, June 8, 1938.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

arbitrary drawing of the line and branding a man as unemployable. That does something to that fellow." 1 More recently, C. M. Bookman, nationally known social worker, has declared that among his objections to federal relief policy was that it resulted in "classifying the unemployed as 'employable' and 'unemployable,' killing what little hope is left in the hearts of thousands of men that some day they may be once again independent workers providing for their own families." 2

Evidence that there is some validity to criticism of this type—under conditions existing at the time at least—is available from a 1936 report of the Nassau County (New York) Emergency Relief Bureau which declared:

The separation of the relief families into two groups—the employables and the unemployables—has had harmful effects. Some of those returned to the relief rolls with the stamp of being unemployable, given them in cursory fashion, are taking advantage of the fact that they have been officially designated as unable to work any longer and even though many of them can work, it has been very difficult for the Bureau to stimulate them to find employment again. Others, who have always worked in the past and who will work again, by receiving the designation of unemployable have suffered an additional blow to morale. They always have been aware of their handicaps and have risen above them but now to have it said that they are unfit to hold even a made job with the government has been a difficult blow to accept. 3

While it may be admitted that it is "cruel" to relegate unemployable persons to the poorly co-ordinated and meager services available to them in many areas, it does not follow that those who are in fact employable should be denied the types of assistance considered most appropriate for them. It might be just as truly argued that it would be "cruel" to employable persons to provide for them only such services as could properly be made available to "unemployables" as well. 4 The better course would be to improve the kinds of services available to the latter rather than to dilute the quality of service to the former.

Contentions that the very process of labeling a man as "unemployable" is "cruel" assume, of course, that it is not so much a

4 The importance of providing work for employable persons is discussed in some detail in chaps. 32 and 33.
The Broader Issues

person's situation as the act of classifying him that is detrimental. In reality, however, it is highly doubtful whether a man's morale could long be preserved merely by labeling him "employable" if, because of his age, physical condition, or other considerations he were consistently denied private employment and could not hold his own even on a job provided under a public work program. To expect that a man's morale could be preserved by not classing him as unemployable—or even by calling him employable when the bulk of his every-day experiences points to the opposite conclusion—would be like expecting a tuberculosis victim not to run a temperature simply because he is not told of his affliction.

Furthermore, distress and discouragement commonly felt as a result of being classed as unemployable may be attributable not so much to this fact as to despair over the lack of broad and well-co-ordinated assistance measures and rehabilitation programs to which those needing such services could turn for help in overcoming any remediable difficulties that might be responsible for their unemployability.

It is claimed that in addition to the administrative difficulties involved, assumption by the federal government of "special" responsibility for employable persons results in unjustifiably larger benefits to and preferential treatment of this group, thus establishing among the nation's needy a socially indefensible "hierarchy." The reply usually made to this criticism is that such differences in treatment should be remedied not by lowering the standard of service accorded the "favored" groups, but by raising them for those who have hitherto been denied the aid they needed.

"Special" Responsibility in Operation

By contrast with provisions of the Social Security Act which was under consideration at the time the "new approach" was inaugurated in 1935 (and which imposed upon the federal government consistent, predictable, and clearly defined responsibilities for certain types of unemployable persons, such as the aged, the blind, and dependent children) the "special" responsibility the federal government claims to have for employable needy persons has been fitful and unpredictable. Instead of imposing upon the

1 As shown in some detail in chap. 7.
2 See chap. 23.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

federal government any consistent proportion of relief costs, the peculiar type of responsibility acknowledged by the federal government for unemployed workers has, from time to time, permitted Congress arbitrarily to say what proportion of the need shall be met and what left unmet. It has also permitted Congress more or less arbitrarily to disclaim responsibility for certain types of needy employable persons, and to thrust back upon states and localities the responsibility for relieving them. Among the most serious limitations upon the degree of federal responsibility for relief to employable persons may be noted the unyielding insistence from Washington upon a work program exclusively.

Despite the “special” responsibility the federal government has assumed for needs arising from unemployment it has not hesitated precipitately to change its course on practically any policy without reference to what states or localities can or will do to care for those for whom it suddenly relinquishes responsibility. The net result of congressional plus administrative action, therefore, has been that federal responsibility for needy employable persons (unlike that assumed under the Social Security Act for needy unemployable persons) is not only fitful and unpredictable but strictly unilateral.¹

Although less has been said in later years about the obligation of state and local governments to do their share in carrying the total relief load, the unilateral and vacillating nature of responsibility the federal government has from year to year accepted in regard to unemployment relief has, in effect, loaded upon states and localities the burden of caring for all those the federal government chose not to aid. When other governmental units followed suit and, like the federal government, refused to assume these responsibilities, the inevitable result was to “take it out of the hides of the unemployed.”²

The limited nature of the liability assumed by the federal government for unemployment relief needs is clearly apparent in various official statements of the role of the WPA. These sometimes refer to the WPA as a resource or as one of several resources available to needy unemployed workers. According to one official memorandum, local relief officials were expected “at all times” to remember that the WPA program was “only one re-

¹ For discussion of difficulties arising from this fact see chap. 25.
² See chap. 3.
source for meeting the needs of the unemployed. . . .” Should the WPA be unable to assist in meeting a particular problem, continued the memorandum, relief authorities were expected “to develop other resources or to give an interpretation to the client if no resources are available.”

Unfortunately for those uncounted thousands of potential workers for whom WPA jobs have not been available and particularly for those to whom some well-meaning social worker had to “interpret” the harsh fact that there were no other resources available, federal responsibility toward needy employable persons has fallen far short of what was expected when President Roosevelt declared that the federal government was the only governmental agency “with sufficient power and credit to meet this situation”; that “we have assumed this task”; and that “we shall not shrink from it in the future.”

1 Georgia FERA, Release No. 7311, October 9, 1936.
CHAPTER XXX
FEDERAL VERSUS STATE AND LOCAL
FINANCING AND CONTROL

In sharp contrast with the situation prevailing in 1932, the necessity for at least some degree of federal responsibility for relief needs had by 1942 won the all but unanimous support of the American people. There still remained, nevertheless, many knotty questions: How far should this principle be carried? How much of the costs of relief and employment should the federal government bear? How much administrative control should it exercise? What justification was there for assuming relatively heavy responsibilities for one kind of program, like that of the WPA, and washing its hands of others, such as that for general relief?

The Case for Federal Control
Over a Work Program

To the question of how much responsibility the federal government should assume for various types of public welfare programs, there is no easy answer. All that is attempted in this chapter and the next, therefore, is an enumeration of various considerations that need to be taken into account in any attempt to say how far the federal government should go in financing and controlling a program like that of the WPA. Upon the weight given to one as opposed to another of these factors will depend the answer to the problem at hand. Various arguments offered by supporters of one side, interestingly enough, have also been advanced by protagonists in the opposite camp in favor of their position.

Before embarking upon this discussion it may not be amiss to point out that the many difficulties militating against effective administration of relief measures have undoubtedly contributed to the ever-recurring interest in giving some new authority a chance to try its hand. Dissatisfactions over the way relief has been administered have not usually been analyzed in terms of fundamental causes, but have sometimes been attributed both in this
The Broader Issues

country and in Great Britain to the fact that the service in question was administered by a national instead of a local authority or by a local instead of a national body—depending upon which was administering it at the time. Facile changes of administrative responsibility, however, frequently leave untouched deeper causes of dissatisfaction which go far beyond the immediate question.

Experience with the Grant System During FERA Days

Opposition on the part of federal authorities to administering the WPA program on a grant-in-aid basis (as is often suggested) is attributable in no small measure to their unsatisfactory experience with grants to states during the FERA days. Howard Hunter, for example, once declared:

As for grants-in-aid to the States for relief, the present administration, for 2 1/2 years, practiced that system. And it simply did not work well. It worked badly because of the wide variety of standards of relief and administration. . . .

. . . the grant-in-aid system for public highways has worked well for many years. But the unemployed are not highways and you can’t talk with engineering accuracy about the unemployment problem in any State or locality as you can about a highway. No grant-in-aid scheme can be made flexible enough, or be made to work fast enough, to take care of the relief of the unemployed.¹

However sorry the experience under the FERA may have been, it is important to distinguish between flaws in the grant-in-aid principle as such and the defects in the specific law underlying the FERA program. Inaugurated as it was in times of great stress, flexibility and quick action were of prime importance. Both were permitted by law. FERA officials were given complete discretion in parceling out federal funds; states were not required to contribute any specified proportion of relief costs. As could have been expected, allocation of funds to states developed into a vast poker game. On the one hand state needs were sometimes exaggerated because it was known that amounts requested would be scaled down. On the other hand, allocations of federal funds were sometimes reduced or withheld to compel states to assume larger financial responsibilities.² That methods like these should

¹ Congressional Record, Appendix, May 22, 1939, p. 2120.
² Something of the nature of the highly discretionary power given FERA officials over this all-important fund-distributing process is indicated by Edward A. Williams, a member of the FERA staff during those hectic days. He writes:

"In making his decision, the Assistant Administrator [who was in charge of
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

have been the cause of chronic administrative headaches and have drawn sharp criticism as being too subject to political and personal considerations was only to be expected.¹

Perplexing as its financial problems were, the FERA’s life was still further harassed by its lack of authority effectively to control relief standards or methods of state and local administration. There was no provision, such as that subsequently written into the Social Security Act, prescribing that federal funds could be granted only to states submitting plans conforming to specified legal requirements and meeting the approval of the responsible federal authority. Apart from persuasion, the FERA’s only alternatives, when state administration fell too far below expected standards, were to withhold federal funds altogether or to take over relief administration in the offending state. This latter power, given to the FERA in May, 1933, was within twenty-four months exercised in six states.² Threats of withholding federal funds, on the other hand, were more common, being relied upon as a lever to improve standards of relief or to compel larger contributions by state and local governments.³

Added to all these difficulties was the expectation that the entire

relations with the states and who was, in the main, responsible for saying how much was to be granted each state] was influenced to some extent by the comments of the various divisions of the F.E.R.A. . . . which reviewed the state applications and supporting papers. In the last analysis, however, the Assistant Administrator relied most heavily upon the opinions of the field representatives and his own personal contacts with the states. This was inevitable. The governors’ applications and the supporting statements and briefs merely served to give the states’ views concerning their need for federal assistance. The F.E.R.A. soon learned to take these applications with a grain of salt. . . .

“The Assistant Administrator . . . often made field trips to various states. In making recommendations for grants for certain states he could therefore often rely on his own personal observations and the interviews he had had with persons familiar with local relief conditions. . . .”—Federal Aid for Relief. Columbia University Press, New York, 1939, pp. 198-199.

Even after the development of complex formulas to guide in making allocations of funds in 1935, these were regarded only as “approximations” which had to be modified by “more ‘subjective’ judgments.” As a result, writes Mr. Williams, state allotments throughout 1935 continued to rest “heavily on the observations of field representatives, the general information gathered by the Assistant Administrator in charge of relations with states, and the views of the Administrator.”—Ibid., p. 215.

² Massachusetts, Ohio, North Dakota, Georgia, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.
³ Of this, Mr. Williams writes: “The federal agency . . . was extremely reluctant to withhold funds, primarily because the use of this sanction fell with the greatest force upon those in need of relief.”—Federal Aid for Relief, p. 170.
The Broader Issues

FERA program would be short-lived. It was therefore administered only on a month-to-month basis. This precluded advance planning on the part of federal officials no less than on that of state and local authorities. It precluded, too, establishment of effective federal-state relationships.

In view of the many handicaps under which the FERA program operated and of innumerable administrative problems encountered, it is not surprising that those engaged in its administration have become wary of the validity of the grant-in-aid principle. Still, FERA experience in itself cannot fairly be regarded as conclusive evidence that the principle, given a better legal basis, cannot be applied to the administration of either a work relief or a public employment program.

Just as it is important, in discussions of federal versus state and local control, to make due allowance for shortcomings of the grants-to-states policy applied to the FERA program, it is no less important frankly to face genuine difficulties encountered in administering grant-in-aid programs even under the relatively favorable conditions obtaining under the Social Security Act. This is something proponents of grants-in-aid for work relief frequently overlook.

There is, first of all, great diversity in standards of assistance granted in the several states.¹ Then, too, there are wide differences in standards of personnel and administration in one state as opposed to another. True, the Social Security Board may, when other efforts fail, threaten to withhold or actually withhold federal funds in an effort to compel a state to adhere to its plan as approved. This is an extreme step, however, and one that is taken only as a last resort by the Social Security Board, as by the earlier FERA.² This reluctance is not necessarily evidence of weakness, but rather of concern for those to whom the withholding of fed-

¹ See, for example, Table 15. This diversity in the size of average benefits cannot, however, be attributed to the grant-in-aid principle alone, since it might be possible (as the Social Security Board proposes) to achieve greater uniformity by modifying the basis on which grants are made to states. See, for example, Social Security Board, Sixth Annual Report, 1941. Government Printing Office, Washington, pp. 21-22.

² After an intensive study of the administration of old-age assistance, made under auspices of the Social Science Research Council, it was reported that the Social Security Board “has been hesitant to take the drastic step of complete withdrawal of federal funds . . . both because this action is likely to cause suffering among the dependent aged . . . and because it marks the failure of a cooperative administrative effort.”—Lansdale, Robert T., and others, The Administration of Old Age Assistance. Public Administration Service, Chicago, 1939, p. 13.
eral funds might mean serious deprivation. It is because of this fact that V. O. Key, Jr., after his wide study of grants-in-aid, could write:

There is often ascribed to the power to withhold federal funds a potency which it does not in reality possess. Its use is practically limited to a narrow range of situations. It is primarily the large political issues—the failure of the legislature to grant proper powers or adequate appropriations to the state agency, the machinations of a corrupt political machine, the spoils raids of the ordinary political organization—that bring about the exercise of the power. Drastic measures can be justified only when the transgressions have been gross. The power is of little avail in the correction of the weaknesses of an unimaginative, half-hearted, self-satisfied, incompetent state agency which commits no spectacular offenses and exhibits a modicum of activity. The effect of the device, however, is not to be measured only by the instances in which it has been used: the threat of its use can be equally effective.  

Whether such shortcomings as “unimaginative, half-hearted, self-satisfied, incompetent” state agencies have been guilty of are too high a price to pay for the grant-in-aid principle is not for this volume to say. Neither can it be said with any degree of certainty whether such weaknesses would be cured, or aggravated, under increased central control by the federal government.

Even if it could be shown that, as many observers have contended, results achieved under existing grant-in-aid programs were reasonably satisfactory, this would not necessarily mean that a work program administered on such a basis would prove equally successful. For instance, several authorities point out that grants-in-aid can be successful only if the various levels of government concerned are in general agreement with the purposes being sought. Therefore, old-age assistance, about which there is little disagreement, might be expected to be more efficiently administered on a grant-in-aid basis than relief to employables with respect to whom local attitudes vary widely.

Conversely, the principle of administration to hold most promise for a program like that of the WPA (or any other designed to meet needs arising from unemployment) might not necessarily be appropriate for other types of welfare programs.

2 See, for example, Ibid., chap. 12.
3 See chaps. 2 and 3.
The Broader Issues

Thus, one might well say of the public welfare field what Robert D. Leigh has said of the fields of public health and education:

. . . whole functions, such as health or education, break themselves up into specific services or units of activity to which different principles apply and which, therefore, require different degrees of centralization. . . .

Discarding the comfortable methods of general formulae and principles of universal application as solutions of the federal problem . . . we must then proceed to the more difficult task of reexamining the actual federal . . . services with the view to applying in detail such general principles of geographical allocation of work as are found relevant.1

Administrative vs. Financial Responsibility

The extent to which the federal government, as opposed to states and localities, should control programs like that of the WPA depends upon how the costs are distributed. Important to discussion of this issue is the belief, widely held among public administrators, that he who pays the piper should call the tune. President Roosevelt, for example, was reported in December, 1938, as saying that so long as the federal government was providing most of the money, it should keep a tight rein over relief spending and administration.2

Although the President in April, 1939, declared that a system of “handling unemployment relief through a system of grants . . . to states . . . has as many disadvantages as there are local political units in the nation”3 he had, only a few months before,


Of this issue Jane Perry Clark has written: “Each [federal-state] cooperative arrangement . . . is designed to serve only in relation to the need of particular projects of government, in widely differing fields, such as control of oil production and the development of numerous social services. Each cooperative arrangement, no matter what its kind, is designed primarily as a means of forwarding specific projects of modern government. Therefore, cooperative devices bear such a close relationship to the special requirements of different subjects and particular situations that it is dangerous to attempt to separate the component parts and to make generalizations concerning arrangements divorced from the particular ends they are designed to serve. As the aims of road building are different from those of old-age pensions, so their methods and administrative plans are to a large extent dependent upon the particular subject matter, despite the fact that both are forwarded by means of grants of money from the federal government to the states. Furthermore, each cooperative arrangement is closely intertwined with the special social, economic, and political conditions in particular states and with the political problems of the federal government as well.”—The Rise of a New Federalism. Columbia University Press, New York, 1938, pp. 9-10.

2Conditions indicating need for substantial federal contributions toward the cost of unemployment relief are discussed in chaps. 26-29.

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

vigorously defended the grant-in-aid principle as it applied to the social security program.¹ This divergence in points of view may be attributable to the fact that the federal government bears a proportionately larger share of the cost of the WPA than of federally aided security programs.

Inasmuch as the federal government normally contributes 50 per cent of the cost of assistance programs administered on a grant-in-aid basis, but contributes approximately 80 per cent of the cost of the WPA program, it may be fair to assume that somewhere between these two proportions lies the magical point at which the federal government, in the opinion of various officials, should assume responsibility for direct administration of a program for which it provides “most of the money.”

A point of view much like that of the President was once expressed before a House Committee by Aubrey Williams, who declared that since states and cities could not meet needs for unemployment relief “the Federal Government has got . . . to be the major financing agency. . . .

“. . . I believe that the agency which expends the money must control and be responsible for its expenditure.”²

This same consideration was among those most frequently ad-

¹ Instead of attacking, he extolled federal grants for social security, saying: “Much of the success of the Social Security Act is due to the fact that all of the programs contained in this act (with one necessary exception) are administered by the States themselves, but coordinated and partially financed by the Federal Government.”—Ibid., January 17, 1939.

² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Supplemental Appropriation, Relief and Work Relief, Fiscal Year 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, p. 63. In direct contrast with the federal administration's position regarding the importance of retaining control over funds appropriated for work relief is that of certain Republicans in Congress. Senator Vandenberg, for example, once advocated and introduced a bill to effectuate the principle that “complete power of decision relative to the type of relief, and complete responsibility for subsequent administration” be given to the states despite the fact, which he admitted, that the federal government must continue to accept “primary . . . obligation to finance the major costs of feeding, sheltering, and clothing all worthy Americans who are in need.”—“Pro—Should Relief Funds Be Administered by the States?” in Congressional Digest, vol. 15, nos. 6-7, June-July, 1936, p. 177. (Original not italicized.) Similarly, William J. Ellis, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Institutions and Agencies, and one-time chairman of the Committee on Relief established by the Council of State Governments, has declared: “Even though work relief may continue to be financed to 90 per cent or more of its whole cost by the federal government, there are substantial reasons why administration should be transferred to state and local governments. . . .”—“The Case for State-Local Administration,” in Public Administration Review, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring, 1941, p. 236.
The Broader Issues

vanced in Great Britain in 1933 during the fight to nationalize that country’s program of relief to unemployed workers.¹

The principle that with support goes control implies that he who is asked to help pay the piper must be allowed to call at least a few of the tunes. Thus, when it was decided, early in the history of the WPA program, that federal funds were to be supplemented with “contributions” from state and local governmental agencies, the co-operating units were allowed to designate the projects to be undertaken.²

Those who deplore such control as local and state authorities have been given under the WPA program must face the possibility that if these bodies are deprived of their present roles, further funds from their treasuries might not be forthcoming to augment federal appropriations for the WPA.³

It has sometimes been argued that it is important to continue to receive state and local contributions to the WPA program in order to increase the total funds available even though ⁴ this may result in a less equitable distribution of costs and more costly tax collections. Furthermore, it is said, financing programs of this kind from several tills makes the cost easier for the taxpayer to bear since it does not all appear on one bill! Nevertheless, a research report made to and published by the Canadian Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations strongly recommended against dividing financial responsibility for unemployment relief, contending that when responsibility is divided there is a tendency

¹ Of this the Minister of Labour once declared: “The local authorities are at present administering transitional payments on behalf of the central government, but without any financial responsibility at all. There is a complete divorce between the responsibility of the central authority, which is providing the money, and that of the local authority, which disburses it. I venture to lay down this rule as axiomatic, that, if the responsibility is to be a national obligation, the administration can no longer remain local but must be national also.”—As quoted in John D. Millett’s The British Unemployment Assistance Board, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1940, p. 35.
² Local and state agencies, though not necessarily the same ones contributing to the cost of the program, were also given some say as to who should be employed.
³ Though it is likely that local and state authorities shorn of all control over the WPA program would prove most unwilling contributors to the cost of that program, it does not necessarily follow that financial contributions could not be secured. In Great Britain, for example, where the rivalry between the local and national governments has been every bit as keen as that in the United States, local governments were, by the act of 1934, required to pay part of the cost of unemployment assistance which is nationally administered.
⁴ As shown in chap. 27.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

to concentrate attention on the "apportionment of the costs . . .
to the detriment of other considerations." The report continued:

If responsibility were entirely with the government, attention would be
concentrated where it should be, namely, on the terrific financial burden of
unemployment to the country and the necessity of reducing that burden
through the most efficient organization of relief possible and through com¬
bating the causes of unemployment. Canada has not been aggressive in meet¬
ing the causes of unemployment, and although it is true that unemployment
cannot be eradicated, it can be lessened by thorough-going preparation along
the lines already mentioned to cope with the causes of unemployment. . . .

With the whole problem of unemployment in the hands of one authority,
the taxpayers of the country would know what were the immediate cash
costs of the problem. This knowledge should exert a constant pressure on
that government for efficiency and economy in the administration of unem¬
ployment aid and for dealing with the causes of unemployment.\(^1\)

Whether or not programs like that of the WPA should be
financed exclusively from federal funds involves consideration of
the degree of control that may safely be given to state or local
authorities. If a high degree of national uniformity\(^2\) is desired,
any considerable financial contributions from state and local gov¬
ernments may prove something of an obstacle. In this connection
it is interesting to note that relief officials in various parts of the
country have admitted that opposition by local authorities to what
a federal agency does in their bailiwicks often results less from
opposition to the policies inaugurated than from resentment over
being told what they may and may not do with their own money.
Thus, questions regarding the degree of control that the federal
government can and should exercise over a program like that of
the WPA are inextricably bound up with further questions as to
what proportion of the cost of the program should be borne
by each level of government. Answers to these questions, in turn,
will hinge on one's theories of taxation and the desirability of
attempting to levy taxes in accordance with ability to pay and in
such a manner as will be most economical and work least hardship
on taxpayers.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Grauer, A. E., Public Assistance and Social Insurance: A Study Prepared for the
Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. J. O. Patenaude, Ottawa,
1939, Appendix 6, pp. 30-31.

\(^2\) Discussed in the succeeding chapter.

\(^3\) See chap. 27.
The Broader Issues

Economy vs. Waste

Efficient administration of the WPA program, according to administration leaders, can be assured only by continued federal operation. Colonel Harrington, in a radio address, once put the case thus:

... the program is federally controlled and administered, and all our experience indicates that such control is necessary. While local control of direct relief may be feasible, a work relief program financed with Federal funds must, in my opinion, be federally administered. We speak in the light of considerable experience in that matter. Any attempt to have a work program administered by forty-eight states, more than 3,000 counties, and countless municipalities, with the diversity in planning and operation that this would occasion, would inevitably lead to inefficiency, waste and confusion.¹

Conflicting sharply with the claims of administration supporters are those of critics who maintain that increased state and local control will result in greater economy. In the opinion of Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, for example, return of relief administration to states and localities would mean halving, approximately, the cost of relief with no lessened efficiency.

A similar statement made by Republican candidate Landon during the 1936 presidential campaign drew from Harry Hopkins a series of questions as to how he intended to cut relief costs. Would it be done, he asked, by cutting administrative expenses which then (he said) amounted to less than 4 per cent of total expenditures? By reducing payments to workers who were then getting an average of about $50 per month? By increasing contributions from states and local communities which were already paying approximately 20 per cent of the cost of WPA projects and which depended primarily upon real estate taxes for their incomes? By substituting the dole for work relief? Mr. Landon “can’t make his big cut in relief costs any possible way except by putting able workers on the dole!” concluded Mr. Hopkins, answering his own questions.²

¹ WPA Release 4-1901, February 26, 1939.
² WPA Release 4-1346, October 18, 1936. Pressing his attack upon Mr. Landon for suggesting economy in relief expenditures, Mr. Hopkins recalled requests for federal funds which Mr. Landon had made while serving as Governor of Kansas. “Governor Landon says we are extravagant,” said Mr. Hopkins derisively. “Well, the best way to judge that is to compare what we have spent in Kansas with what Governor Landon asked us to spend. From 1933 to last year, he himself urged us
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

It seems clear that proponents of increased state and local control over the WPA program do, in fact, expect to effect economies by reducing benefits and allowing state and local authorities to choose whether needy unemployed workers shall be given work relief, direct relief, or none.¹

When Howard Hunter in 1939, in his turn, criticized critics who charged that the costs of administering the WPA would be lowered by increased state and local control, he declared that the “facts show the contrary.” Costs of administration of relief under state control, said Mr. Hunter, “never got below 10% of the total, and today the average administrative expense of state relief administrations is about 16%. Compared with this, the administrative expense of the WPA . . . actually averages less than 3 1/2%.”²

Unfortunately, these claims, like many others relating to the complex problem of administrative costs, need considerable qualification before they can be seen in their true light. As already shown in some detail³ administrative costs reported by the WPA (which have amounted to 3.5 or 4.5 per cent of all expenditures) represent only costs of administration paid from WPA funds and do not reflect at all the costs of other necessary administrative services rendered by other federal, state, or local agencies and paid for from funds of those agencies. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that administrative costs as reported by the WPA include none of the costs of investigating and reinvestigating, certifying and recertifying the eligibility of millions of workers referred by state and local relief agencies for employment by the WPA.⁴

Mr. Hunter’s comparisons also ignore such factors as differences in the average benefits provided under the WPA as opposed to state and local relief programs, differences in the number of individuals served, the relative frequency with which agencies

to spend 28 1/2 percent more than we actually did. If we had followed his signed requests, we would have spent $12,300,000 more than we did in Kansas alone!”—Ibid.

¹ See chap. 31.
² WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1939.
³ See chap. 4.
⁴ Although it is recognized that there is some question as to whether the costs of various services here referred to are properly chargeable as “administrative costs,” they are the same types of expenditures as those which are usually taken into account in computing costs of administering the WPA or relief programs.
The Broader Issues

attempt to review the eligibility of those granted aid, and, finally, the variety of services rendered. To relate administrative costs only to total expenditures, therefore, is manifestly unfair.

So complicated is this problem and information on it so scattered that it may safely be said there are no reliable data indicating the administrative superiority and economy of administration by either the federal government or by state and local governments. Nevertheless, it is significant that impartial students who have scrutinized WPA administration either from the broad national perspective or from the more restricted point of view of operations in a given locality have found that despite the many handicaps imposed upon the program by its nature and by Congress, it has been well administered. Even as early as 1937, when the WPA had been in existence only about two years, Fortune magazine reported as follows on the results of a survey that had been made of the program: "One conclusion of the research will perhaps startle you: this impartial and wholly unbiased survey gave strongest support to the feeling that the machinery . . . of the damned and despised WPA functions with an efficiency of which any industrialist would be proud."

That this could have been said, regardless of various obstacles to efficiency and sound administration, is indeed a tribute to the caliber of many officials who have been drawn into WPA service.

---

1 See Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief. Public Administration Service, Chicago, 1941.
3 Commenting upon state as opposed to federal administration in general, and not with respect to WPA operations alone, George C. S. Benson, in his book, The New Centralization: A Study of Intergovernmental Relationships in the United States, has written that although there are noteworthy exceptions "... state governments are inferior administratively to the federal government. Two-thirds of the states lack genuine merit systems for selection of personnel, and only three or four have salary levels sufficiently high to attract competent administrative or professional staffs. ... Moreover, those departments which in every state show uniformly high administrative efficiency are generally those in which the federal government, through grants-in-aid, is exerting some pressure for maintenance of standards."—Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1941, pp. 40-41.
5 The quality of some of these officials is well attested by the more demanding roles many of them have been called upon to play in the prosecution of World War II. For example, Leon Henderson, formerly economic consultant to the WPA, at this writing holds the important office of administrator of the Office of Price Administration; Robert H. Hinckley, once assistant administrator of the WPA, was subsequently made chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, then Assistant Secretary of Commerce—a post he resigned when he became associated with the Sperry Corporation in 1942. High on any list of WPA administrators who have
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Not only the higher officials, but also a host of lesser WPA employees are now serving in various emergency and war agencies where—because of previous experience in the far-flung operations of the WPA, in working under pressure and under quickly changing conditions—they are serving with conspicuous success.

Better Co-ordination—but with What?

Closely related to the question of economy of operation is the argument that if control over the WPA program were shifted to state and local authorities immediate economies could be effected through closer co-ordination of work relief and other assistance measures. This assumes, of course, that employment provided for unemployed persons of the United States is to be continued on a relief basis.¹

If, as an increasing number of authorities and observers suggest, work for those who are unable in this richest of all lands to find other jobs is to be kept as nearly like normal employment as possible, then co-ordination with relief measures may be something to be avoided. Instead, it may be important to gear the work program with other nationwide efforts to stabilize employment, to retrain workers, and to help workers to relocate. A program of this kind might better be co-ordinated with the public employment offices (which since 1941 have been federally operated) than with relief programs, regardless of their auspices.

Federal vs. State and Local Politics

Both those who favor and those who oppose continued federal control over the WPA program claim that only by following their proposals can politics be kept out of relief!

For example, Republican Senator Steiwer of Oregon once declared that if his party had the chance it would return control of

¹ See chap. 14.
The Broader Issues

relief to state and local agencies so that "public money voted for relief . . . will be employed to feed hungry mouths and not to feed hungry political manipulators. . . ." ¹

Similarly, a group of Republican representatives and senators in 1936 advocated increased local control "on the theory that a properly set up local administration by states would be more responsive to the demands of the localities and less likely to indulge in politics, because more open to attack." ²

From the other side of the fence, pointed comment has not been lacking. "Whatever politics there may be in it now," Howard Hunter once declared, would "be multiplied by some three thousand counties and twelve thousand townships" were relief to be returned to local administration. "Let us not forget," he continued, "that local politics got so bad under the Federal grants-in-aid system that in six states, including Senator Taft's State of Ohio, the Federal Government had to completely take over relief administration on account of local political manipulation." ³

Most ardent of all defenders of the good name of the federal government, however, has been Harry Hopkins. Choosing Philadelphia (certainly not the least appropriate of possible choices) as his vantage point, Mr. Hopkins once berated his accusers who charged him with mixing politics with relief. Pointing out the depths to which political manipulation of local relief sometimes sank, Mr. Hopkins declared:

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

In this crisis . . . your State legislature voted $10,000,000 in the First Talbot Act. Your Governor said the law was "conceived in politics and born in hatred." It turned the money over to the local Poor Boards without supervision. The contemptible story of what happened to it has now been ferreted out—waste, discrimination on the basis of grudges, favoring of particular grocery stores, squeezing the destitute out of compensation and insurance.

² New York Herald Tribune, April 14, 1936.
³ WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1939.
Local political racketeers paid personal taxes with this money. The stories of many of these boards, for years back, are utterly incredible. Official reports show that one district bought 5,800 cigars for its officials in 1931 at 11 cents each, and 20 cases of rye whiskey for $1,000. In another, 528 bottles of ginger ale and 950 cigars helped to build up an administrative overhead of 36 percent. When an investigation threatened, many of the records were mysteriously burned. Members took their wives to conventions on relief money, framed dummy real-estate deals and worked insurance rackets. They paid big architects’ fees in periods during which there was no construction. One board was entirely above favoritism. It divided the relief money evenly among all the qualified voters! This is the picture of local Poor Board relief.

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

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

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

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

Somewhat more recently William H. Matthews, one-time director of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, an agency in which Mr. Hopkins gained some of his early social work experience, wrote:

". . . let us not be so simple as to think that by transferring the relief to local communities all “politics in relief” will disappear. The grossest irregularities that have been written of from time to time, not only as to relief of the unemployed but also in connection with the administration of the old age assistance act in certain states, have been due to the deviltry and dishonesty of local rather than federal administration."

That these are not isolated and exceptional observations, though they cannot, of course, be applied to all local administra-

1 WPA Release 4-1338, October 13, 1936.

Attacks by federal officials upon the extent to which state and local relief programs are riddled with politics are not without their humorous aspects. Deficiencies in these programs in this regard, as well as in others, are nothing that could not be at least partially, if not wholly, corrected, given some federal leadership mixed with a little federal aid and topped off with a touch of the Hatch Act.

The Broader Issues

tion, is readily apparent from the wide variety of evidences available. For example, a discussion held by a group of public welfare officials themselves (under the auspices of the American Public Welfare Association in 1939) was summarized as follows:

In many states a twentieth century categorical assistance program is accompanied by sixteenth century general relief. Administration by local elected officials with no state aid or supervision in the program has led inevitably to the worst kind of partisan manipulation of relief. One middle western state was cited as having regular pre-election and post-election relief policies. In one township, it was noted that there was a decrease of nearly 60% in total monthly expenditures following the local primary. In another township, medical care for dependent persons cost over $70,000 in less than two years, the entire sum going to one physician.¹

Granting that local and state relief administration is sometimes tainted with venal politics, there is no certainty that any given program can escape political manipulation merely because it is operated by federal authorities.² Who would want to guess what the “Ohio gang,” for instance, might have done with the FERA, CWA, and WPA?

And, just as there have been evidences of political machinations on the part of local and state authorities administering relief programs (as evidenced by the FERA’s taking over administration in six states and the Social Security Board’s withholding funds from Ohio and Oklahoma because of their politically controlled program) so also has there been scattered evidence that the WPA may not be wholly blameless nor above reproach in this regard. Nevertheless, as shown elsewhere in this volume, the WPA has made heroic efforts to keep politics from affecting adversely the

² For example, Robert D. Leigh has written: “The most disastrous defects in the provision for veteran care, as we have seen, were . . . too much politics, the intermeddling of Congress in the plans framed by the experts, and the reckless assignment of the task of central administration at a critical stage by the Chief Executive to a political adventurer who made a disgraceful exhibition of spoils and the ethics of piracy in his control of men and money.” However, he continued, “Such political meddling and Presidential irresponsibility are in no sense more connected with national or centralized government than with state or municipal governments. It would be flying in the face of the plain facts derived from ample experience to ascribe to state legislatures or city councils more respect for the matured judgment of experts than is exercised by Congress, or to governors or mayors higher levels in appointments or surer safeguarding against partisanship, spoils, and graft than is exercised by the President or the national administrative establishment generally. On the whole the balance is unfavorable to the smaller units.”—Federal Health Administration in the United States, pp. 437-438.
selection of administrative personnel, the selection of projects for prosecution, the selection and employment of project employees, and the total volume of employment provided. This has been particularly true since 1939. Whether states and localities could have matched—or improved upon—this record is debatable.

Because of difficulties inherent in the process of ferreting out evidence of political activity in connection with the WPA program, objective data on the question are lacking. Unfortunately not even the special Senate Committee which was established to investigate alleged political abuses of the WPA in 1938 pretended to make a comprehensive first-hand study of the extent of possible exploitation. It went no farther than to investigate specific cases that were brought to its attention. Only a few of these were found to have been valid. In a summary appraisal of the revelations made by this Committee (known as the Sheppard Committee) Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden have written:

The charges made before the Senate committee involved, not WPA administrative officers in Washington, but officials at the state and local level. Nothing indicated that WPA headquarters encouraged local political activity by its state personnel or condoned it. The Senate committee made no reference to the possibility that the practice of senatorial confirmation of state WPA administrators might have had anything to do with political activity within their organizations. Who sponsored the appointment of the state administrator would have been a logical question with which to begin an inquiry into local WPA practices.

What is even more striking about the Sheppard Committee's report is that the abuses cited were as often attributable to persons outside the WPA as within it. For every misdeed of a WPA official there seemed to be at least one—if not more—ascribed to petty politicians, local or even state authorities, who had no direct connection with the WPA program. In fact, in Kentucky where charges of "political" administration of the WPA had been particularly rife, the Committee found that contributions to the campaign fund of Senator Alben Barkley, the favorite of the Roosevelt administration whose election the WPA was said to have abetted, totaled only $24,000. This was subscribed by employees of a number of governmental agencies of which the WPA

1 See chaps. 4, 5, 12, and 24.
2 The Administration of Federal Work Relief, pp. 287-288.
750
The Broader Issues

was but one. Contributions from state employes to the campaign fund of Governor "Happy" Chandler, Senator Barkley's opponent, on the other hand, were reported to have totaled "in the neighborhood of $70,000," or nearly three times the amount collected for the administration's favorite.¹

Though specific knowledge of the extent of possible political machinations on the part of WPA officials is not available it is clear that if existing safeguards are insufficient to protect either administrative or project employes or the public against political depredations there is a whole gamut of possible ways of controlling these activities without resorting to the extreme step of relinquishing to state and local authorities control over the WPA program. For example, enforcement of the Hatch Act may be lax in states where infractions of it redound to the advantage of the national administration or, perhaps, of a favored senator; such states may need to encourage, by legislation if necessary, their state and local law enforcement officials to take appropriate steps if and when federal officers fall down on the job.

Arguments Raised Against Highly Centralized Control

Opposition to federal control over a program like that of the WPA—as over other kinds of social programs—is often based upon claims which run directly counter to those made by advocates of a high degree of centralization. Both those who favor and those who oppose centralized control contend, for example, that only by effectuation of their views can a program like that of the WPA be administered economically and humanely and without political interference—considerations which have already been alluded to.

Greater Likelihood of Inflexibility and Bureaucracy

Prominent among further arguments advanced in opposition to federal control is the contention that this is likely to result in unduly inflexible administration and to contribute to the development of an unhealthy bureaucracy—a term which is often loosely used to cover a multitude of administrative sins. Typical of many

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

such criticisms of federal control is that voiced by President Hoover in 1931 when he declared:

The moment responsibilities of any community, particularly in economic and social questions, are shifted from any part of the nation to Washington, then that community has subjected itself to a remote bureaucracy with its minimum of understanding and of sympathy. It has lost a large part of its voice and its control of its own destiny. Under Federal control the varied conditions of life in our country are forced into standard molds, with all their limitations upon life, either of the individual or the community. Where people divest themselves of local government responsibilities they at once lay the foundation for the destruction of their liberties.¹

Criticism of this type obviously applies not only to relief measures but to public administration in general and involves many questions that cannot be considered here. Nevertheless, it is important at this point to note that inflexibility and the "standard molds" which Mr. Hoover strongly implies should be rigorously avoided, are not inevitable concomitants of central administrative control over a program of public employment. For, as shown elsewhere in this volume,² federal control exercised over the WPA in the past has permitted and, in the future, can no doubt continue to permit, necessary accommodation to local needs. However, to say that centrally controlled administration can take cognizance of genuine and defensible differences between one area and another does not, of course, mean that it should—as many critics raising the cry against "bureaucracy" seem to expect—yield to every local whim and prejudice. Neither should it aid in perpetuating indefensible localisms resulting not from the free choice of the people but from their poverty or inability to change them. Were central control to capitulate before every set of unique local circumstances, it could easily fail to realize values which, in the best interest of the nation as a whole, should not be compromised.

If one fears in a bureaucracy not its alleged inflexibility but the danger that vast administrative organizations may attempt to extend their lives and their programs longer than necessary, then it might be replied that the broader an agency's jurisdiction, the less difficulty it might be expected to have in reducing staff and activities when need in a given area grows less. A national agency

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, February 13, 1931.
² See chap. 31.
The Broader Issues

has much more opportunity than an organization of narrower scope to transfer personnel to some area where need might remain unabated or even be increasing.

Danger of Drying Up Local Resources

A further objection that has been raised against federal participation in relief measures is that this is likely to “dry up” local resources (both governmental and non-governmental) which might otherwise be available for relief needs. As Walter S. Gifford, chairman of President Hoover’s Organization on Unemployment Relief, put it, back in 1932:

Should . . . community and State responsibility be lessened by Federal aid, the sincere and wholehearted efforts of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers engaged both in raising and administering relief funds would doubtless be materially lessened. Individuals would tend to withdraw much of the invisible aid they are now giving; private funds raised by popular subscription would become less; efforts to spread work and to provide work that would not be done except for the emergency would be lessened; business organizations would tend to do less for former employees. Communities, counties, and States undoubtedly would appropriate less public money. The net result might well be that the unemployed who are in need would be worse instead of better off.¹

Far from being dried up, state and local governmental funds for relief purposes have in recent years assumed mammoth proportions ² undreamed of before the federal government came into the relief picture. Though undoubtedly attributable in large measure to the federal government’s entry upon the scene, it is difficult to say, of course, what might have happened to local governmental expenditures for relief if federal leadership had not been forthcoming. However, even if federal participation in relief had resulted in decreased expenditures by local governmental units, this would all be to the good, say proponents of federal responsibility for relief. One of the primary purposes for drawing the federal government into the field, they declare, is


In speaking of invisible aid, Mr. Gifford referred “to the cash aid and the board and lodging extended to relatives, friends, and neighbors; to the aid given by religious, fraternal, labor, and other organizations; to the voluntary or involuntary remission of debts by merchants, landlords, and others; and to the aid—quite real in this depression—extended by business concerns to former employees.”

² As shown in chap. 1.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

to ease the financial burden upon property owners and consumers and to shift a larger share of the burden to those most able to pay. Furthermore, even if it could be shown that federal participation in relief measures had resulted in lessened contributions for this purpose by private agencies and lesser units of government, this would not prove that the springs of human sympathy had been dried up. The streams flowing from them might only be diverted into new channels.

Although the people of the United States came slowly to the realization that relief needs cannot be met without federal assistance, it was recognized almost from its founding that the nation's defense could not depend upon volunteers and locally enlisted and locally paid troops. In the long future there may be no more complaint about the danger that federal action will dry up local sympathy and resources for needy people than there is today about the danger that building a national army, navy, and air force will dry up the springs of patriotism and the willingness to serve and sacrifice for one's country.

"Don't Put All the Eggs in One Basket"

Still another argument sometimes advanced in opposition to centralized control is that it is poor policy to put all the eggs in one basket. Under a highly centralized system, it is said, discovery of even one or two bad spots in a program may undermine public confidence in the whole. This danger has frequently been illustrated in congressional debate where a single misstep by a WPA official or one project of questionable value has been interpreted to mean that the majority of WPA officials are rascals and most projects worthless.

Under a program controlled by the states, say the critics of centralized control, evidences of maladministration can be more readily condoned as characteristic only of the region in which they are discovered. Of this a representative of the Sentinels of the Republic said to a Senate Committee in 1932:

The fatal effects on the populations of other countries directly traceable to donations from the public purse are admitted alike by the historians of the Ancient Roman Empire and of the modern nations where such a policy has been pursued. . . . If in the stress of actual conditions our municipalities, or the States of this Union see fit to repeat these experiments for them-

1 See chap. 27.
The Broader Issues

selves, it is their right to do so at their own risk and the risk of their inhabitants. On the comparatively small scale on which these governments act it may be possible for them to retreat from such a course if and when it proves too costly or deleterious. On the scale on which the Government of the United States acts, the cost would be staggering . . . the responsibility of administration remote from the people's control, and the consequences economically and morally too serious to be calmly envisaged by anyone with the good of the Nation at heart.¹

While admitting some validity in claims like these, persons who favor a relatively high degree of federal control over programs like that of the WPA insist that,² by and large, the effect of federal control is to keep to a minimum administrative abuses, inefficiency, and political control which tend to shake public confidence.

Furthermore, it is held that one single program like that of the WPA makes it easier for observers and interest groups that are really concerned for efficient administration to keep a watchful eye on it. If instead of one single program there were 48 separate schemes, attention of the relatively few people who are genuinely interested in improving the quality of work programs would doubtless run into no little trouble trying to keep their eyes on so many baskets.

Experimentation

It has been further claimed that decentralized control permits a higher degree of experimentation than does the centralization which tends to deal with all sections of the country under uniform regulations.

When applied to a program like that of the WPA—which in itself has been one of the most gigantic and imaginative experiments ever made in the field of social welfare—claims that increased state and local control offer greater opportunity for experimentation lose much of their cogency. Furthermore, it is, of course, impossible to say whether increased state and local control would have resulted in greater or less experimentation than the WPA has, as shown in earlier chapters of this volume, undertaken at various times and places in its attempts to discover different and better ways of selecting workers for employment, of

¹ U. S. Senate Committee on Manufactures (Hearings on S. 174 and S. 262), Unemployment Relief. 72d Congress, 1st Session. 1932, p. 354.
² As shown in a previous section of this chapter.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

prosecuting projects, and of executing its total program. That emphasis on the allegedly superior interest and capacity of state and local agencies to conduct useful experimentation may be somewhat overrated has been suggested by George C. S. Benson who has written:

. . . state and local units do not seem generally to have functioned as satisfactory experimental laboratories. It is true that new devices and programs are often tried out in restricted areas, but the utility of such “experiments” is questionable if no scientific recording or evaluation of results occurs and if there is no consistent effort to transmit to other units the conclusions drawn from the experiment. Sometimes the blame is to be laid on the experimenting unit when it fails to make available in practical form the results of its experience. More frequently indifference, venality, or incapacity on the part of officials in other communities is responsible for the relatively small degree to which intelligent use of the existing data is made.

Thoughtless imitation does often take place—but this is by no means desirable and at times may be actually deleterious. A system may be taken over in toto, bad and good details together; the idea but not the valuable essentials of a good plan may be taken over; or a good plan may be transferred in entirety into an environment so radically different that adjustments to local needs should have been made. . . .

Frequently—especially on the local level—the situation is not due to the venality, indifference, or inability of the officeholders. It is due to the fact that competent, honest men who have had no previous opportunity or occasion to study governmental problems are elected for relatively short terms. Before their initial ignorance can be remedied to any considerable extent, their term of office expires.¹

Whatever may be true in other fields, the achievements of the federal government, contrasted with those of states and localities in the field of work relief appear to justify completely Mr. Benson's observations.²

Leaving Federal Government Free for More Important Business

A consideration having special validity during times of great national stress, whether this is attributable to war or some other crisis, is that the responsibilities of the central government should be lightened as much as possible to permit fuller attention to the chief business in hand. In reply to this line of reasoning, expo-

²Discussion of the probable effects of increased state and local control over work-relief programs is incorporated in chap. 31.

756
The Broader Issues

The Broader Issues

nents of central control over the WPA recall that in time of national crisis it is more important than ever to integrate the nation’s work-relief program with all other steps taken to help the country in its extremity. Furthermore, it is held, the matter of meeting human need and providing jobs for those who have no other work is of such importance to the bolstering of the nation’s morale and to helping it withstand severe strains that these responsibilities cannot, in time of crisis, safely be trusted to lesser levels of government.

Threat to Democratic Institutions

Finally, critics of centralized control aver that this is inimical to the preservation of democracy and free government. Stating the case of those holding this view, Paul Studenski and Paul R. Mort have written:

The trump card of the advocates of local government, at least in England and the United States, seems to be the argument that it promotes freedom, democracy, and responsible government. . . .

It is stated that under local self-government, local groups are free to manage their own affairs as they deem best, to venture on new undertakings, to make mistakes and to correct them in the light of experience, and that every active and interested member of the group is free to partake in this collective privilege. It is maintained that under local self-government the individual has a wide opportunity for self-expression; that he can influence the course of public affairs in the local group much more effectively than in the national group; and that his importance in the local group is considerable, whereas in the national group it is exceedingly small. Thus, it is said, local self-government enlarges the freedom of the individual.¹

The claim that local and even state administration as practiced in the various sections of the country represents the prize flower of democratic free government is not one that wins easy acceptance. The federal government has, in fact, demonstrated that a democracy can efficiently meet the challenge of providing employment for millions of workers who would otherwise have had to go without jobs. This may be regarded as a greater contribution to the preservation of democratic government than would have been likely to result from turning over to state and local authorities greater responsibilities for meeting needs arising from unemploy-

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ment. That this conclusion is warranted is suggested by Studenski and Mort who, in balancing the possible advantages against the previously enumerated dangers of centralized control, have written:

Central government equalizes the social, economic, and educational opportunities available to the people in various sections of the country. . . . Proper centralization of government stimulates the civic interest of the people and broadens their civic outlook. . . . A properly conceived central government does not restrict the freedom of the individual. . . . It endeavors, in a democratic country, to guarantee fundamental civil rights to all the citizens in any portion of the country. . . . A well-conceived central government enlarges individual freedoms also by guaranteeing to the individuals freedom of enterprise over the entire national territory and by affording them an opportunity for a wider sphere of creative activity. The individual shares, in a democracy, in the determination of the large affairs with which the central government is concerned. The greater the scope of the public affairs, the greater the importance and responsibility of the individuals who share in their disposition.³

Similarly, friends of continued federal control over the WPA program contend that—far from being a threat to democratic institutions—the national government’s effort to meet human need in all parts of the country, to give jobs to those who have no work and to afford all the people of the nation a voice in determining how these policies shall be carried out, is not only no serious threat to democracy but is actually indispensable to the preservation and enhancement of free government in these United States.

³Ibid., pp. 33-34.
CHAPTER XXXI
FEDERAL CONTROL AND
NATIONAL UNIFORMITY

In addition to considerations alluded to in the foregoing chapter, it is often urged in support of centralized control over the WPA program that such control is essential to realization of the desired degree of "national uniformity." Those demanding increased state and local control, on the other hand, are less concerned with uniformity and contend in support of their position that this would permit greater flexibility in administration and would result in more effective adaptation to local needs and opinions. Like other considerations having a bearing on this whole issue of central versus local controls, questions relating to national uniformity, too, go to the very depths of one's philosophy about government and democracy itself.

When President Roosevelt in April, 1939, made his plea for the continuance of federal operation of the WPA program he based his request, in part, upon the contention that a grant-in-aid program would inevitably result in "inefficiency and confusion through lack of coordination and uniformity. . . ." 1 In similar vein, Howard Hunter once declared:

[The] . . . proposal that federal unemployment relief funds and the administration of these funds be turned back to the states and local communities . . . is no new idea because we had two years of experience with this plan, which experience, in the main, was bad both from the point of administration and the fact that there were 48 standards of relief instead of one. 2

On another occasion Mr. Hunter raised the ante considerably, contending that a return to grants-in-aid would give rise to "thousands of standards." 3

The fact that federal authorities are concerned over lack of uniformity inherent in 48 states, to say nothing of "thousands" of

---

1 As quoted in the New York Times, April 28, 1939. This prediction is particularly interesting when viewed in the light of a somewhat earlier statement in which he praised the grant-in-aid principle as having "given us flexible administration."—Ibid., January 17, 1939.
2 WPA Release 4-1904, February 26, 1939.

759
different local standards is not without its ludicrous aspects. There is, for example, the great lack of uniformity that has characterized the federal government’s own provision for needy unemployed workers from month to month and year to year.\(^1\) If uniformity is considered such a desirable quality in relief measures, it would seem fair to expect that the federal relief program be consistent, dependable, and predictable—characteristics which do not apply and never have applied to the program of the WPA.

Great lack of uniformity is discernible also with regard to two other most important aspects of the WPA program: namely, the availability of suitable projects for workers of all types and skills, and the standards of eligibility determining the types of people who could, from time to time and in various sections of the country, be certified for employment.\(^2\)

Finally, if federal officials are genuinely interested in uniformity one cannot but wonder why federal leadership and federal funds have not been used to bring at least some degree of national uniformity into that chaotic and most neglected field of general relief.\(^3\)

Despite tolerance by federal officials of what has seemed to many authorities to be completely unjustifiable heterogeneity, there are at least three respects in which federal control has brought about a desired degree of uniformity: work for wages has been made available to needy unemployed workers in all parts of the country; benefits made available to these workers have probably been larger, on the average, than if local and state authorities had had more to do with it; and finally, members of various minority groups (Negroes, strikers, and workers who have not lived long in any one place) have, it is safe to say, suffered less discriminatory treatment under the federally controlled WPA program than they would have received at the hands of local and state officials.

**Local Control a Threat to Continuance of the Work Program**

Many of those opposing federal operation of the WPA program frankly admit, as do the United States Chamber of Com-

---

\(^1\) See chap. 22.

\(^2\) Discussed in chaps. 11 through 21.

\(^3\) See chaps. 2 and 3.
The Broader Issues

commerce and the National Economy League,\(^1\) that a basic element of their plan is to permit states and localities to choose whether or not relief shall be provided in the form of wages for work done or in the form of direct relief. Admittedly, it is expected that this freedom of choice would curtail the amount of work and work relief provided and, by substituting direct relief, cut down relief costs. As John C. Gebhart of the National Economy League put it in 1936: "The total cost would probably be about 1 billion dollars because with decentralization of relief there will be, we believe, fewer work projects and more cash allowances."\(^2\)

Administration leaders claim that moves to allow state and local authorities freedom of choice in this matter merely cloak their real purpose, which is to scuttle the work program. The Democratic party, for example, declared in 1940: "We are opposed to vesting in the States and local authorities the control of federally financed work relief. We believe that this Republican proposal is a thinly disguised plan to put the unemployed back on the dole."\(^3\) Putting this issue sharply, Howard Hunter once declared:

... people who propose to abandon the WPA for a system of grants-in-aid to States do not really want the unemployed to work at real wages on useful public projects. What they want is an idle labor pool, given a charity pittance. They do not like a program of work which enables these tem-

\(^1\) As early as 1936 a pamphlet issued by the League declared: "We propose the abandonment by the federal government of its huge works program and the return to a cooperative system of relief in which the major responsibility for unemployment relief will be returned to state and local governments... and that the federal government make grants-in-aid to states to supplement unemployment relief. Such a plan would leave to the discretion of local authorities whether relief should be in the form of work relief wages, cash home relief or a combination of these two methods."—Gebhart, John C., Federal Relief—What Next? New York, April, 1936, p. 18.

\(^2\) Relief and the Budget. An address delivered over the Columbia Broadcasting System, July 22, 1936, pp. 6-7. When Charles P. Taft, in 1938, was asked by a member of a Senate Committee whether federal relief funds granted to states would be used for work or direct relief, Mr. Taft replied: "Two months ago my guess would have been that it would be spent for direct relief... My experience in my own community, however,... convinces me that there is a tremendous pressure for work relief, and I am inclined to think that in most communities a substantial proportion—by 'substantial' I do not mean probably more than—certainly not more than half would be spent for some type of work program. I have been amazed myself to find the strength of that sentiment..."

"... and I started without any belief that it really was there."—U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 1, p. 438.

\(^3\) As quoted in the New York Times, July 21, 1940.
The WTA and Federal Relief Policy

porarily unemployed people to maintain their self-respect, bargaining power and rights of citizenship.\(^1\)

Similarly, Edward A. Williams in his Federal Aid for Relief concluded:

\ldots if work relief is to be accepted as a long-term policy, an immediate return to the grant system would be undesirable. A federal grant agency operating at this time [1939] would have to face the almost impossible task of preventing certain states from neglecting the work program in favor of the cheaper direct relief. There exists at present no emergency psychology (such as sustained the F.E.R.A. in its early period) that would aid in obtaining state compliance, and the idea of a work program has not had time to take sufficient root everywhere.\(^2\)

LOCAL CONTROL A THREAT TO FEDERAL WAGE STANDARDS

Critics of the administration's relief policy admit not only that increased state and local control over relief policies would result in less work as opposed to direct relief, but agree that benefits paid in direct relief or under such work-relief programs as might be continued would be materially less than those paid by the WPA. For example, the Citizens' Bureau of Milwaukee, late in 1941, boasted that the county's work-relief program was "more suitable" to that county's needs because it paid "family heads" at the rate of $52 or $57.20 and single persons $26 a month, whereas the WPA scale ranged from $52 to as much as $95 to either single persons or heads of families. "The Milwaukee County program," concluded the Bureau, "is therefore much less expensive than WPA—it really amounts to persons on general relief working out their relief costs on needed operation projects."\(^3\)

Describing Cincinnati's relief program, Clarence O. Sherrill declared in 1939:

\ldots the cost per case for direct and work relief under the City Relief Division during 1938 was $282 per year, or approximately one-third of that under WPA.

It should be remembered that this low cost in Cincinnati is an average of direct relief and city-work relief costs. On the basis of the above figures it

\(^1\) WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1939. 
\(^3\) Local Governments in Milwaukee County Should Drop W.P.A. The Citizens' Bureau, October, 1941, p. 4.

762
The Broader Issues

will be apparent that, should the Federal government turn back the administration of relief to the local communities, it would be possible to cut the total cost of relief to approximately one-third of the cost per case paid by the United States on WPA.1

Clearly anticipating what advocates of increased state and local control over relief programs have since admitted, Harry Hopkins, during the earliest stages of the presidential campaign of 1936, observed:

All of the proposals so far made to turn relief back to the States, in my opinion, mean putting the unemployed on a miserly pittance, chiefly in the form of grocery orders. . . . The cry of our critics is that relief must be cheaper. What they really mean, and what they intend to do, is to take it out of the hide of the unemployed.2

In agreement with Mr. Hopkins' statement is one made in 1938 to the Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief by David Lasser, then president of the Workers Alliance:

Those who want to starve the unemployed want local and State relief, and for very good reasons. First, they know that localities and States do not have the taxing power to raise large sums, and that the money must be raised from farmers, small householders, and consumers. The strategy of those who favor local relief is to create resentment from the rate payers against the unemployed for every increase in taxes, while permitting the large Federal taxpayers to evade the obligation.3

Local Relief Standards Not Always Lower Than Federal

That increased state and local control in the United States might not of itself everywhere reduce standards of relief is indicated by the fact that in various sections of the country general relief grants are sometimes more liberal than WPA wages and in some areas, at least, are given in supplementation of WPA


Commenting upon Cincinnati's local work-relief program, Howard Hunter once said: "The report of Cincinnati's own Public Welfare Department, which provides this work program, says that the work consists of projects for maintenance of normal city enterprise—which obviously decreases normal employment—and that the pay on these projects is 25¢ an hour. But wait a minute—the people do not even get the 25¢. They actually get 12½¢ and the other 12½¢ is dished out in grocery orders. Here we uncover the essential fact behind the proposal to abandon the Federal work program, which is that the opposition doesn't want a real work program."—WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1939.


3 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 2, p. 1033.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

wages. In January, 1939, for example, over 20 per cent of the general relief cases in Milwaukee (20.8 per cent) and Minneapolis (26.4 per cent) also received WPA earnings. In Cleveland and Detroit the percentages were 17.3 and 10.4, respectively; in Buffalo, New York, and Rochester between 5 and 10 per cent; and in Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco, less than 5 per cent.

Although some local and state relief authorities are willing to grant supplementary relief in amounts that give certain WPA workers larger benefits than are provided under the federal work program, general relief is frequently granted not in addition to full WPA wages but in lieu of wages lost. Thus, not all supplementation means that relief standards are more liberal than WPA wages, but only that wage losses are sometimes made up.

Probable Effect of Federal Participation Upon General Relief Standards

Although it is hazardous to conjecture what the effect of federal aid and leadership has been, it is noteworthy that relief standards (particularly in the South) improved during the FERA era and fell again when this participation ceased.

Whether or not the changes were due solely or even largely to federal aid and leadership, it is noteworthy that the average relief grant made to families in the United States increased from $15.15 in May, 1933, to $24.53 in May, 1934, and to $29.33 in

1 See chap. 7.
2 In Buffalo this included cases in households also receiving earnings on work projects or student aid under the NYA.
3 For further discussion of differences in relief standards and in benefits paid under the WPA as opposed to state and local relief programs, see chaps. 3, 6, and 7.
4 Declines in average relief grants may not, however, reflect only a lowering of relief standards. They may also reflect changes in relief needs and policies. For example, size of grants between 1935 and 1939 might easily be affected by possible differences in the size of relief families as a result of changes in policy regarding the giving of relief to single persons or the tendency to retain on relief rolls smaller families by giving preference in WPA employment to workers with more dependents. Then, too, there may be differences in the number of families granted only supplementary relief, in addition to wages or WPA wages or social security benefits. Despite possibilities of this kind, Josephine C. Brown, former FERA official, once wrote: "The gradual withdrawal of the Federal Government from the field of direct relief during this period [latter part of 1935] may also have contributed somewhat to the decline in average relief benefits."—FERA Monthly Report, March, 1936, p. 8. See also Baird, Enid, and Brinton, Hugh P., Average General Relief Benefits, 1933-1938. WPA, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1940, chap. 2 in particular.
The Broader Issues

May, 1935. In many states during this period of federal participation in the general relief program average monthly grants increased even more sharply. From May, 1933, to May, 1935, average family grants rose by 100 to 200 per cent in 13 states, rising, for example, from $4.51 to $11.75 in Oklahoma and from $21.01 to $43.91 in Connecticut. Average grants to families were more than trebled in nine states, the largest proportionate gains being made in Mississippi and Nebraska, where the average grant was more than quadrupled. In Mississippi the average increased from $3.86 in May, 1933, to $15.23 in May, 1935, while that in Nebraska rose from $5.54 to $25.38.

Cessation of the FERA program during 1935 was accompanied by an immediate fall in standards. Whereas the national average grant (not only to families but to single persons as well) was $26.59 in April, 1935, it was only about $22.52 in April, 1938, and about $23.87 in April, 1939.

The fall in relief standards in many states after cessation of the FERA program is seriously clouded by the fact that United States averages for 1938 and 1939 are heavily weighted by the averages in a relatively few states in which standards did not fall as much as they did in most areas. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that although the median state average in April, 1935, was $22.98 (as opposed to an arithmetic average of $26.59) the median average in April, 1939 (when the arithmetic average was $22.52), was only $13.57. Although general relief averaged less than $10 per case in only two states in April, 1935, there were 15 states giving an average of less than this amount in April, 1939. At the other extreme, there were eight states in which relief in April, 1935, averaged more than $30, reaching to more than $40 in three states. In April, 1939, no averages exceeded $40 and averages in excess of $30 were found only in two states. Only in Delaware and South Carolina was the average grant in April, 1939, higher than that for April, 1935.

Non-Discrimination and Humane Administration

National uniformity, as staunchly advocated by administration spokesmen, calls for non-discrimination against various groups,

2 Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.
such as Negroes, workers on strike, and persons out of their place of legal settlement. It also means the cessation of practices under which, by state or local regulations, relief is denied to all but those in the most desperate need, or to those needy persons who have the misfortune to be "able-bodied." People falling into these groups, it is frequently said, would be dealt with unfairly if states and localities in which they live had too great a voice in administering the WPA program.

When a member of a House Committee in 1938 asked Aubrey Williams whether, if distribution of relief funds were controlled solely within a state, we would "not have a more healthy sentiment expressed by the people of the State or of any given community . . . toward those who receive these benefits," Mr. Williams replied: "I think it would be very much worse." Somewhat previously Mr. Williams, while emphasizing this same point, declared:

... many local relief systems are . . . cruelly inhumane. . . .

Their methods . . . involve nailing people's names upon the doors of the town hall, publicizing them as the town's paupers, reducing this whole thing to a level where you force people to accept the status of pauperism, denying them votes in many places, forfeiting their citizenship. These are ordinary unemployed people, honest citizens willing and able to work for a living. They ought not to be subjected to these things.

I believe with all my heart . . . that if you were to throw responsibility back to the States, it would not be many months until you would have this on the level of soup kitchens and paupers' oaths. You would have forfeiture of citizenship and of self-respect that no Congress could stand.

... as to the United States as a whole . . . our greatest trouble comes from the local attitude of some persons against impoverished people—Negroes, for example. In whole sections of this country, if it were not for the Federal Government, those people would not get anything. And there are many other submerged groups.

1 In direct contradiction, again, to these claims advanced in defense of continued federal operation of the program, are those advocated by persons seeking larger state and local control. Many of these claim that one reason why local control is superior to federal operation is because the former promotes "neighborliness," "humaneness," "sympathy." Congressman Luce of Massachusetts, for example, once declared: "Relief should be a neighborly matter, not alone because it ought to have an element of personal benevolence but also because neighbors are more likely to deal wisely and fairly."—As quoted in the United States News, January 24, 1938.

2 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Supplemental Appropriation, Relief and Work Relief, Fiscal Year 1938. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, p. 97.

3 Ibid., p. 64.
The Broader Issues

As shown in some detail already, the effect of federal control over the WPA program has been to permit the employment of Negroes, strikers, and persons who have not lived in one locality a specified length of time even though local attitudes and prejudices have militated against their employment. Furthermore, the influence of federal officials has undoubtedly served to liberalize measures of need used in determining eligibility for WPA employment. This is often quite readily admitted by those seeking greater state and local control over relief measures and is, in fact, one of the arguments advanced in favor of such control which, they contend, will result in economies because only the neediest would be given help. It is largely for this reason (as well as because state and local control is expected to give smaller benefits to those that are aided) that a relaxation of federal control is expected to result in economies in the administration of relief. "There is a strong probability," says a report published by the United States Chamber of Commerce, "that with a cessation of the federal work relief program the number of persons added to local relief rolls would not be as great as the number now employed on WPA projects. For instance, there was not a proportionate increase in persons receiving state and local relief as a result of the recent curtailment of WPA rolls undertaken in

---

1 See especially chaps. 11, 13, and 19. Conspicuous for their absence from this list of those for whom federal control has probably secured more equitable treatment than they otherwise would have been accorded is that large group of aliens to whom the federal government has refused WPA employment although at least some states permit them to receive relief. See chap. 12.

While it is likely that federal control of the WPA program has given Negroes a better break than they would have been given under a program dominated by state and local authorities, it must not be inferred that central control as such automatically assures considerate treatment. Evidence of this may be seen in the traditional reluctance of two centrally controlled and federally administered agencies—the Army and Navy—to accept the services of Negroes. Thus, it is obvious that even though a work program were federally administered this might not of itself insure Negroes any fairer treatment than they have been accorded by those in control of the armed forces. What counts, therefore, is the attitude of the officials immediately in charge of the work program, the degree to which these officials are permitted by the administration to have their way, and, of course, the all-important influence of public opinion.

If further evidence is needed to prove that federal control, of itself, neither guarantees decent provision to needy families nor assures non-discriminatory treatment to minority groups such as Negroes, one needs only to recall the inadequacy of the provision made by Congress for relief in the District of Columbia and the difficulties experienced in finding federal agencies willing to co-operate in providing WPA jobs for Negroes in the District. See chaps. 2, 3, and 11.

2 As shown in chaps. 14, 15, and 16.

That this has been true under state and locally controlled relief programs in many sections of the United States is shown in chap. 2.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

accordance with the present requirements for economy imposed by Congress on that organization.”

It may be recalled that this failure of relief rolls to rise commensurately with decreases in WPA employment is explained in large measure by differences in standards by which need for relief as opposed to that for WPA employment is measured, and by the wholly inadequate general relief programs existing in many sections of the country.

Finally, a large degree of federal control over unemployment relief measures is justified on the ground that this is necessary to secure decent provision for employable persons who are frequently discriminated against when left to the devices of state and local authorities. As Howard Hunter once put it, the federal government’s attempt under the FERA to administer relief through grants to states failed, in part, because “In too many parts of the country there was no recognition given to the fact that these newly unemployed people that had grown in numbers from a handful to millions, were a new kind of poor people. They were not the same old paupers who had normally been handled under the archaic poor-laws in most of our states. They were able-bodied unemployed citizens—the same kind of people as you and I.” Thus, fear of prejudice against “people who could work if they only would” has been one of the primary reasons why continued federal control over the WPA program has been so staunchly defended in many different quarters.

However effective federal control may have proved in securing for various groups more liberal consideration than they might have been given under programs subject to more state and local control, it is undeniable that federal relief policy as a whole has failed to extend to all who needed it the beneficent influence of federal leadership.

Limitations upon Central Controls

In this connection it must again be pointed out that in at least two ways current policies of the WPA permit discrimination by state and local agencies against minority groups (or individuals)

2 As shown in chaps. 3 and 15.
3 See chap. 2.
4 WPA Release 4-1957, May 15, 1930.

768
in such a way as to leave the WPA powerless to aid even those who may improperly be denied benefits under its own program. First of these policies is that which authorizes state and local relief agencies to refer or certify workers for employment. The second is that requiring sponsors to initiate and contribute to the cost of projects. As already shown, both these practices can exclude from benefits of WPA employment individuals or groups which the WPA might be perfectly willing to employ if only the responsible local agencies would refer or certify them for employment and if sponsors would initiate projects and contribute to their cost. Most amazing in this respect is not the degree of control over its own program the WPA has delegated to others, but the fact that, as previously noted, no effective provision is made for redress of possible wrongs—no appeals machinery, no adequate way, in short, of avoiding at these vital points discrimination that might prevent disadvantaged groups or individuals from benefiting under the very program which federal officials aver is more humane and less discriminatory because it is administered by the federal government.

**How Much Uniformity Should There Be?**

Is it preferable to thrust upon a given state or locality a better relief program than it wants or to scale down standards to the level such a community desires? This reduces itself to the question of whether, in a democracy, the national majority or a lesser regional majority should rule.

Are such matters as the provision of jobs as opposed to direct relief, the assurance of payments to needy workers of at least as much as the security wages paid by the WPA, and fair treatment of various minority and disadvantaged groups, invested with sufficient national interest to justify the federal government’s taking a strong stand to assure their realization? If they are, then a considerable degree of central control may be indicated. If not, then the balance of power might well be passed to state and local authorities.

---

1 Discussed in chap. 28.
2 For further discussion of the relative merits of work and work relief as opposed to direct relief and total unemployment, see chaps. 32 and 33.
3 For analysis of amounts paid to WPA workers and the relationship of these amounts to what is thought to be the minimum required to meet even an emergency standard of living, see chap. 6.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

While WPA officials are proud of the degree of national uniformity they have been able to achieve through federal control, they would be the first to acknowledge that there are limits beyond which they cannot go. A number of these officials have admitted that there appears to be a point where such vertical pressure as a central authority can exert is neutralized by lateral pressures existing in local communities.

Recognizing this fact, certain observers have held that since central control can go only as far as local attitudes permit, it makes little difference whether the final authority rests with the higher or the lower level of government. This position, however, loses sight of the fact that even though community attitudes might temporarily estop application of a federal policy, a temporarily blocked central authority would probably be more likely than local officials to do by education and publicity, for instance, whatever was necessary to win, without prolonged delay, support for the policy in question.

Central Control Not Necessarily Inflexible

Although federal control over the WPA has probably brought about a higher degree of uniformity with respect to important aspects of an unemployment relief program than would have been likely if there had been more state and local control, the WPA program cannot be said to have been inflexible and unadapted to local and regional differences. One outstanding illustration of this is the policy of scaling WPA wage rates in accordance with known (or presumed) geographical differences.

What is most striking, perhaps, about the reductions in wage differentials effected in 1939 is that the pressure to make wage rates more nearly uniform in various sections of the country came not from areas which were trying to impose higher rates

It is this fact, probably, which has delayed so long acceptance upon equal grounds of Negroes into the nation's armed forces.

The real extent of control over the WPA program by regional and federal officials as opposed to that exercised by state and local WPA officials has undoubtedly been exaggerated by the well-known administrative practice of "passing the buck." In resisting pressures brought to bear on them, state and local WPA officials, shortsightedly, perhaps, sometimes excuse their unwillingness to do as they are asked by saying that "Washington will not allow it," or that they cannot give an answer until they "hear from Washington." This protective tendency of state and local WPA officials to hide behind "Washington" undoubtedly emphasizes unduly the role of federal officials and underemphasizes the extent to which state and local WPA authorities are, in fact, free to act on a variety of questions.
The Broader Issues

upon other sections but from the South which wanted the higher rates.\(^1\)

This phenomenon is of particular interest inasmuch as wage rates established by the FERA and the PWA in their day were bitterly assailed in the South, which fought against—rather than, as in 1939, for—"national uniformity." The South's dissatisfaction with FERA and PWA wage rates has often been misinterpreted as conclusive evidence that centralized control must of necessity be too inflexible to meet local needs.\(^2\) Experience with WPA wage rates disproves this contention and makes it clear that it is not centralized control as such, but inflexible central control that works the mischief.

Interestingly enough, there is almost no criticism of the nation's Old-age and Survivor's Insurance program on the score that it is "inflexible" or "not adapted to local situations" even though benefits paid in all parts of the country are uniform.\(^3\)

Admittedly, the line between a desirable degree of national uniformity and just the right amount of adaptation to local differences is, at best, a fuzzy one. What is more, it is probably of ever-decreasing importance. As Leonard D. White has well said:

\[\ldots\] the standardization of tastes, fashions, goods and habits aids the process of centralization by diminishing the sense of locality. \ldots\] The advent of automobile, moving picture and radio is gradually lessening the significance of the many culture variations which can still be found. \ldots\]

We have now no sections of the population characterized by widely variant customs or racial traditions; while there are plenty of minor differences which are often overlooked by persons from other countries, it remains true that in our fundamental ways of life we are increasingly a homogeneous people. We read the same magazines, we eat the same breakfast cereal, we take the same patent medicines, we drive the same model car, we use the same soap, we attend the same movies, and millions at a time we hear the concerts of Walter Damrosch or the discourses of Amos'n'Andy on the radio. Thus have been and are being established and confirmed similar tastes and

\(^1\) See chap. 6.

\(^2\) See, for example, George C. S. Benson's The New Centralization: A Study of Intergovernmental Relationships in the United States. Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1941, p. 20. Here it is suggested that increased state and local influence might have avoided difficulties arising over the application to the South of wage scales that were regarded locally as too high. That intelligent central control of wage rates can also avoid bitter controversy has been proved by the WPA.

\(^3\) Since all but minimum benefits are scaled in accordance with previous earnings and since wage rates may be said to reflect regional differences, it might be argued with considerable reason that benefits in excess of legally prescribed minima are indirectly, at least, geared to geographical differences.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Habits and attitudes which tend to create the uniformities on which a policy of centralization must rest.1

In support of this thesis a report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics declares:

There are of course significant regional differences in the satisfaction and sense of well-being derived from the same items of consumption, but these differences are apparently becoming less important than formerly. It is apparent that largely because of the spread of the radio, the automobile, the motion picture, and the nation-wide periodicals, regional differences in consumption have tended more and more to be eliminated from American life. . . .2

However, even if it could be shown that there are in the United States wide differences in social, cultural, or economic conditions, there would still remain two further questions: What are the reasons for the observed differences? Are these sufficiently valid to justify "adaptation" on the part of a national program in order to perpetuate them?

To take but one small illustration—consumer purchases. After extensive study, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that as income increases "there is the same advance towards a similar standard." This is interpreted to mean that "the type of living regarded as desirable" is much the same in the South as in the North. The report continues:

... as income increases expenditures for movies not only increase at the same rate in both the South and the North, but are approximately equal at each income level. Evidence with regard to a large number of other items of expenditures, all pointing toward a nation-wide approach to the same standards, can be adduced from the results of the Consumer Purchases Study.3

Thus, what have been regarded as unique regional characteristics may not be the result of choice but of necessity. To adapt national programs to conform to these characteristics, therefore, may only mean an intolerable acquiescence in prolonging indefensible social ills. Furthermore, so far as the local "differences" to which accommodation on the part of a nationwide program is requested are attributable to local prejudices or to the virtual dis-

3 Ibid.
franchisement of various kinds of disadvantaged persons, federal authorities representing the nation as a whole might well refuse to "adapt" to these differences.¹

Despite the fact that the WPA has tried valiantly to achieve a desirable degree of national uniformity in the treatment of unemployed persons and has attempted to avoid unjustifiable adaptations to the peculiar "needs" of certain states or regions, it cannot, of course, be said that the wisest possible course has always been pursued. Even the predominantly friendly National Appraisal Committee reported that the WPA program "did not permit or encourage, in many instances, the exercise of sufficient discretion, responsibility and initiative on the part of local officials."²

One device which has been suggested as a means of bridging the gap between the desired degree of national uniformity and local adaptation is the establishment and use of state (and, perhaps, regional and even national) advisory committees such as have been used with notable success by the NYA in this country and by the Unemployment Assistance Board in Great Britain.³ Such committees, it is suggested, might have a threefold usefulness: (a) to give assurance to individuals and local groups that their opinions with respect to the federally operated program were afforded a hearing; (b) to pass on to the responsible federal agency recommendations having merit; and (c) to help interpret to communities the reasons for the particular policies and practices adopted by federal authorities.

Before turning from this question of national uniformity it may be well to recall that it is inseparably linked with questions as to how much state and local authorities must contribute to the cost of the WPA program. As already noted, there is likely to be less local resentment over failure of a federal program to accommodate itself to local whims and prejudices if no local financial contributions are required. Thus, those who want real

¹ For discussion of how such factors as poll taxes and discrimination against disadvantaged persons may preclude effective control over relief and welfare programs by the very people most likely to need them, see chap. 28.
³ According to Eveline M. Burns, "inappropriate uniformity" in the administration of unemployment assistance in Great Britain was avoided, in part, because of the use made of these advisory committees.—British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938. Social Science Research Council, Washington, 1941, p. 233.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

"national uniformity" may find themselves obliged to stand for a program financed wholly by the federal government.

Conversely, administrators of services which are exclusively (or even predominantly) federally financed will probably find themselves under considerable pressure to administer these funds so as to bring about a material degree of national uniformity. Discussions of British unemployment policies are replete with evidences of this. Since the money is taken from the national treasury, the argument goes, standards of administration must be uniform throughout the nation.
CHAPTER XXXII
WORK VERSUS UNEMPLOYMENT

"JOBS FOR THE JOBLESS"

Repeatedly President Roosevelt has insisted that the only decent way to treat the unemployed is to give them employment.

"The able-bodied unemployed," the President once declared, "need work and should have it." 1 "This Administration," he has said, "recognizes that total defense of our shores, our homes, our institutions, cannot be complete until all Americans willing and able to work have a job and a decent standard of living...." 2

The same note was struck in the Democratic platform for 1940:

By public action, where necessary to supplement private re-employment, we have rescued millions from idleness that breeds weakness and given them a real stake in their country's well-being. We shall continue to recognize the obligation of government to provide work for deserving workers who cannot be absorbed by private industry.

The Republican platform, by contrast, said nothing about government's responsibility for providing jobs when other means failed. Although the Republicans proposed "to re-create opportunity for the youth of America and put our idle millions back to work in private industry, business and agriculture," 3 details and working plans by which it was expected that this could be effected were not given.

Though proud of what his administration had accomplished in giving jobs to unemployed workers, President Roosevelt has clearly recognized that government employment is no ideal or final answer to the problem of unemployment. Of this he said, in 1940:

While the number of the unemployed has decreased (very greatly), while their immediate needs for food and clothing—as far as the Federal Government is concerned—have been largely met, while their morale has been kept

---

1 As quoted in the New York Times, March 12, 1938.
2 Ibid., August 19, 1940.
3 Ibid., July 21, 1940.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

alive by giving them useful public work, we have not yet found a way to employ the surplus of our labor which the efficiency of our industrial processes has created.¹

Whether the American people, having seen that unemployment can be virtually abolished, will ever again stand for the return of mass unemployment only the future can say. Nevertheless, until better solutions to the problem of unemployment are assured, it is probably safe to assume that the federal government may have to stand ready to provide jobs needed by unemployed workers in the future just as it has had to do in the past.

If there were those who thought that, as a New York Times writer said, the President's declaration early in 1935 in favor of a mammoth work program broke "with bombshell suddenness," it was only because they had failed to read aright the early purposes of the administration and did not know Harry Hopkins. Planning of the new program, it seems, began about the time the administration decided to abandon the CWA which was virtually liquidated by early spring, 1934, and which had itself been a hurried move to make up for the failure of earlier steps to provide work for the unemployed.² Thus, when the Committee on

¹Ibid., January 4, 1940.

This declaration was, of course, made before the war boom carried industrial production and employment to heights subsequently attained and before "The panzer divisions," as Stuart Chase has written, "released not only another world war, but a new economic tempo," which brought in its wake "astonishing" effects. "Back in the dear, dim days of the Presidential campaign of 1940," continues Mr. Chase, "citizens by the millions said 'you can't spend your way out of a depression.' They believed it. They voted on that belief. They were supported by the highest banking, business and economic authorities. In due course, Congress appropriated 60 billion dollars, more or less, for defense spending, and Mr. Knudsen began awarding contracts as fast as God and the army bureaucrats would let him. The money flowed around the economic machine in ever greater volume."—The Road We Are Traveling, 1914-1942: Guide Lines to America's Future as Reported to the Twentieth Century Fund. Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., New York, 1942, pp. 49-50.

²Tracing the various steps by which the administration hoped to fight unemployment, Nels Anderson has written: "According to plans outlined early in 1933, the emergency direct relief program of the New Deal should have terminated in a few months. FERA was the bottom step in the proposed climb to recovery, the means of sustaining a few million unemployed workers until regular public or private jobs could be provided.

"The real public work program was made the responsibility of the Federal Administration of Public Works, called PWA. . . .

"PWA, the second step in the climb to recovery, was scheduled to terminate as rapidly as private enterprise, under the guidance of the National Recovery Administration, the NRA, could revive employment. . . .

"The experiment was a colossal failure. Industry could not be persuaded to impose rules on itself, nor to keep them when they were imposed. Powerful farming interests resisted the best efforts of the government to protect the farmers as a whole. 776
The Broader Issues

Economic Security, early in 1935 urged that “public employment should be expanded when private employment slackens,” that the provision of useful work was “a most effective means of meeting the needs of the unemployed,” that the federal government should embark upon a program of “employment assurance,” and that the provision of jobs on public projects should be a permanent policy and not merely a temporary or emergency expedient, it was only enumerating objectives the administration was already trying to achieve.¹

When President Roosevelt, in 1935, outlined the broad aspects of his three-point security program—encompassing “security of livelihood,” “security against the major hazards and vicissitudes of life,” and the “security of decent homes”—he said, “A definite program for putting people to work . . . is a component part of this greater program of security of livelihood through the better use of our national resources.”²

The Case for Work as Opposed to Idleness

Noteworthy among considerations advanced in favor of providing work for job seekers who would otherwise be unemployed are the contentions that this is necessary (a) to the preservation of workers’ morale; (b) to the preservation and improvement of skills and work habits; (c) to the protection of wage and other labor standards; (d) to the effectuation of workers’ “right to work”; (e) to the preservation of public order and to the safeguarding of democracy itself; (f) to the provision of needed public facilities and services; and, finally, (g) to the maintenance of economic stability and purchasing power on the part of workers without other income.

The fight against NRA and AAA was finally carried to the Supreme Court where both were declared unconstitutional.

“PWA did not provide the millions of jobs expected of it. The obstacles to getting off to a quick start were too many.

“By the autumn PWA had fallen so far short of expectations that labor unions and other interested groups presented a new plan to carry on for a few more months. This time it was as a strictly emergency agency that the Civil Works Administration was launched late in October, 1933.

“The emergency relief program had to be extended month after month for two years, always in the expectation that it would be discontinued next month or the next.”—The Right to Work. Modern Age Books, Inc., New York, 1938, pp. 11-13, 15. (Order of sentences changed.)


777
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Preservation of Morale

In answer to the question, What does work do for us? a handbook prepared for WPA workers replies, “Work keeps us from going nuts.”

Stating the issue more formally, Harry Hopkins once declared:

In spite of the fact that we envy those who live on their income we still . . . have sufficient regard for the man as producer that we view him with scorn when he is producing nothing. In our more rational moments we conceal this scorn, but deep in their hearts most bread-winners resent the jobless, as the jobless resent their own state.

If in the past we could have provided the necessaries without working for them, there would never have grown up in us the admiration for work that most of us profess to have. But as it is, we have to deal with the simple truth that the majority of people have associated the chance to earn their living with self-respect. . . .

But the unemployed man now has been moved out clean from the world to which he belonged, and from the conventions to which he once subscribed. Not only has he failed to provide for his family what it needs, but the world still believes, except for the fortunate few at the top, that there is something intrinsically good in earning a living. It is a deep-seated conviction. It is, in fact, such a deep-seated conviction that without work men actually go to pieces. They lose the respect of their wives, sons and daughters because they lose respect for themselves, even though they have broken no laws and even though their deportment as fathers and neighbors continues to be above reproach.

In similar vein, Aubrey Williams once said:

... what could be more unfair and more cruel than to inflict upon the unemployed person the contempt that we feel for a parasite, at the same time denying him all opportunity to prove himself through work. This would be the ultimate injustice.

It is the assertion of this national sense of justice that has brought the element of work into our relief program. . . .

Of all the pleas that have been made in favor of work as a means of preserving morale and mental health, however, none is more eloquent than that made before a Senate Committee by Dr.

3 WPA Release 4-1177, May 26, 1936.
The Broader Issues

Thomas Parran, Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service. To the Committee Dr. Parran said:

A man needs not only to be sound physically, but if his mental health is to be preserved, he must have self-reliance, the satisfaction of work, the joy of acquisition, the sense of equality, the opportunity of leading a normal family life, and the wholesomeness of recreation. Involuntary unemployment creates an attitude of helplessness, the sense of being beaten, a loss of initiative, of self-reliance and of courage, creates distrust of government and discontent with things as they are. It breeds pathological political philosophies, subversive of our present democratic institutions. This disillusionment with life produces first a secretive and later open opposition to authority. Juvenile delinquency, crime, are a result.

I speak not as an economist but as a doctor when I urge that useful employment be provided for all who are willing and able to work. Whatever the cost, I would urge that from the standpoint of public health, in its larger concept, of mental health, economic factors are subordinate to the vital necessity of providing for our destitute citizens an opportunity of a livelihood earned by individual effort. I emphasize useful work; no other type fills the mental needs. We can rebuild cities destroyed by earthquake or fire. We can even recoup losses from plague or pestilence, but we cannot for long years and perhaps generations repair losses to human character and mental health which will result from a failure to give useful employment to our citizens.¹

Although every genuine American could subscribe to these observations, nevertheless it is important to recall that the meaning of joblessness to any particular worker is largely determined by the mores of the circle in which he moves. Indeed, the supposedly deleterious effects of unemployment upon a worker might vanish completely if to him and his immediate associates the virtues of work and self-support did not seem paramount or if idleness came to be looked upon as tolerable or even actually to be desired.² In fact, a social worker attempting during an economic

² Observance of behavior sanctioned by group opinion may not, of course, prevent deterioration of an individual even though it may support his morale. A man may, as the saying goes, be "digging his grave with his own teeth." However, because the public regards overeating as allowable, he will probably experience no feeling of inferiority. Thus, conduct distinctly harmful to the individual, to his family, and even to the community to which he belongs, if sanctioned by the mores of his group, may lead to no loss of the reflected self-esteem called "morale" unless, as sometimes happens, the individual should experience the censure of a group which he acknowledges to be more important than his own. In the case of the gourmand cited above, his physician might represent such a group.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

depression to help an individual suffering great mental distress over the lack of a job would be very likely to remind him that the problem is not his alone, but a mass phenomenon, affecting millions of workers; or that because of the vast complexity of modern industry, a worker is not the master of his own fate. Such an attempt to substitute another and less harsh attitude for one held by society as a whole might seem justifiable if it served to help the individual in question to maintain his sense of personal worth.

Frequently unemployed workers will rationalize so expertly their inability to find work that the mental distress usually expected to result from lack of work and self-support is not manifested. It thus appears that the provision of employment for those who are unable to work because of widespread unemployment may be part of the price society must expect to pay for the protection of its own mores with respect to self-support and work.

Despite all that is said about the importance of work as a means of preserving morale and self-respect, relatively little has been done to show specifically what there is about work that has this beneficent influence upon human personality and how it is that work helps one to maintain his personal integrity. Nevertheless, a number of serious attempts have been made. These suggest that if public work is, as frequently held, to provide a means of preserving morale it should offer employment which challenges the capabilities and interests of workers, and should offer such security as one can find in steady work and steady income. Further factors often thought to have a bearing on this issue are (a) methods by which work is done; (b) conditions under which it is done; (c) the usefulness of the work; (d) ways in which workers

---

1 There is, of course, Charles Kingsley's long list of some 106 virtues which are fostered by work, and Sir William Osler's observation that work is "the open sesame to every portal, the great equalizer in the world, the true philosopher's stone which transmutes all the base metal of humanity into gold."—Cushing, Harvey, The Life of Sir William Osler. Oxford University Press, New York, 1925, p. 617.

2 Of the importance of this factor Robert Hoppock has written: "The literature of industrial psychology provides ample evidence of the dissatisfaction which may result from assigning men to work which is either too difficult for them or which fails to utilize more than a small fraction of their abilities; lasting reductions in labor turnover indicate that such dissatisfaction can be relieved by a better adjustment of the work to the ability of the worker. Vocational guidance clinics have recorded many cases in which reasonable contentment replaced intense dissatisfaction after the individuals had found work that was more in harmony with their capacities and interests."—Job Satisfaction. Harper and Bros., New York, 1935, p. 281.
The Broader Issues

may secure jobs; (e) the possibility of progressing once they are employed; and, finally, (f) the pay. A priori, it would not seem that a worker could find much dignity in a job that could be done better by a donkey, or very much more effectively by a donkey-engine. Too rigid restrictions upon equipment, machinery, and tools that might be used on public jobs, therefore, would seem likely to affect adversely the morale of workers employed. Similarly, if (despite weather conditions which, except in emergencies, would result in shutting down the job) work is continued simply because the workers need the pay, this too might well be expected to have its effect upon morale, particularly if the workers realized that the jobs were being continued when it was wasteful and uneconomic to prosecute them. Unless work is useful and workers think it is useful, it is likely that it cannot yield the satisfaction it otherwise might. Again, if workers feel that to get a job they must take some humiliating step or rely on "pull" and if they feel that continuance of employment and advancement are not in accordance with merit, it would be understandable if morale were adversely affected. Finally, unless the pay is regarded as a sufficient and fair reward for the work done, and also, perhaps, as evidence of general approval of the job performed, it would not be surprising if the work itself fell short of being a real safeguard to morale.

Although it would be easy to point out dozens of ways in which conditions imposed upon the WPA program have detracted from the morale-preserving values that might have been realized under more favorable circumstances, it must be admitted that many, many types of private employment also fall far short of the criteria here suggested.

Preservation and Improvement of Skills and Work Habits

Linked closely with this objective of bolstering morale is that of preserving and improving skills and work habits. As WPA officials have often said, public work is designed not only to help men keep their chins up but also to help them keep their hands in.

Admitting that the earlier stages of the WPA program had

1 Obviously, any single consideration may be greatly outweighed by others. A low paid job offering unusual security or having a high prestige value may, of course, offer greater satisfaction than better paying jobs offering less security or imbued with less prestige.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

merely provided the able-bodied unemployed with jobs at security wages, Harry Hopkins declared, in 1937, that this phase had passed, and that the program had entered the reconstruction phase in which the aim was "to supply to industry as many physically strong, mentally alert, skilled workers as we can." 1

"My business," Mr. Hopkins once said in discussing this aspect of the WPA program, "is to try to find jobs for the unemployed—the kind of jobs that will jerk good citizens back from the brink of despair, sharpen their skill, boost their spirits and set them on the road back to self-reliance again." 2

Preservation of work skills and habits is obviously of benefit not only to workers, but also to the general public and to private industry; to the public, because workers prepared to re-enter private employment as occasion presents are less likely to need continued employment at public expense, and to industry because the labor reserve is kept intact, ready for re-employment as production resumes.

Of the government's responsibility for maintaining the labor reserve Mr. Hopkins once said, in part:

We have always had a labor reserve. ... This reserve may need to be larger as our industrial structure becomes more complex. In the first thirty years of this century, this labor surplus was maintained in a meagre, pitiful way by private charity and local public relief. Industry paid the bill for this charity because it needed the reserve, but the workers themselves paid the dearest price of all, in degradation and misery. American industry ... was willing to keep its machines well-oiled and cared for even when they were idle. But it didn't see the need for keeping its workers from going rusty. ... in many sections of this country we literally kept many industrial organizations together when they were not operating more than a day in every week or two. In those terrible times we employed their workers on Federal work projects so that they could live. Thus we were indirectly helping industry, for it was able to reach out for its trained men when the demand returned. ... 3

1 The Realities of Unemployment. WPA, Government Printing Office, Washington, n. d., last page. (Pages are unnumbered.)
2 WPA Release 4-1445, March 1, 1937.
3 WPA Release 4-1366, November 17, 1936. In an attack upon the idea that WPA workers are "on relief," Nels Anderson once declared: "Here is a factory; it lays off a thousand workers. ... If the same business needed horses to carry on its work, we can be sure they would not be turned out into the street. They would be put into a pasture and cared for, and nobody would speak of the horses as being on 'relief.' Private industry is on relief to whatever degree it gains by being able to turn its workers into the WPA 'pasture.' "—The WPA and Private Industry. Speech before the Third Annual Conference on Social and Labor Legislation, Hartford, January 14, 1939, pp. 4-5.
The Broader Issues

Emphasizing the need for maintaining work habits and skills Aubrey Williams once declared:

Changes in industrial techniques are rapid. A man must be employed to keep abreast of the mechanical developments in his trade. . . . A man who does not ply his trade for months and years loses his skill; he loses his grip on himself; he degenerates into a charity recipient. ¹

When it is recalled that large numbers of workers employed by or needing WPA employment come from manufacturing industries, that the WPA was forbidden to operate projects that might have helped give these workers employment to which they were accustomed, and that further restrictions were imposed by Congress upon amounts that might be spent for equipment and supplies, serious questions might be raised as to how effectively the WPA could be expected to help a man “keep abreast” of either “the mechanical developments in his trade” or “changes in industrial techniques.”

The importance of preventing the deterioration of skills has sometimes been advanced as an especially urgent reason for employing certain white-collar and professional workers at their usual skills since “the social investment” in their training was greater than that for less highly trained workers.

Unfortunately, the primary problem confronting WPA officials has not generally been to find a job on which a worker could continue to exercise any special skills he might have, but to find one on which he could be employed in any capacity. Rather than an inappropriate job, he might be given no job at all.

Although disuse of working skills resulting in their loss or impairment is a highly personal matter, it also has its social implications. Workers who lose their ability on the job may experience greater difficulties in finding employment, may need to be

¹ New York Times, March 27, 1938. The necessity of preserving and maintaining in readiness the labor reserve has been said in England to be of such importance to the nation as a whole that this in itself was good reason for transferring to the national government responsibility for care of the unemployed. During debate on the Unemployment Bill, for example, a member (Mr. Soper) declared: “. . . this House has no more right to expect us in the industrial areas to maintain the industrial army than they would have to expect the citizens of Portsmouth and Chatham to bear the whole cost of maintaining the Northern Command. . . . It is just as necessary for the welfare of the country that the industrial army should be kept fit and well as that the military forces should be kept fit and well and efficient, and on that ground . . . I am glad that the Government have shouldered this responsibility.”—Great Britain, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, 1932–1933, vol. 276, p. 2676.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

given public relief, may later require expensive retraining. Furthermore, through failure to use workers' skills and abilities the public is deprived of services and goods that it might otherwise have enjoyed.

Of more importance even than preservation of existing work habits and skills is the development of new skills and better work habits. Of this Mr. Hopkins has said, "We know from experience that the skilled man has a much better chance of holding his job when business turns downward than the unskilled man. Increasing the skill of those now on relief would not only be a service to them but a service to the Nation by increasing its productive power." ¹

Special difficulties which have seriously interfered with the WPA's efforts to preserve skills and to help workers acquire new skills have already been discussed.²

Protection and Improvement of Wage and Other Employment Standards

Public work programs have been designed not only to maintain the labor reserve in readiness, particularly during periods of prolonged unemployment, but also to help maintain wage levels and other standards of employment. This may be accomplished by giving public employment to large numbers of workers who might otherwise be tempted to accept sub-standard wages and so undermine existing wage scales in a desperate effort to eke out a living. In the words of Nels Anderson, "Emergency public work . . . is not a cure for unemployment, although . . . [it] is good medicine for the sick labor market . . . so that too many workers are not competing for too few jobs." ³ Expanding this idea, Mr. Anderson has explained:

Industry's demand for an ample supply of workers is in effect a demand that a large percentage of workers must be insecure and idle, but capable and willing to work. . . .

¹ The Realities of Unemployment, WPA, last page. This same need has also been stressed by John Maurice Clark. In his Economics of Planning Public Works, he writes: "The best service which relief work is capable of rendering can be rendered only to a few in our present state of knowledge, namely, to provide industrial re-educations for those whose old jobs are likely to vanish permanently and who will need to find new places."—Government Printing Office, Washington, 1935, p. 9.
² See chap. 9.
³ WPA Release 4-1531, May 24, 1937.
The Broader Issues

Such a free labor market is free only to those who can take advantage of it. To the vast army of the unemployed it resembles more a slave market. . . . The government with its work program has frankly entered the field in an effort to shorten the hiring line and to relieve the misery of some of the unemployed and sub-marginal workers. . . .

WPA, as the biggest single employer of labor in the United States, might easily become the arbiter of the minimum wage and of working conditions in private employment. No other public agency is in such a powerful position. Through WPA the government can purchase surplus labor just as, through other departments, it can buy surplus commodities.¹

To those who are interested not in preserving but in beating down wage and other labor standards, public employment which serves to keep these standards up is, of course, anathema.² Lashing out against those who criticize the WPA on this score, Mayor La Guardia once said they “want to see the people hungry in the breadlines so they will work at starvation wages.” ³

Safeguards established by the WPA to protect employment standards and wage rates have been of two general types: those which have not required workers to leave WPA jobs to accept any and every proffer of private employment, and those which have been designed to prevent WPA workers from undercutting established wage rates by accepting other employment during their spare time.⁴

The Right to Work

A jobless worker’s “right to work” has been widely and warmly defended by President Roosevelt and officials high in his administration. Equally ardent has been their advocacy of a correlative responsibility of government—the obligation to provide a job for every worker unable to find one in private industry. Mr.

¹ The Right to Work, pp. 86-87, 93.
² Accustomed as the people of the United States have become to their complex system of social services which undergird and protect standards of employment, it is easy to forget what can happen in the absence of protective governmental services. Of this lack in Japan, for example, Freda Utley has written: “The complete absence in Japan of social services to take the place of the outworn family system constitutes a great immediate advantage to the employers, not only because it saves them rates and taxes, but also because it renders the working class as helpless and defenceless as in England a century ago.”—Japan's Feet of Clay. W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., New York, 1937, p. 198.
⁴ See chaps. 17 and 20.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Roosevelt, during his 1932 campaign for the presidency, said in defining "the greater social contract":

Every man has a right to life; and this means he has also a right to make a comfortable living. He may by sloth or crime decline to exercise that right; but it may not be denied him. . . . Our government, formal and informal, political and economic, owes to everyone an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work.1

Among New Dealers none has defended this right more ardently than Nels Anderson who, in an address before the annual conference of the Governmental Research Association, once declared: "I believe that every able-bodied person has a right to work. Every democracy worthy of the name has a responsibility to give its citizens public work if private work is not available. This, I realize, is a matter of opinion, but so is the ideal of democracy a matter of opinion." 2

So important has this tenet seemed to federal officials that the inscription placed on the WPA building at the New York World’s Fair declared:

The foundation upon which this nation stands is the dignity of man as an individual . . . his right to free expression in politics and religion, and in the labor by which he builds his way of life. Work is America’s answer to the need of idle millions. . . . Work, not charity . . . peaceful work, not regimentation to build machines of war . . . useful public work, to benefit us all.

Strong reaffirmation of this right was given by the National Resources Planning Board when in 1942 it announced a series of new objectives for the nation and headed the list with "The right to work, usefully and creatively through the productive years." 3

Among various organizations which have supported the right to work may be noted the National Unemployment League, the American Federation of Labor, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. More recently, under the stimulus of planning

---


2 WPA Release 4-1757, September 8, 1939.

for that better order—both national and international—which the planners hope can be realized after World War II, the right to work has found wide support in the profusion of plans already announced. There are, for example, the recommendations of the National Study Conference of the Churches on a Just and Durable Peace. This conference, held under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches early in 1942, resolved:

That every member and family of the human race has a right to steady employment and to earn an income such as may provide the necessities of life and growth and is in accord with the wealth-producing capacity of his day and the requirements of responsible conservation of natural resources. . . .

Every man has the right to employment of a kind that is consistent with human dignity and self-respect. . . .

Imposing as these recommendations are in themselves, they assume almost staggering proportions when coupled with the conference's previously adopted "statement of guiding principles" which held, in part: "That the right of all men to pursue work of their own choosing and to enjoy security from want and oppression is not limited by race, color or creed. . . ."

Declarations with respect to the right to work, though more widely discussed during recent years than previously, represent no innovation in American political and economic thought. Interestingly enough, just as World War II has seemed to intensify interest in the question so also did World War I. Among those who, during that crisis in world affairs, took up the cudgels in behalf of the right to work was John Dewey who wrote, in April, 1918:

The first great demand of a better social order . . . is the guarantee of the right, to every individual who is capable of it, to work—not the mere legal right, but a right which is enforceable so that the individual will always have


For comparable statements by the Commission of the Churches for International Friendship and Social Responsibility in Britain see Ibid., p. 19. These actions in both the United States and Britain paralleled closely that of the Oxford Conference at which, in 1937, Protestant and Orthodox churches of many nations declared not only that "to every member of the community there must be made open a worthy means of livelihood" but that "labor has intrinsic worth and dignity" and that "the duty and the right of men to work should therefore alike be emphasized."—Ibid., p. 2.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

the opportunity to engage in some form of useful activity; and if the ordinary economic machinery breaks down through a crisis of some sort, then it is the duty of the state to come to the rescue and see that individuals have something to do that is worth while—not breaking stone in a stoneyard, or something else to get a soup ticket with, but some kind of productive work which a self-respecting person may engage in with interest and with more than mere pecuniary profit.¹

At about the same time that Dewey's article first appeared, a Catholic writer, the Reverend J. Elliot Ross, published his The Right to Work, a small volume treating the subject from the point of view of the moralist and theologian. In this the author declares:

... all theologians agree that a person in extremest need has a right to take what he needs. ...

To prevent the disorders that would result from asserting these rights, however, there is a duty of legal justice incumbent upon the State to furnish work to such as cannot otherwise find it. When a government allows such a private appropriation of property as to close all opportunity of employment to any large class, it becomes responsible for affording to each man some reasonable return for the opportunities that would otherwise be his. Private property should never be absolute. The State will not allow a private individual who owns both sides of a navigable river to close it to traffic or to fishing, and as it sometimes compels individual owners of large tracts of land to open roads for the convenience of the public, so it should keep open certain avenues to work that would otherwise be closed by the selfishness of individuals. This is a simple demand of justice.

Every man, then, has a right to the opportunity to work. And the correlative duty of furnishing this opportunity, under a wage régime, falls upon the State. ... Those who are permanently unemployed ... should be furnished work by the State according to their capacities.²

However wide acceptance of this right-to-work principle may be, it is far from unanimous. For example, when Alva B. Adams of Colorado, while a member of the Senate, opposed the first WPA appropriation, he did so, in part, because it assumed responsibility for the federal government to give jobs and because, if assumed once, that responsibility would go on year after year.³

³ For expressions of the views of such observers as Mark Sullivan and Dorothy Thompson, see New York Herald Tribune, December 15, 1938, and August 9, 1939.
The Broader Issues

Safeguarding Public Order and Democracy

New York City would have been "a shambles" and the people who wanted to wreck the WPA would have been "hiding in the Ramapo hills or hanging from lamp posts," declared General Hugh S. Johnson (in 1935) if President Roosevelt had not rushed to New York City's aid "by keeping . . . life in the bodies of a million absolutely destitute victims of this depression."

Continuing in his own characteristic and colorful way, the General, in his farewell address as WPA administrator in "the 49th state," declared that those who sought "to destroy the Roosevelt Administration" were "just like the two drunken sailors who dynamited a hole in the bottom of a ship at sea because they wanted to get even with the captain."^1

Nearly a year earlier Donald R. Richberg had ventured the prophecy that "it might be cheaper even in a money sense to find work for . . . idle hands to do than to support the armies necessary to hold them back if once these millions of pleading fingers were turned into threatening claws."^2 Referring to the dole which some business men favored because it would probably cost them less, Mr. Richberg observed: "It isn't always sound business judgment to pay the cheapest price for a thing. . . . And it is very often very bad political judgment to buy the cheapest protection of national security."^3

Warning his audience to be prepared to leave the country if federal aid to some million and a half New Yorkers were ever stopped, still another observer, Edmund Borgia Butler, while serving as secretary of the New York City Emergency Relief Bureau, declared: "Even if these relief workers never did anything more than dig holes and fill them up again, the W.P.A. avoided major class riots during the depression and kept this country out of revolution."^4

---

1 As quoted in the New York Times, October 13, 1935.
2 As quoted in the Denver Post, December 28, 1934.
3 Ibid.
4 As quoted in the New York Herald Tribune, March 16, 1936. For further examples of dire prophecies by such observers as David C. Adie, New York State social welfare commissioner, Mayor Kelly of Chicago, one-time Mayor Reading of Detroit, and former Mayor Hoan of Milwaukee, see the Daily Worker, June 21, 1939; Chicago Daily News, May 27, 1937; and U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings under H. Res. 130), Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, Part I, pp. 473, 478.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

That Colonel Harrington's "off the record" testimony to a House Committee in 1939 had something to do with the possibility of public disturbances in case the WPA program were reduced, is indicated by a question later put to him by a member of the Committee after the reporter again took up his task. "You think, then, that people would refuse to starve peaceably?" the committeeman asked. To this the Colonel replied, "I certainly do."

Similarly, Monsignor John O'Grady of the National Catholic Welfare Council once declared to a House Committee that he thought there would have been riots in the United States had it not been for the employment provided by the WPA.

Closely related to the prevention of disturbances is the preservation, not only of sound attitudes toward government, but of democracy itself. Early in 1936, for example, Mr. Hopkins testified to a House Committee that the previous practice of caring for unemployed people "by means of the dole or grocery order, while the heads of families remained at home in idleness . . . was an extremely demoralizing thing. It was building up in the great mass of the unemployed an unwholesome attitude toward the Nation and the States. . . ." ² Five years after the inauguration of the Works Program Harold H. Burton, then mayor of Cleveland, maintained that it was "the nation's safeguard against anarchy and subversive movements." ³

Many believe that one of the chief benefits of the WPA program has been to preserve American institutions and to lessen the likelihood of popular interest in Communism or Fascism.⁴

In a report to the constitutional convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1938, for example, John L. Lewis declared:

If Congress chooses to act in accordance with the President's program, our nation can be again turned toward economic vigor. If Congress fails to act we will continue to drift in the direction of economic chaos. In that dis-

³ Idem (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, p. 69.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 154.
The Broader Issues

rection lies the greatest threat to democracy, the idleness and misery of our people.¹

Nowhere, however, have these issues been more frankly faced nor more pungently stated than they were in 1939 by Sidney Hollander, a layman vitally interested in and closely associated with social work, who has said:

Democracy has no appeal for discouraged rebellious youth—for workless and hungry men. If we continue to deny Americans food to sustain them, clothing to cover them, homes to shelter them, we are implanting resentments that will not quickly be forgotten. There is a limit to what man can bear. Let us be watchful that the limit be not overstepped.

Talk with those here who vainly seek work, who suffer daily the humiliation of empty-handedness, who eat the bitter bread of failure—talk to them, there are 10,000,000 of them—of the meaning of democracy, of the boon of liberty and equality. We've got to make liberty mean to every man what it means to us, or it won't mean much to us very long.

Last year . . . there were about 2,000,000 children born in this country; and of that number about 1,100,000 . . . came to families on relief or in the very low-income groups. Let us assume that this will happen again this year and next and throughout the years to come. In just one decade there will be 11,000,000 children growing up in homes that are but a travesty on the word—homes in which most of the opportunities that should be the right of every child will be wanting.

Now these children may be dependent on us, but in a generation we may be dependent on them . . . They will fill the offices that govern us and make the laws that control us. What kind of America will we leave if we fail to provide these children . . . the security that all children should have? ²

No less important than the negative role of preventing disorder and unwholesome attitudes toward government is the positive part played by the WPA in strengthening and safeguarding democracy. "The most inspiring thing" about the federal Works Program, Harry Hopkins once said, was "to see a real democracy in action—meeting civilization's most serious problem, that of unemployment—not in the easiest way, but in the most courageous, intelligent way. . . ." ³

Contrasting what the Roosevelt administration had done to further the cause of democracy with what the previous administration had accomplished, Mr. Hopkins once declared:

I wonder if the pious phrases he [Mr. Hoover] gave to millions of desperate people, while denying any Federal responsibility for relief, strengthened

² As quoted in the New York Times, June 21, 1939. (Order of paragraphs changed.)
³ WPA Release 4-1189, June 5, 1936.

791
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

the popular faith in this form of government. I wonder if the tear gas with which he greeted the bonus army was his idea of the full flower of democracy. I say it is policies like these which strike at the existence of our form of government.¹

Largely as a result of the stabilizing effect of the WPA program, Aubrey Williams was able to claim without fear of contradiction that the American people had "no fear of the unemployed . . . no fear of employment offices . . . no fear of the unemployed congregating in groups," and that government was not afraid of the "peacetime army [mobilized by the WPA] that rivals in size the wartime army mobilized in 1917 and 1918. It is only when a government regards caring for its people as 'sloppy sentimentalism' that it has to be afraid of its own citizens." ²

References made by Mr. Williams to fear of "employment offices" and of the unemployed congregating in groups relate to Mr. Hoover’s veto of a measure to encourage the establishment of employment offices. The term “sloppy sentimentalism” Mr. Williams borrowed from an address made in 1932 by the assistant director of the President’s Organization on Unemployment Relief in which he was quoted as saying: "England . . . developed a sloppy sentimentalism that the government should care for its people. When old-age pensions were adopted, England took the first step to destroy the foundations of thrift. Labor exchanges and unemployment insurance were then introduced on the idiotic idea that it was the duty of the government to find its citizens work." ³

In view of all that governmental officials have said about the need for employment and relief measures to prevent the development of subversive attitudes toward government, it is interesting to note that the special (Dies) committee established by the House of Representatives to investigate un-American propaganda activities in the United States, practically voted its thanks to the "131,000,000 Americans who in spite of the efforts of Nazis, Fascists, Communists, self-styled saviors of America and all the rest, and in spite of the suffering and distress of 10 years of unemployment and depression, are still as sound and loyal to

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, May 9, 1938.
³ Ibid., p. 477.
The Broader Issues

American institutions and the democratic way of life as they ever were.” “We owe something,” the Committee concluded, “to these 131,000,000 people—especially to the poor, the unemployed, the distressed among them. . . . We owe them a solution of the economic and social problem of unnecessary poverty in the midst of possible plenty.”

As World War II became more and more inevitable, there was an ever-increasing emphasis upon the importance of assuring employment to unemployed workers who sooner or later would be called upon, in one way or another, to help win the war. Senator Murray, for example, declared:

We need the loyalty and devotion of every American citizen in every State, city, county, and village, however humble he may be. Unemployment and destitution are foundations of sand in building patriotism. To place this Nation on a solid foundation we must give assurances, and put those assurances into action, that this Nation can, and will, provide work for those of its citizens who cannot find employment in private enterprise, but who are able, willing, and anxious to work.

Not many months later, Representative Burdick, in support of a plea for increasing the funds available to the WPA, told his colleagues:

Our best defense is to give every man and woman in the United States a chance to work and supply himself with the necessities of life. . . .

We are willing to vote thousands to support a committee to run down Communists, but by our unwarranted and stupid action in cutting down relief when it cannot be cut, we are making Communists faster than the gentleman from Texas [Mr. Dies] can count them. . . . Cut down this relief, when it cannot be done without bringing suffering to thousands of our people, and the result will be the best fertilizer communism has yet had.

If these and similar views reflected at all accurately the real effect of assuring employment to jobless workers then there may have been good reason for Howard Hunter’s statement that:

In the light of these requirements for total defense we can all of us look back upon our five years of WPA work with the feeling that the entire program has been a program of national defense. We have built better than we knew. . . . We did not realize that . . . we were developing the nation’s strength against the eventuality of foreign attack.

2 Congressional Record, June 13, 1940, p. 8165.
3 Ibid., Appendix, February 24, 1941, p. 806.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Just think of the situation in which we would find ourselves if our national defense emergency had struck us with social and economic conditions similar to those of 1932. Would our economy have been strong enough to undertake the task of making our shores impregnable? Would the masses of people have been ready to defend a democracy that did not provide them with bread, work, and self-respect? ¹

No less important than the provision of jobs to workers who may be needed to help win the war is the longer-range problem of assuring employment—once the war is won—to those who helped to win it. When it is recalled that veterans’ organizations during the 1930’s were demanding jobs for members (who were then approaching an age at which job-finding was becoming increasingly difficult) and for various relatives of veterans, it is not difficult to foresee how great the demand for jobs will be once the armed forces and industrial army now engaged in a titanic world struggle are demobilized.

Provision of Necessary Services and Facilities

Utilization of the efforts of employable persons in adding to the country’s wealth has often been referred to officially as one of the WPA’s prime objectives. According to an official publication of the WPA:

The Nation never had enough roads and streets, schools, parks, airports, sewer, and water systems. It never had enough conservation work to protect natural resources. It never had enough libraries or books, health services or educational opportunities. A host of Americans do not have adequate food or clothing. . . .

Millions of people needed work who could help meet these shortages. . . . Their training and energy were unused because they could not find jobs.²

To many observers it has long appeared axiomatic that so long as there are workers to do it, work that needs to be done should be done. This view fell far short of realization during the early 1930’s. Though millions of men lay idle, soil that could have been saved was allowed to wash away. Houses needed by families living in hovels were never built. Schools, clinics, playgrounds, hospitals, and other facilities for which many communities were clamoring were denied them.

The total cost to the nation of this failure constructively to

¹ WPA Release 4-2167, September 19, 1940.
² As shown in chap. 13.
³ Work Pays America: Facts About the WPA, November, 1937.

794
The Broader Issues

use its idle manpower—despite the historic efforts made by the federal government to salvage it\(^1\)—has indeed reached staggering proportions. The National Resources Committee,\(^2\) in 1939, for example, reported that although “no calculation can give a precise figure for the depression loss in income due to the idleness of men and machines, the figures do suggest that this loss through non-production was in the magnitude of 200 billion dollars worth of goods and services. Most of this represents sheer waste, though to some extent it reflects a smaller depletion of natural resources.”

Illustrating concretely what losses like these meant to the American people, this report continues:

If all the idle men and machines could have been employed in making houses, the extra income would have been enough to provide a new $6,000 house for every family in the country. If instead, the lost income had been used to build railroads, the entire railroad system of the country could have been scrapped and rebuilt at least five times over. Of such is the magnitude of the depression loss in income through failure to use available resources. It meant a lower standard of living for practically every group in the community.\(^3\)

Unused labor, declares this report:

. . . is a resource like unharnessed water power. It is gone if it is not employed. It cannot be stored. If 10 million men are able and willing to work, but are forced to be idle for a year by lack of jobs, the community has wasted the valuable resources of manpower. And because of idleness, the individuals are likely to suffer a loss of skill and a breakdown of morale. The Nation is poorer both by the goods that could have been produced and by the frustration and loss of morale of the unemployed individual.\(^4\)

More recently, a report of the National Resources Planning Board has declared, “Our greatest resource is men at work, a resource which is lost forever when men are idle.” Consequently, this report declares, the American people must plan for the full utilization of the nation’s manpower and for the avoidance of waste not only because we cannot afford idleness but because:

Our people do not intend to let an economic depression, unemployment, and “scarcity in the midst of plenty” ever again threaten our growing stand-

\(^1\) For an enumeration of accomplishments realized by the WPA in its heroic attempt to utilize labor that would otherwise have been wasted, see chap. 5.

\(^2\) This was the forerunner of the National Resources Planning Board.


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 1.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

ard of living or our economic security. If the victorious democracies muddle through another decade of economic frustration and mass unemployment, we may expect social disintegration and, sooner or later, another international conflagration.¹

In any future plan that might be devised to avoid idleness and to provide for the American people facilities and services that they need, public work is, of course, only one of a wide variety of devices that might be relied upon. Nevertheless, as the history of the WPA proves, public work is at least one practicable means of salvaging labor and of employing usefully and for the benefit of the nation as a whole workers whose service to their fellows might otherwise be forever lost.

In 1942, when war production was booming and unemployment dwindling, many observers were demanding the abolition of the WPA and its program. To other observers, however, the importance to the war effort of avoiding waste of such idle manpower as did remain, appeared to demand continuance of the WPA program despite the war prosperity. Among those who took this view was Fred K. Hoehler, director of the American Public Welfare Association (an organization of local, state, and national public welfare officials), who wrote:

Persons engaged in the welfare field are the first to recognize the importance both to national and individual morale of placing public aid to individuals capable of working on a basis of payment for public service. In time of war when the full effort of every individual is essential to victory this is even more fundamental than in time of peace. Every individual needs to know that he will not only not be permitted to starve but that he will be permitted to participate in the common job of winning the war.

It is my sincere hope and that, I feel sure, of our entire membership, that the Work Projects Administration will continue to serve this essential function during the coming year.²

After spending hundreds of millions of American dollars for relief, Mr. Hopkins said in 1938:

Perhaps many will think I am not the man to say what economy is—but I know what it is not. To permit idle men with their families to starve; to let our schools close; to let our city streets become a maze of holes; to see our land wash away and our homes go to rack is not economy.

To use the wealth we have to put our idle people to work in the task of the

¹ National Resources Development: Report for 1942, pp. 8, 9.
² U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings), Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1943. 77th Congress, 2d Session. 1942, p. 8.
The Broader Issues

internal development of our country and in the conservation of our natural resources is real economy. That is the heart of the work program.¹

While it would be impossible to deny that the vast accomplishments of the WPA have indeed given the American people a wide variety of benefits and services of almost incalculable value, still it must be admitted that a number of limitations placed upon the WPA program (such as the restrictions imposed upon the types of projects that could be undertaken and the requirement that some local or state governmental agency must co-operate in the initiation of a project and contribute a substantial proportion of its cost) have often made it impossible for the WPA to do what was most needed in a given community. These same limitations have also made it impossible for the WPA to undertake work of any kind in comparatively poor communities which were in great need of particular services or facilities but which were unable to make contributions necessary to initiate a WPA project.

Maintenance of Purchasing Power and Stimulation of Recovery in Times of Depression

Among considerations most frequently advanced in favor of public employment programs, particularly in times of economic depression and widespread unemployment, is the claim that such programs are necessary to economic recovery. Speaking specifically of the effect the proposed Works Program was expected to have upon the nation's economy, President Roosevelt (in April, 1935) declared that although the program's first objective was to provide jobs it was also expected "to assist materially in our already unmistakable march toward recovery."² Again in 1938, he emphasized the role of the program in stimulating recovery when, at the annual meeting of the Community Mobilization for Human Needs, he declared:

The able-bodied unemployed need work and should have it. But equally the economic system needs that they should have it. A Federal works program not only serves the unemployed, it saves the jobs of those who have jobs. Our industrial production cannot progress, as it must, unless our masses have income with which to buy its products. That, in brief, is an aspect of the relief problem—and a most important aspect. . . . Only in jobs and more jobs, at good pay, shall we find national stability and individual security.³

¹As quoted in the New York Times, October 9, 1938.
²Ibid., April 29, 1935.
³Ibid., March 12, 1938.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

That the President even in 1939 did not intend to abandon the WPA program which he still regarded as a desirable stimulus to economic well-being was indicated in his declaration that:

Some highbrow columnists and some high-powered economists say that you and I think too much about consumers' purchasing power and look at our economic problems from the wrong end. They say that we should glue all of our attention on the heavy industries and should do everything and anything just to get these industries to work and to get private investors to put up the money to build new buildings and new machines without regard to the average consumer's need or his ability to use these buildings or machines. By and large, you will find that these experts are the same as those who in 1929 told us that conditions were sound and that we had found the way to end poverty when we were building luxurious office buildings, hotels, and apartment houses which consumers did not need and had not the purchasing power to pay for.  

On this question of the role of a work program in helping to save the economic fabric of the nation as a whole, Harry Hopkins said in 1937:

To preserve the very life of business the mass of people must be able to buy, for mass production is the heart of our system. With all this talk about the unemployed, what is going to take care of the unemployed employer? Nothing except the consumer's dollar. It seems to me to be a proper function of government to see to it that the wheels of industry keep turning. And since this can be assured only by keeping men in employment, what more natural than that the government do the job?  

In explaining how WPA expenditures helped keep the American economy going, Mr. Hopkins in June, 1938, estimated that approximately $1,825,000,000 would be spent on WPA jobs during the next eight months. Some 300 million of this, he expected, would go for materials, supplies, and equipment. These purchases, he predicted, would give "indirect, full-time private jobs to a quarter of a million workers, entirely apart from those on the WPA rolls. They, also, will buy things and create other jobs." Shipping materials to the jobs where they could be used, said Mr. Hopkins, would place "another 200 million dollars into the pockets of the owners of machinery, the owners of buildings, the railroads and a host of other business concerns." He continued:

1 Ibid., May 23, 1939.
Finally, we arrive at the biggest single item in the WPA program—1 billion 325 million dollars which goes directly in pay to the workers. What happens to it?

The average WPA worker makes about $55 a month—some make as low as $30—and has three dependents to support on it. Every cent of his paycheck is needed, immediately, for the basic necessities of living. It is obligated for the purchase of food, clothing, rent, medical care and other necessities. It swells the stream of American trade where it is needed most—among those with the lowest incomes—so that the turnover is repeated the maximum number of times.

Where do WPA workers' dollars go . . . ?

About 515 million dollars will go for food to the grocer, the baker, the butcher.

About 220 millions will go to the owners of rooms, houses and apartments for rent.

Another 150 millions will go for household operation—for furniture, fuel, kitchen equipment, gas, water, electricity.

The rest of the wages will be spent for a wide variety of things. Fifty millions, for example, will go to doctors and dentists, 60 millions for street car and bus fare.¹

It was no doubt considerations like these which led Nels Anderson to say that the WPA was, in part, "800,000 storekeepers who get most of the money paid to WPA workers." ²

To illustrate to WPA workers themselves the broader economic effects of the program that provided their livelihood, a handbook for workers issued by the WPA pictured graphically "Where the WPA dollar goes." This indicated that WPA earnings spent for food affected in turn canneries, farms, wholesalers, and fisheries. Money for shelter, in its turn, aided building repairs, mines, factories, and the lumber industry. Finally, expenditures for clothing were shown to help manufacturers, textile mills, and farms.

So important did this recovery-stimulating role of the WPA appear to Aubrey Williams that he declared, in 1936, that he believed "a fair examination of the results of . . . increased purchasing power will justify on that ground alone, expenditure of this amount of money [780 million dollars during the first six

¹ WPA Release 4-1710, June 19, 1938. Basing his estimates upon studies of consumer expenditures, made but a short time before by the National Resources Planning Board, Colonel Harrington (in 1940) estimated that of a total of 6.6 billion dollars paid to WPA workers 2.8 billion had gone for food; 1.3 billion for housing; 656 million for heat, light, gas, ice, etc.; 590 million for clothing; 328 million for transportation; 262 million for medical care; and 656 million dollars for other items.

² WPA Release 4-1757, September 8, 1938.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

months of the WPA] as one of the most effective means of bringing about recovery."  

In support of views like these federal officials like to point out that when expenditures for public employment go up economic conditions improve, and when they go down recession is likely to ensue. Howard Hunter, for example, in an address in February, 1939, maintained that:

Putting three million people at work into the economic life-stream of the country with purchasing power, has been a demonstrable stabilizing force in our business life and a force in sustaining our national income. Every time we have materially reduced the rolls of those who work for the WPA, private employment and business have dropped. On the other hand, every time we have increased the number of people employed by the WPA, private employment and business have immediately gone up. This is a matter which is easily demonstrated.  

Although the relationship between federal spending and business conditions may in fact be as direct as Mr. Hunter here suggests, the question of how and to what extent relief expenditures and other pump-primings have benefited the nation's economy is highly controversial. Nevertheless, an imposing array of authorities have agreed with the administration on the importance of public spending as an aid to the national economy. For example, Paul H. Douglas, professor of economics at the University of Chicago, declared in testimony before a Senate Committee in 1938:

. . . the administration has . . . up to the present . . . pumped out about 16 billions of dollars of purchasing power in the form of relief, W.P.A., Public Works, and Army and Navy expenditures.

This blood transfusion has alone kept the economic system running. . . .  

When sharp reductions in WPA expenditures were being contemplated late in 1938, 69 economists joined in sending President Roosevelt a letter of warning in which they stated as their belief that "Such a cut in consumer purchasing power would . . . constitute a severe threat to the continuance of the present economic recovery, and might even cause a serious setback in business ac-

1 As quoted in the United States News, September 28, 1936.
2 WPA Release 4-1904, February 26, 1939. For an example of an earlier claim by Corrington Gill see WPA Release 4-1584, September 16, 1937.
3 U. S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief (Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36), Unemployment and Relief. 75th Congress, 3d Session. 1938, vol. 2, p. 979.
The Broader Issues

tivity.” As for the past, the 69 declared that the recession of 1937 had been arrested by the “vigorous action” of the federal government. “The expansion of the spending program,” it was claimed,

was the chief governmental weapon used in fighting the recession and stimulating the recovery. Furthermore during these 6 months the major channel for the disbursement of new purchasing power has been the Works Progress Administration and we believe that the Works Progress Administration should continue to perform this function until private industry clearly demonstrates its capacity to absorb all those released from relief rolls.

Obviously, attempts to analyze the WPA’s contribution to economic stability and recovery would lead directly into consideration of the effects of the entire fiscal policy of the federal government; but such analysis lies far outside the scope of this volume. All that can be said here is that reliance upon “spending for recovery” has been attacked as ardently as it has been ad-

1 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 83), Additional Appropriation for Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. 1939, pp. 65-66. Also, New York Herald Tribune, December 26, 1938. Among the 69 signers were included such authorities as Eveline M. Burns, Paul H. Douglas, and Seymour E. Harris.

2 It may not mean straying too far afield, however, to recall that intensive studies made for the National Resources Planning Board suggest that 9.7 billion man-hours of WPA construction work (done prior to 1939) had resulted in 1.5 billion man-hours of “off-site” or secondary employment such as that required in off-site administrative work and that used in producing or transporting materials used on WPA projects. The ratio of off-site to on-site employment on WPA construction projects, interestingly enough, was estimated as being the same as that for construction work done under the FERA program and was far lower than that for other types of federal construction projects. On PWA, “regular” federal construction, and construction financed at least in part by RFC funds, off-site employment ranged from at least the equivalent of to double the volume of on-site employment.

The low ratio of off-site to on-site employment on WPA and other relief construction jobs was largely responsible for the startling finding that “the total on-site and off-site employment attributable to construction was in 1934-38 nowhere near as great—even including work-relief construction—as in 1925-29, although on-site employment was actually greater.”

Nevertheless, since the average man-hour cost of both on-site and off-site employment provided through WPA construction projects was only 55 cents (whereas the average for federal PWA projects was 88 cents, that for regular federal projects $1.03, and that for non-federal PWA projects $1.12), expenditure of a given amount of money for WPA construction resulted in providing from 1.6 to more than two times the volume of employment that was provided on projects prosecuted under the other types of program.

Even with this indirect labor included, it has been estimated that WPA provides about 50 to 75 per cent more man-hours of work per dollar expended than does PWA.—Galbraith, J. K., and Johnson, G. G., Jr., The Economic Effects of the Federal Public Works Expenditures, 1933-1938. Prepared for the National Resources Planning Board. Government Printing Office, Washington, November, 1940, pp. 44, 42, 53.
vocated. Criticisms of public spending as a means of invigorating a sick economy are based upon (a) fear of certain effects of the spending itself; (b) the dangers of waste, of the political use of funds, and of competition with private enterprise; (c) apprehension of increased central control over credit; and finally, upon (d) misgivings about the economic effects of an increased public debt, both as a harbinger of higher taxes and as a factor likely to lead to inflation.

Among those who at one time or another have been arrayed against the administration's broad anti-depression fiscal policy are certain Democratic senators such as Senator Harrison of Mississippi and Senator Byrd of Virginia; Republican leaders such as Herbert Hoover, Senators Vandenberg and Taft; the United States Chamber of Commerce; the National Association of Manufacturers; a group of 56 economists comprising the Economists National Committee (which included Leonard P. Ayres of the Cleveland Trust Company, Ernest L. Bogart of the University of Illinois, John M. Chapman of Columbia University, D. W. Ellsworth of The Annalist, William D. Ennis of Stevens Institute, Hudson B. Hastings of Yale University, Jacob H. Hollander of Johns Hopkins, Edwin W. Kemmerer of Princeton, and Joseph A. Schumpeter of Harvard University).

Divisions of opinion on the effectiveness of federal fiscal policy during the 1930's have often turned on the question as to what results were expected. Those who thought the spending should revive the economic system to the point where it could run without continued priming were, of course, disappointed. There were others, however, who realized that public expenditures fulfilled an important function in helping to maintain the national income even though they failed to get the economic machinery going under its own steam.1

1 Summarizing briefly her appraisal of the federal government's spending program, Mabel Newcomer has written:

"The fact that the rapid recovery in business in 1933-34 and again in 1935-36 corresponds to the years of largest deficits may be no accident. But the backers of this theory hoped and believed that government spending would stimulate private business so that it would go of its own momentum. It was rightly described as a pump-priming theory.

"In this hope they were disappointed. Government expenditures may have been useful in themselves—even necessary; but they did not bring continued business recovery. Why they failed is a matter for conjecture, but various possibilities may be noted. There are some indications that savings have exceeded investments. Business has hesitated to expand, partly because of future uncertainties, partly because
The Broader Issues

Despite criticisms leveled against federal spending for public employment as a means of stabilizing general economic conditions, it is significant that public work plays an important role in many of the projected plans by which experts think that in the future it may be possible, through planning, to assure what they variously term industrial expansion, jobs for all, full employment, national recovery, and economic stability. Similarly, the National Resources Planning Board and a wide variety of other agencies and organizations advocate a vast public works and employment program to be put into operation, as necessary at the close of the war to facilitate the nation’s return from a war to a peacetime economy. Thus, so far as a considerable number of planners are concerned at least, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that public employment constitutes an indispensable part of the nation’s defenses against economic disruption. It appears, therefore, that the chief question is not: Shall we have public employment to serve as a balance wheel for our economy and to make up such deficiencies as may still result in spite of all our planning? but rather: What kind of public employment program shall we plan to have?

One danger likely to arise from emphasis upon the desirability of utilizing work programs primarily to revive a sluggish economic order (rather than, say, to provide services and facilities needed by communities and to give jobs to needy workers of whom of present high costs. The unsettled state of world affairs, with the consequent repercussions on international trade and finance, has not promoted the necessary confidence. Labor costs have risen faster than prices, and construction costs have been out of line. The result has been to slow up the velocity of circulation of money and credit. It is not sufficient to create more purchasing power; it must be used.

"The Government itself has been pursuing other policies that have, perhaps, discouraged business."—Taxation and Fiscal Policy. Columbia University Press, New York, 1940, pp. 74-75.


803
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

there might be large numbers even in "good times") is the threat that when conditions do improve public opinion is likely to demand too rapid curtailment of expenditures for public works.

When, as in time of war, for example, employment levels rise, prices of materials and supplies no longer need support, and certain kinds of materials grow especially scarce, it is not surprising that one of the first moves suggested is the curtailment of public work. If this can be effected through the transfer of workers to other jobs, well and good. But, if reductions are made too rapidly and before workers can be absorbed in other employment, this means that such savings as may be effected are realized at the expense of workers who are thus denied such fundamental necessities as work, an opportunity to earn a living, and in many instances, the very means of subsistence. To various authorities and observers, therefore, it appears that in case of necessity economies in employment and materials should, so far as possible, be effected in such a way that the burden will fall with equal weight upon all elements of the population, not upon only a few, and certainly not upon the very few who are already socially and economically disadvantaged.
CHAPTER XXXIII

WPA EMPLOYMENT VERSUS DIRECT RELIEF

ALTHOUGH MANY considerations advanced in support of public employment programs pertain particularly to genuine work, others relate specifically to the advantages of work relief, such as that provided by the WPA over direct assistance, in the form of commodities, store or rent orders, or cash.

THE ADMINISTRATION’S STAND AGAINST DIRECT RELIEF FOR EMPLOYABLE WORKERS

Ever since the administration’s earliest announcement of its proposal to establish a work program, the superiority of such a program over one of direct relief has been a most important selling point. President Roosevelt drew the issue sharply as early as January, 1935, when he declared:

I am not willing that the vitality of our people be further sapped by the giving of cash, of market baskets, of a few hours of weekly work cutting grass, raking leaves or picking up papers in the public parks. We must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination. . . .

Almost a year later, just as the Works Program was providing employment for some three million workers, the President told the nation:

. . . a dole would be more economical than work relief. That is true. But . . . in this business of relief we are dealing with properly self-respecting Americans to whom a mere dole outrages every instinct of individual independence.

Most Americans want to give something for what they get. That something, in this case honest work, is the saving barrier between them and moral disintegration. We propose to build that barrier high.

It was in this address that the President explained that the federal government had first established a program of direct relief “realizing that we were not doing a perfect thing but that we were

1 See preliminary discussion of this same topic in chap. 3.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

doing a necessary, saving and humane thing.” “But,” continued the President, “as quickly as possible we turned to the job of providing actual work for those in need.”

In support of work as opposed to direct relief, Harry Hopkins once told a Senate Committee: “Certainly for a perfectly able-bodied man to sit at home day after day and week after week, and month after month, getting his relief without any return to the State or the community, it seems to me, undermines his morale. It tends to pauperize him, while on the other hand in working for his benefit, he believes he is contributing a useful service in return for his relief benefits.” His conclusions, Mr. Hopkins stated, were based on his own experience, that of his staff, and that of people “intimately acquainted with relief.”

Even with the passing of the Hopkins regime, WPA officials have continued vigorously to stress their contempt for direct relief. In 1939, for example, Howard Hunter declared that one of the reasons he liked the “answer of public work for the needs of the unemployed” was because it was “the only decent way to treat American citizens who want to work.” Said he: “I hope and believe that we are forever through with the indignities which were heaped upon the unemployed a few years ago in the form of grocery orders or cash doles.”

Succinctly stated, the administration’s case against the dole—as phrased in an official WPA handbook in answer to the question “What happens to us when we are on the dole?”—was as follows: “We lose our self respect. We lose our skill. We have family rows. We loaf on street corners. Finally we lose hope.”

Illustrating concretely the ways in which work relief was

1 Ibid., November, 30, 1935.
2 This issue was so important to Mr. Hopkins that (according to the United States News, December 13, 1937) he threatened to resign because of “a suggestion from the President that the Government should return to direct relief.” However, Mr. Hopkins was said to have “re-sold Mr. Roosevelt on the idea of work relief for the employables.”

For an interesting account of how administration leaders have wavered on this question of providing work for unemployed workers, see Men around the President, by Joseph Wright Alsop, Jr., and Robert Kintner. Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., New York, 1939.


4 WPA Release 4-1904, February 26, 1939.

The Broader Issues

thought to be preferable to direct assistance, a WPA survey of three "depressed" southern Illinois counties declared:

The inadequacy of the dole was not a theoretical question in southern Illinois. Three years of grocery-order relief, of soup kitchens and hand-me-down clothing at the beginning of the depression had reduced a large part of the unemployed to such poverty that active purchasing power among the relief population had virtually disappeared. As a result, scores of merchants became superfluous during the era of relief in kind and were driven to the wall. Extended idleness among active workers on the dole had taken its toll in demoralization as well as in poverty. In the meantime, the program of public improvement in the community had been halted and the existing social equipment had fallen into disrepair for lack of necessary workers. The only immediate solution for these critical problems was a broad drive to substitute public jobs for idleness, a wage income for grocery orders. . . .

During the first 4 years of operation WPA provided jobs for 7,000 to 15,000 unemployed workers and supported a total population of 23,000 to 55,000 persons. The WPA pay roll has varied from 4 million dollars to 6 million dollars a year. Operating on such a scale, the program solved—in part at least—the graver relief problems inherited from the early years of the depression. The poverty and distress among the relief population was appreciably relieved. With free buying power restored to the unemployed, local business revived; and the store space left vacant during the era of the dole gradually began to fill up. Idleness in good part disappeared. Finally, the community was enabled to construct and to repair needed public facilities.

The list of the WPA’s physical accomplishments in the three counties is an impressive record in itself.¹

Comparisons here drawn are not, unfortunately, between work relief and a reasonably decent program of direct relief but contrast WPA employment with a shockingly inadequate “dole.” Obviously, direct relief programs need not necessarily be of this type. For this reason, the description of the advantages of WPA employment over the relief program which preceded it in the Illinois counties discussed here overstates somewhat the difference between WPA employment and direct assistance administered in accordance with up-to-date standards of adequacy and decency. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that no program of direct relief, however well administered, can claim to abolish idleness or to do much about initiating public improvements or keeping “the existing social equipment” in repair. It must also be admitted that, as shown in a succeeding section of this chapter, the present state of

The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

public opinion in this country undoubtedly makes it more difficult to establish an adequate and decent program of direct relief than to operate a work program meeting these standards.

Although the position of administration leaders in the past has been unequivocally in favor of work as opposed to direct assistance, various WPA officials have observed that this does not necessarily commit the administration to such a policy for all time. Given a different set of social and economic circumstances from those that prevailed in the 1930's, say these observers, it might be that the same ingenuity that devised the idea of a federal work program to meet one set of needs might, under other conditions, develop a very different type of attack.

Federal Opposition Does Not Extend to All Types of Direct Assistance

Despite official attitudes already described, the federal government participates in the administration of several measures providing cash grants to needy persons who, for the most part, are regarded as unemployable. Federal co-operation does not, however, extend to the provision of direct assistance to needy unemployable people in general. Though it seeks to avoid having any part in giving direct relief to employable persons, the administration has itself chosen to finance and administer (through the Farm Security Administration) subsistence grants to farmers who, for one reason or another, are not thought to be good loan risks or who need more than can safely be made available to them on a loan basis. It is also laying plans for assisting directly various types of persons (many of whom will undoubtedly be employable) who are thrown into need as a result of the war. If the administration can justify giving this direct assistance to farmers and to employable war sufferers, the critics ask, why can it not also justify giving to other employable persons such direct assistance as they might need?

The administration's abhorrence of direct relief (and all that this implies in terms of the "baskets of groceries" which Harry Hopkins so liked to ridicule) does not prevent its assumption of

1 For data on the extent of the Farm Security Administration's grant program which has never been a particularly big one and which has always been regarded as only supplementary to the more important program of rehabilitation, see Appendix Table 1.
The Broader Issues

the leading role in one of the worst, most unstable and least adequate aspects of the nation's various relief programs—the distribution to needy persons of federal surplus commodities.\(^1\) Despite their inadequacy and uncertainty, these commodities often constitute a large proportion, if not the whole, of the aid available in many sections of the country. Since the federal government appears to have no qualms about providing this lowest type of direct relief even to employable persons, many critics of federal policy find it difficult indeed to understand the administration's persistent refusal to participate in what might be a really decent national program of direct assistance to help meet needs arising from any cause and in any section of the country.

Position of Congress

Although the President and the administration in season and out have extolled the advantages of work as opposed to direct relief, it is by no means clear that Congress, if left to its own devices, would have insisted upon a policy of work relief for the unemployed. In fact, all the ERA acts enacted prior to June, 1939, specified that the appropriated funds (or not to exceed a specified maximum) might be used for "relief" as well as "work relief."\(^2\) In 1942, when the House acted upon the bill which ultimately became the ERA Act, fiscal year 1943, the Taber amendment to substitute a direct relief program for that of the WPA was defeated by a mere handful of votes and only after strong measures on the part of administration leaders to rally their forces.

Even among Democratic leaders in Congress there have been a number who, at various times during the past several years, would have been glad, at the drop of a hat, to substitute a direct relief program for that of the WPA. Prominent among these, ironically enough, was Senator Adams who, as chairman of an important Senate subcommittee, year after year had to assume leadership for the successive WPA bills presented.\(^3\)

---

\(^1\) See chaps. 3 and 7.

\(^2\) See, for example, ERA Act of 1935, sec. 1; ERA Act of 1936, Title II, par. 2; ERA Act of 1937, Title I, sec. 1; ERA Act of 1938, sec. 1(1).

\(^3\) Incongruous as it may have seemed, it was none other than Senator Adams who in 1935 proposed that the Senate Appropriations Committee substitute a direct relief measure for the President's plan for a work program. This plan missed passage by the narrowest possible margin, the vote on the proposition having been a 10 to 10 tie!
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Additional Supporters of Work Relief

Second only to administration leaders' enthusiasm for a work program is that of the United States Conference of Mayors. In season and out the mayors have urged that "Work and not the dole is the American way of meeting the relief problem." The city officials of America, said the mayors in 1936, "will never consent to the abandonment of the work principle in giving relief assistance. The dole, based upon idleness and groceries, has no place in our American scheme of society." ¹

Among the most consistent advocates of work, instead of direct relief, organized labor has been particularly vocal. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, for example, told a Senate Committee (in 1935) that he preferred the "plan which will provide for the creation of work opportunities . . . to the dole. The dole is demoralizing . . . makes paupers out of our independent people. That is not right." ² The Illinois State Federation of Labor in its 1936 convention took the position that although the WPA, based as it was "primarily upon immediate relief needs," could "never be made wholly satisfactory" as a relief measure, yet it was "infinitely better than relief payments or supplies based upon budgets of such items as food, clothing, shelter and medical care. . . . The plan itself as a whole should not be discarded until it is certain that there will be no need to return to an expanded direct relief system as a substitute for W.P.A." ³

Farmers, too, appear to favor work as opposed to direct relief. The board of directors of the American Farm Bureau in 1934, condemned the dole and spoke for a work program. Several years later, the voting delegates of the American Farm Bureau Federation adopted a resolution calling upon the federal government to "continue to provide employment for those who cannot secure employment in private industry." ⁴

¹ U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, pp. 31, 29.

² For supporting statements by prominent mayors such as Fiorello H. La Guardia of New York City and Frank Couzens of Detroit, see Ibid., p. 32, and the New York Times, March 24, 1938.

³ U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 117), Emergency Relief Appropriation. 74th Congress, 1st Session. 1935, sup. p. 40.

⁴ Illinois State Federation of Labor, Proceedings of the Fifty-fourth Annual Convention. [Chicago], 1936, pp. 55, 93.

⁵ As quoted in the Congressional Record, January 12, 1939, p. 249.
The Broader Issues

Prominent among those who have favored work as opposed to direct relief are many social workers who from first-hand experience see the personal and social effects of various types of relief policies.¹

Finally, it is noteworthy that the American people as a whole appear to share the view that work is preferable to direct relief. A poll taken by the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1938, for example, showed a nine-to-one majority, reported to have been one of the heaviest majorities recorded in such a poll, in favor of work relief as opposed to a dole. A poll conducted by Fortune magazine about a year earlier showed that some 74.5 per cent of those voting thought jobs created by the federal government a better form of relief for the unemployed than direct cash payments which were favored by only 9.0 per cent of those participating. Another 4.4 per cent voted for both jobs and cash payments. Other votes were scattered.

The Case for Work as Opposed to Direct Relief

The overwhelmingly favorable sentiment supporting work relief as a means of aiding needy employable persons may be attributed in part at least to four factors: the belief that if people get something for nothing their morale is impaired and that they become pauperized; the contention that only by having people work for what they get, can payments to them be made adequate properly to maintain themselves and their dependents; the feeling that in the long run, at least, it is more economical; and, finally, the conviction that workers themselves prefer it.

Avoiding “Pauperization”

Since such great stress has been laid upon the morale-preserving values of work relief as opposed to direct assistance, it is indeed to be regretted that it is so difficult to measure the effects upon morale of various relief programs and that such attempts at appraisal as have been made are so limited in scope.² Making up,

¹ For testimony of such social work leaders as the Rt. Rev. John A. Ryan, director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Charlotte Carr, one-time director of the New York City Emergency Relief Bureau and subsequently director of Hull House in Chicago, and Frederick I. Daniels, who for several years was executive director of the New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, see the New York Times of February 16, 1936, August 8, 1937, October 20, 1935.

² Speaking of the difficulties of measuring the effect of relief programs, Henry S.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

however, for the paucity of objective studies of this issue is the plethora of opinions that have been offered. Most noteworthy among these are the views of WPA officials who, as a result of their day-by-day contacts with people who are one day "on relief" and the next day "at work," are convinced almost to a man, that work relief is better than direct assistance. Typical of examples that one can hear from WPA officials at any hour of the day or night and in any section of the country is the story of the head of a family who, after three weeks on a WPA job, declared:

Now I can look my children straight in the eyes. I've regained my self-respect. Relief is all right to keep one from starving . . . but, well—it takes something from you. Sitting around and waiting for your case worker to bring you a check, and the kids in the house find that you contribute nothing toward their support, very soon they begin to lose respect for you. It's different now. I'm the bread-winner of the house and everybody respects me.¹

Almost as enthusiastic as those who are attached directly to the WPA organization are the employes of relief and public welfare agencies which co-operate in determining the eligibility of workers to be employed by the WPA. As one state official put it, administrative employes who had previously worked only with recipients of direct relief themselves noted that WPA workers were different. "The WPA workers," she explained, "stood up. There was less cringing."

Further evidence that persons having wide knowledge of WPA operations think work relief preferable to direct assistance is afforded by the findings of the National Appraisal Committee which reported that responses from a wide variety of local and state officials indicated that they were "almost unanimously" of the belief that work relief (as opposed to direct aid) was "highly preferable with regard to its effects on both the community and the worker. The benefits to the community from WPA projects


812
and the maintenance of the self-respect of the worker were the chief reasons given for preferring work relief."

Though, as already noted, but few first-hand studies of the morale-preserving values of WPA employment have been attempted, some of those that have been made are worthy of mention.

One small study (covering only 137 WPA workers), made in Chicago by Margaret C. Bristol in 1936 led her to conclude that:

Although it was not possible to secure adequate responses from the men on many of the various separate factors in the W.P.A. program which may have had a bearing upon the morale and the self-respect of the workers, it was possible in a majority of the cases to secure indications, both direct and indirect, as to the general effect of W.P.A. upon the self-respect, morale, or general outlook of the workers. Like the previous work-relief program, W.P.A. seems to have been of distinct value in providing encouragement to men otherwise mentally depressed by lack of work. The widespread disdain for direct relief came not only from the unemployed themselves, and particularly from the wives, who often blamed their husbands for their inability to secure jobs, but also from the employed members of the community who saw a threat to security of their jobs in the unemployment of their fellows. This disdain was possibly further encouraged by the emphasis placed upon work by the various federal, state, and local administrations.

A second study is that made by F. Stuart Chapin and Julius A. Jahn in St. Paul in 1939. This covered two small but carefully selected sample groups, one embracing 80 families of WPA workers, the other 42 families receiving direct relief. The purpose of the study was to ascertain which of the two groups revealed better morale and adjustment to community life.


3 The criteria used in making this determination included "(1) morale, or the degree that the individual feels competent to cope with the future and to achieve his desired goals; (2) general adjustment, or the feelings about his relationship to other persons, toward present or future social conditions, and toward present social institutions; (3) social participation, or the degree to which an individual actually engages in the organized activities of his community in terms of membership, attendance, contributions, committees, and offices; and (4) social status, or the position the family occupies with reference to the average prevailing household possessions of other families in the community."

The first two measures, the writers point out, describe "how people feel about their situation" whereas the latter two describe "their objective social condition."—"The Advantages of Work Relief Over Direct Relief in Maintaining Morale in St. Paul in 1939," in the American Journal of Sociology (University of Chicago Press), vol. 46, no. 1, July, 1940, pp. 19-20.

Among specific criteria against which social status, for example, was measured
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Findings resulting from application of the scales used in the course of this investigation led the writers to report that:

The morale of eighty W.P.A. workers in St. Paul was found to be 5.46 per cent higher than the morale of a matched group of forty-two direct-relief clients in St. Paul (certified for W.P.A. and waiting assignment). Besides measurement of morale, we obtained a pattern of adjustment by using three additional criteria—general adjustment, social participation, and social status. The average percentage superiority of the W.P.A. workers over the matched group of direct-relief clients was 5.67 per cent on the percentage gains of these four criteria. . . We cannot, of course, claim that the superiority of the W.P.A. workers studied was exclusively the effect of the W.P.A. program as a cause. But we can answer the question: What is the probability of obtaining a difference of the magnitude found, by pure chance? The odds are 49 to 1 of obtaining by chance a difference in pattern of adjustment as large as the advantage that the eighty W.P.A. workers showed over a matched group of forty-two direct-relief clients. Clearly, such a difference in pattern of social adjustment does not often occur by chance; therefore, we may conclude that the higher morale, general adjustment, social participation, and social status is probably due to the W.P.A. program.

Although an attempt was made during this study to match the WPA and relief groups so as to reduce differences due to some 10 or 15 factors (including age, sex, race, nativity, amount of education, usual occupation, size of family, residence, county of work, previous WPA experience, and family status), no attempts were made, apparently, to take into account such important factors as employability or previous work experience, which in themselves might have contributed to their being selected for WPA employment from among the larger number of those who (like the relief recipients included in the study) were eligible for WPA jobs. Furthermore, no allowance was made for the length of time the WPA workers had worked on their WPA jobs, or had been on relief prior to their employment by the WPA. Such

were: furnishings and equipment in the homes of those interviewed, comparative neatness, and condition and the presence of musical instruments and books. Social participation was measured by such standards as active membership in club, lodge, church, and similar programs.

1 Ibid., pp. 14-15.
2 Some effort, however, was made to adjust for “length of time on relief.” This was limited, unfortunately, to consideration of “the length of time since the subject’s family was registered for the first time with the direct relief agency.” All the WPA workers, prior to their employment by the WPA, had been so registered. Incidentally, in a final comparison of 37 WPA families and 25 direct relief cases for which this further factor could be taken into account, the WPA workers were still said to

814
shortcomings, together with the extremely small size of the sample, severely limit the usefulness of this study which, nevertheless, is an important first attempt to devise objective and quantititative measures of phenomena that are much discussed but little studied.

Even if one were to accept as valid the conclusion suggested by the Chapin-Jahn study, there is nothing to show that the higher morale of WPA workers was attributable to the fact that they had work whereas the relief recipients had none. Since no allowance appears to have been made for differences in the amount of benefits granted to the two sample groups, and since, by such measures as “social participation” and “social status” persons having relatively more income might be expected to rate higher than those with less, it is possible that observed differences in morale may be due to the amount of income available and not to the fact that such income represented a work as opposed to a direct-relief benefit.

The most comprehensive of all attempts thus far made to study the effects of WPA employment is that made in New Haven by E. Wight Bakke. As already noted, Mr. Bakke has defined a number of stages through which men who are long unemployed may pass. Even if one were to accept as valid the conclusion suggested by the Chapin-Jahn study, there is nothing to show that the higher morale of WPA workers was attributable to the fact that they had work whereas the relief recipients had none. Since no allowance appears to have been made for differences in the amount of benefits granted to the two sample groups, and since, by such measures as “social participation” and “social status” persons having relatively more income might be expected to rate higher than those with less, it is possible that observed differences in morale may be due to the amount of income available and not to the fact that such income represented a work as opposed to a direct-relief benefit.

The most comprehensive of all attempts thus far made to study the effects of WPA employment is that made in New Haven by E. Wight Bakke. As already noted, Mr. Bakke has defined a number of stages through which men who are long unemployed may pass. It is his opinion that the chief need during the first phase, that of “momentum stability,” and for much of the second, that of “unstable equilibrium,” is for cash which with other possible resources should be in an amount sufficient to keep the workers’ “plane of living fairly approximate to their normal plane.” With the approach of the second stage, however, Mr. Bakke contends that:

... more than cash is required to avoid the damage to self-reliance inherent in the modification of goals, disturbance of relations and status, and destruction of self-confidence characteristic of the period. Even an offer of work relief gives an opportunity to escape some of the most serious maladjustments of the disorganization stage, and in any case to shorten it, by providing an alternative source of support which reestablishes to some degree the status of the unemployed as a worker in the eyes of his family and friends. Moreover, it restores the routine of work, whose lack is one of the

show a “better pattern of adjustment” than the relief group, “although the absolute differences on each of the four measures of adjustment were smaller than in the case of comparisons using seven controlled factors.”—Ibid., p. 18.

3 See chap. 19.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

most damaging of those factors which disorganize his attempts to be self-reliant and discourage his faith in the efficacy of his own plans.\(^1\)

Turning from a discussion of work relief in general to a consideration of that provided by the WPA and under the earlier FERA program, Bakke concluded:

Work relief avoids the stigma of charity which has, over a long period of years, been attached to home relief. . . .

The worker has an employer. A part of the social status involved in relief work comes from the reality behind the phrase used by those who are working on projects: “I am working for the city,” or “I am working for Uncle Sam.” This status is obviously different [from] if not superior to the status indicated by the statement, “I am on relief.”

He is a producer. The fact that the work being done is returning to the community some object or service of real usefulness is a factor in making the role played more socially respectable than the role of one who is merely receiving the community’s money without returning something for it. . . .

When, in the autumn of 1935, W.P.A. replaced the work projects of the F.E.R.A., the investigation and control of clients were considerably modified. . . . The amount of wages was fixed and no detailed attempt was made through investigation to discover the resources which would be supplemented by just the amount of wages necessary to bring total resources up to the relief budget. From the point of view of the unemployed man and his family, this decrease in investigation was looked upon as an increase in the amount of control one had over one’s own affairs. . . .

The privilege of selecting one’s own grocer and maintaining normal relationships with the dealer, the fact that many workers find that the storekeepers are actually willing to sell on the installment plan in view of their possibility of continued W.P.A. wages—all of these factors indicate that the worker can sense at least an approximation to the control of his own affairs which he would normally achieve.

That control was by no means complete, however. He must still continue to prove himself “in need.” Periodically he knew the rolls would be “purged.” . . . The awareness that the amount available for work relief was subject to political and social forces and even arbitrary decisions was not productive of too great confidence that in the last analysis he had much to say about the security of his position. Comparisons are dangerous; it is our opinion, however, that such uncertainty on work relief is scarcely less frustrating to the desire for control than the awareness of the impersonal forces

\(^1\) Citizens Without Work. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, pp. 298-299.

Elsewhere Mr. Bakke has written: “The constant reminder when the family is on direct relief that the function of the chief breadwinner has changed from that of being a worker and a provider to that of a messenger boy to and from the relief office is as demoralizing to the family relationship as any other single accompaniment of unemployment.

“The alleviation of this discord cannot be completely accomplished by money relief. It can be partially alleviated if this money comes as the result of work performed.”—The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, 1940, pp. 396-397.
The Broader Issues

in private industry which left him without a job and dependent upon this type of work.¹

Before turning from this question of the advantages of work over direct assistance as a means of preserving self-respect and morale, a word should be said about the experience of Great Britain, where, as late as 1939, mounting dissatisfaction was being voiced by increasing numbers of British officials and authorities who were taking the view that the maintenance of unemployed workers was not enough even when accompanied with provisions for recreation and retraining. This growing reaction is particularly significant because the fact that Great Britain—despite her longer experience with social legislation—has never embarked upon vast public employment programs, has long been cited as good reason why here, too, such programs should be avoided.

Dissatisfied with what little had been achieved through training schemes and what had been done by private agencies using public funds to build and equip clubs, promote physical training, and recreational programs for preserving the morale of unemployed workers, a growing chorus in Britain has been asking for jobs for the unemployed.

In 1938 even the Unemployment Assistance Board reported that there was some question as to whether its mandate to improve the employability and promote the fitness of workers receiving unemployment assistance could be fulfilled through the continuance of policies then being pursued. The Board, therefore—while not recommending that steps be taken to provide jobs for those who were unemployed—declared:

A number of Committees [i.e., the local advisory committees], more especially those in areas where industry is depressed, have gone so far as to recommend the Board to urge upon the Government the desirability of starting public works as a means of creating employment. While not endorsing a recommendation in this form, the Board recognize that many applicants have so deteriorated in efficiency from long unemployment that under any system of competitive selection for employment their chances of being engaged in the ordinary labour market are very small. Long unemployment is itself a crippling handicap, and given a choice between men of otherwise similar qualifications, employers select those with the better record of employment.

¹ The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, 1940, pp. 395-396, 410-411. For further observations by this writer on the operation of the WPA program, see Ibid., pp. 314-324.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

It appears to the Board, therefore, that unless considerable numbers of applicants are to be without work for the rest of their lives or are to be employed only occasionally for short spells, some method must be devised for enabling them to overcome the paralysis which has been brought about by their long continued idleness. . . .

The Board are bound to express their concern at the position which has been disclosed and their sense of the urgency of the problems that arise from the wastage of young manhood in idleness due to lack of work, and, to some extent, absence of the will to work. The maintenance of men by the State during long periods of idleness is destructive of the men's own initiative and tends to undermine their self-respect. . . . There may be no simple and entirely efficacious remedy, but, as already indicated, the Board feel that the enquiry points immediately to two main conclusions: first, that the policy of granting unconditional allowances to young people calls for revision in a considerable proportion of cases; and, second, that special steps should be taken to provide opportunities of work in those cases, most numerous of all, where the desire for work has remained unimpaired but where the opportunity is not likely to come through the normal processes of industrial selection.¹

In Canada the National Employment Commission in 1938 declared that:

. . . as far as possible those in receipt of Unemployment Aid should be required to give work in proportion to Aid provided. . . . This has been generally recognized but experience has shown that, under severe stress of unemployment, it has been at times financially impossible to provide the


On this subject of English unemployment relief policy, Corrington Gill has written: "The English . . . have concentrated their efforts on unemployment insurance and unemployment assistance or direct relief. . . . But our major policy has been to provide work for the unemployed, and here our policy differs most widely from theirs. . . . Many Labour Ministry officials and other prominent persons have told me that in their personal opinions our program of work stands out as the best method of dealing with long-term mass unemployment."—Wasted Manpower: The Challenge of Unemployment. W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., New York, 1939, p. 237.

More recently Eveline M. Burns has declared: "On the negative side, the greatest shortcoming of the British unemployment relief programs is undoubtedly the almost exclusive concentration on maintenance and the neglect of more positive policies. Despite the considerable development of training, transference and occupational measures that characterized the period from 1934 to 1938, the lives of the great majority of the long-period unemployed were scarcely affected. Public works instituted for the purpose of providing employment were avoided as a deliberate policy, and the extent of employment in the special areas on local amenities and projects economically justifiable was negligible. . . . Despite the almost unanimous warnings of all students and investigators, British unemployment policy still concentrates too exclusively upon the provision of maintenance."—British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938. Social Science Research Council, Washington, 1944, pp. 328-329.

818
The Broader Issues

extra funds required for the provision of material, equipment, and supervision for the carrying on of such work. . . .

Larger Benefits

A second reason why work relief has been favored over direct relief is that it is thought to permit payment of larger benefits than could otherwise be provided for needy persons. Of this, Aubrey Williams in 1936 said that under the federal Works Program "the unemployed man receives in his wage a greater cash benefit than was permitted under the penny pinching, pantry searching system of direct relief payments based on budgetary deficiency. . . . It is an interesting and highly pertinent fact," he added, "that the public will accept the giving of a higher relief payment in return for work performed than it will countenance as an outright dole." Under the FERA program, as Mr. Williams explained with pride, monthly benefits were finally raised to an average of approximately $30 in January, 1935. Under the Works Program, however, wages averaged about $50 a month. "Thus," he declared, "we have achieved through a Work Program in a month what two and a half years of a relief program could not accomplish!"

Somewhat later Mr. Williams elaborated further his position on this issue, saying:

It may appear . . . that I exaggerate our national abhorrence of idleness. Yet how else can one explain the fact that the element of employment raised the average benefit paid to the unemployed from $25 under our federal relief program to $50 under a federal work program. To the American people a laborer is worthy of his hire but the able-bodied man who depends on charity for his livelihood is thrown a pittance in contempt. I think that this is a trait in our American character which we should not despise. But I think also that we must accept its inevitable corollary—a public responsibility to see that every able-bodied worker has the opportunity to take his rightful place in our democratic society not only through the exercise of political rights but through a job.

2 Recommendations of the National Employment Commission were backed up by the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations which, though enumerating "certain limitations and dangers to a policy of relief works," seconded the earlier body's recommendations with respect to both "relief works" and "timed" public works.
3 WPA Release 4-1178, May 29, 1936. Interest on the part of the administration in getting into the hands of needy people as much spending power as possible has
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

One glaring weakness in arguments of this type is that they relate the increase in benefits under the WPA program almost wholly to the fact that it is a program of work. After all, throughout the history of the FERA, a large proportion of those who were aided were employed on work-relief projects. What is probably much more to the point is that the WPA program is federally controlled. In fact, as shown already, one of the arguments in favor of federal rather than state and local control over the WPA program is that this permits more liberal benefits than would otherwise be possible. Had the federal government itself chosen to undertake a program of direct assistance, it might well have found a way to permit average grants closely approximating the average of WPA earnings. Such a step would probably have been bitterly opposed, however, since it would have meant taking away from states a responsibility they were already administering. Federal administration of the Works Program, on the other hand, looked like something brand-new and could be undertaken without taking from states anything which had previously come within their jurisdiction. Under the FERA program—under which federal officials tried so hard and with no little success to have benefits increased, particularly in the South—the degree of control exercised by state and local authorities probably had as much if not more to do with the size of grants than did the fact that the program was not entirely one of work relief.

However, mores regarding work and maintenance being what they are, it is probably true that, by and large, benefits under a work-relief program may be more nearly adequate than under a program of direct relief. Nevertheless, there are in the United States a few jurisdictions in which families of four or more per-

been said by at least one high federal WPA official to have been the one consideration which more than any other lay behind the administration's enthusiasm for a work program.

1 See chap. 31.

2 It was nevertheless true that families receiving work relief under the FERA program frequently received larger average benefits than did those who received only direct assistance. While this may have been due in part to the fact that work was performed, there were also other factors in operation. Among these was the fact that direct assistance was often given in small amounts to supplement work-relief earnings, that direct relief was often given to those needing help for only a short time, and that the families of employable persons who were given work relief frequently were larger than those of unemployable persons given only direct assistance.
sons may be granted more in direct relief than they can earn on WPA jobs. That this occurs is in itself evidence that under a good program of direct relief, standards need not necessarily be lower than under one of work relief.

A further consideration which must be taken into account in comparing WPA benefits and relief grants is the peculiar nature of federal unemployment relief policy by which the federal government makes provision only for meeting the needs of those who can be given jobs. This makes it possible for the federal government to wash its hands of responsibility for those to whom it does not pay the relatively large security wage of which federal officials like to boast. Relief authorities, on the other hand, must assume full responsibility for all needs not met through this policy of the federal government. Whatever resources are available for these needs are not usually spent in the WPA's security-wage-or-nothing style, but are frequently spread as thin as necessary to meet in at least some measure the needs known to relief agencies. Thus, higher payment under the WPA program may be due as much to the federal government's failure to help meet the sum total of existing needs as to the fact that the WPA's is a program of work. If it is larger benefits that federal officials are interested in, it is remarkable that they have resisted so long some degree of federal participation in the nation's general relief program which by all odds is the most spotty and inadequate of them all.

Closely allied to the administration's interest in a work program as a means of placing in the hands of needy people larger sums of money than could be given them in other ways, has been the belief that only through a work program could enough money be put into circulation during the 1930's effectively to prime the pump and to induce economic recovery. Although there is some question as to whether expenditure of a given sum of money under a work-relief program has any more power to stimulate a sluggish economy than an equal sum spent for direct relief, administration leaders reiterate vigorously the claim that Congress and the American people would never have stood for spending for direct relief the vast amounts that were appropriated for work. The validity of this claim, unfortunately, is not susceptible either of proof or of denial.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

Economy

While no reasonable person would deny that the immediate dollars-and-cents outlay for the relief of a given number of persons would be more if it were given as work relief rather than in the form of direct assistance, there are some who maintain that the basis of calculation should be broadened to take in (a) the long-term return to the community of the products of work relief; (b) the effectuation of the "right to work" and the conservation of otherwise wasted manpower; (c) the preservation of skills, working habits, and "morale"; and (d) the maintenance of the nation's economy through increased spending power.

That friends of work relief have not hesitated to include in their reckoning some of these more elusive values is made clear by President Roosevelt, who in October, 1936, declared:

We could have gone into the relief problem by spending, let us say, a dollar for a dole. That dollar for a dole would have kept unemployed men just alive, just in a state of suspended animation. Or we could think beyond our noses and spend a dollar and a half on work instead of a dollar for a dole. That extra half dollar would maintain the normal relations of the unemployed with their families and their grocers, their merchants and so on down the line.

Yes, we chose to spend money to save money. But who can measure in dollars and cents what the self-respect and the morale of a people mean to their nation? It must be measured rather in terms of the preservation of the families and the normal life of America.¹

Another of the more elusive considerations frequently advanced in favor of the economy of work relief is that this type of assistance helps to prevent the colossal waste of manpower which, if not used, is lost forever and which, if lost, deprives the American people of benefits and services they might otherwise have enjoyed.² Instead of referring to the billions of dollars worth of labor lost during the depression because it was not usefully employed, an official WPA publication in explaining these losses declared, simply, "... if you give a man fifty cents for a day's food and he loafs all day, you get nothing in return for it. If

¹ As quoted in the New York Times, October 16, 1936. Mayor La Guardia in 1936 maintained that even though work relief was expensive it resulted in saving human lives. "We cannot," he contended, "figure the cost in dollars and cents—the cost must be figured in human lives."—Ibid., February 23, 1936.

² Some indication of the magnitude and economic importance of these losses during the 1930's has already been presented in chap. 32.
The Broader Issues

you give him a dollar to repair your back fence you are actually the gainer. The fifty cents spent on the dole yields nothing tangible.” ¹

When one thinks not in terms of back fences repaired but of the vast accomplishments achieved under the WPA program,² it becomes clear why any reckoning of the comparative cost of work as opposed to direct relief must take into account not only the immediate cash outlays but also the return which is made to the community. Since achievements realized under work-relief programs not only give communities needed services and benefits but also improve property values, they help to increase tax revenues, thereby offsetting to some extent at least the cost of the work done.

Still another consideration that must be taken into account in calculating comparative costs is that funds spent for materials, supplies, and equipment for use on work-relief projects might not necessarily be saved if direct relief were substituted for work. During the past several years, for example, nearly a quarter of the total cost of WPA projects has been borne by state and local funds which, for the most part, had been appropriated for roads, streets, sewers, parks, and similar purposes and would probably have been spent for these purposes whether or not they had been used in conjunction with the WPA program. In cases where work would have been done in any event its full cost obviously cannot properly be charged to work relief even though excesses over normal costs might properly be so charged.

Since any one level of government may bear a different proportion of the cost of one relief program as opposed to another, discussion of the relative economy of work and direct relief programs is often complicated by considerations of economy to one particular unit of government rather than to all units concerned. Frequently total costs to all parties are overlooked.

Finally, it must be recalled that a given course is seldom followed merely because it appears to be the cheapest possible alternative. Thus, one's choice of relief programs, like any other choice, must be governed by the ultimate objective sought. For one who needed an iron lung or sulfanilamide, it would be poor "economy" to order a velocipede or corn cures merely because these were cheaper. This simple fact critics of federal relief

² See chap. 5.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

policy frequently overlook, and, losing sight of values inherent in work relief that cannot be realized through a program of direct assistance, they urge what appears to them to be the "cheaper" course simply because of its cheapness and not because it really meets the need.

Attacks upon work programs as being "too costly" have come from many quarters, and, as shown in a previous chapter have accounted for much of the clamor for giving to states and localities a larger voice in the determination of relief policies in the hope that such a transfer of control will lead to relatively more direct relief and to relatively less work.

Those who advocate direct relief because it is "cheaper" usually appear to give primary consideration to immediate cash outlays by a given level of government rather than to long-range costs and to total costs to the larger community.

Relief Recipients Want to Work

Work relief has sometimes been extolled because of what is termed its "deterrent value." Representative Buchanan, for example, once declared (while the ERA Act of 1936 was under consideration): "If we go back to direct relief, it will ultimately be the end of the Federal Treasury. If you had had direct relief, instead of having the number of unemployed that you have now, you would have twice the number."^2

Experience, however, proves this argument to be fallacious. On the contrary, when work has been offered as under the CWA, FERA, and WPA programs, applications have increased sharply above numbers previously applying for direct relief. Far from being a deterrent, work relief appears, as Harry Hopkins has frequently observed, to increase rather than to diminish the numbers seeking aid.

Judging by past history, the New York State Board of Social Welfare, in a memorandum prepared in 1940 to help the state legislature decide whether or not to institute a state and local work-relief program, declared that if such a program were launched there would be "those intangible increases which experience shows always go with a work relief program, such as the

^1 See chap. 31.
The Broader Issues

inevitable attraction of persons to a work relief program who are unwilling to become recipients of home relief." ^1

In Cleveland in 1941 WPA and relief officials were surprised to find that approximately half of those certified for WPA jobs were from families that were not receiving relief at the time of certification although standards used to measure need for WPA employment were only about 10 per cent more liberal than those used in determining need for relief. The only explanation of this phenomenon, upon which both WPA and relief officials agreed, was that needy persons were more willing to ask for work than for direct relief and deferred applying for the latter until they were in more desperate need.

Far from being a drawback, this tendency of work relief to be acceptable where direct relief is not, may actually prove to be an advantage if it can be the means of getting to needy families help they require in order to prevent physical, social, and other types of difficulty that might later take their toll.

Senator O'Mahoney once asked Harry Hopkins if he had found that "a large percentage of the people on direct relief want work relief instead." Mr. Hopkins replied:

All of them. The number of people that do not want to work on the relief rolls is so infinitesimal and small in number that it is not important. One of the interesting things we have learned from this depression is that the old poor law theory that the way to keep a person from getting relief is to offer him a job, is absolutely fallacious . . . all of these people on relief want work." ^2

During debate on a WPA bill in 1940 Representative Sweeney of Ohio, who told his colleagues that he "lived with the W.P.A. problem perhaps more than any man in this House," declared:

I talk to a hundred W.P.A. workers a day when I am home. I maintain an office for official business and I commute back and forth each week end to my home in Cleveland, Ohio. In 85 percent of the cases the complaints are from men and women who are praying to God for a chance to earn a living to

^1 Memorandum Re Work Relief, February 2, 1940, p. 4.
^2 U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations (Hearings on H. J. Res. 117), Emergency Relief Appropriation. 74th Congress, 1st Session. 1935, pp. 105-106.

Another WPA official who has emphasized the degree to which unemployed workers want work instead of direct relief is Corrington Gill. "American unemployed workers," he declared in 1937, "definitely do not want a dole. If a man is a carpenter, he wants work as a carpenter; if he is a musician, he wants work as a musician. Staying home, waiting for a relief check, is not what an unemployed worker needs or wants."—"Something for Your Money," in the Christian Science Monitor, October 27, 1937.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

support their families. Those who are working get $57.50 a month. I have taken a gun out of a man's hand a few months ago in my office, who complained that he was laid off because of the 30-day lay-off provision that you put in the bill last year and it took him 5 months to get back. He was a man with a wife and six small children depending upon him for support. He threatened suicide. I could tell you for hours of the tragedies I have seen every day. Men and women praying for an opportunity to work; many unable to get direct relief. . . .

This same view was expressed in 1934, before the inauguration of the Works Program, by William Hodson, commissioner of public welfare of New York City. "We have had repeated evidence," he said, "that what most unemployed and needy people want is jobs and not relief; that the vast majority of those now receiving cash relief would prefer to work." 

When the United States Conference of Mayors in 1936 asked mayors and other city officials whether the unemployed wanted work or the dole, the answers almost without exception were that they wanted work. Among those who reflected this preference most emphatically was Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago, who replied:

The advocate of direct relief fails to appreciate the fundamental training, habits, and desires of our citizens. In my opinion:

- They do not want charity.
- They do want employment.
- They do want to earn the money they obtain.
- They do want to spend their money as they see fit.

These form the basic foundation for Works Progress Administration. From them it is impossible to form a similar solid structure for direct relief or the dole. . . .

The truth of these contentions is attested by evidence collected from first-hand study in a number of cities.

---

1 Congressional Record, May 21, 1940, p. 6547.
2 As quoted in the New York Times, November 29, 1934. A high local relief official in Pittsburgh declared in 1941 that although the state work-relief program had been inaugurated by the legislature as a deterrent and punitive measure, it had proved instead to be extremely popular with the recipients of relief.
3 U. S. House Committee on Appropriations (Hearing), First Deficiency Bill for 1936. 74th Congress, 2d Session. 1936, p. 32.
The Broader Issues

Some Counter-Considerations

Not All Work Equally Helpful to Morale

An over-glorification of work regardless of its type, the conditions under which it is done, or the pay given for it, is doubtless responsible for many of the commonly held ideas that work relief is necessarily superior to direct aid. Of this Mr. Bakke has written, provocatively:

Both the deprecation of direct relief and the advocacy of a work program were based partly on the assumption that work was work. All kinds of work had similar mysterious power to "build morale." Certainly any kind of work had greater such powers than any kind of "dole."

This assumption is subject to severe correction when examined against the background of fact; indeed, there is much evidence to refute it.¹

Morale, he contends, is improved only "when what one does gains for him the ends he seeks, when his job has a socially recognized place in the scheme of things and permits him to maintain satisfactory relations with other citizens and social institutions, when it provides him with economic security, with the tools of independence and self-support, and with control over and an understanding of his own affairs."²

Blanket condemnations of direct assistance and sweeping generalizations regarding the advantages of work relief often fail to take into account what it is about direct assistance that may be hard on an individual's personality. They fail, too, by overlooking the degree to which allegedly harmful practices involved in the administration of direct assistance are also found in conjunction with work relief.

For example, as Grace F. Marcus, one-time assistant secretary of the American Association of Social Workers, has pointed out, one of the soul-destroying aspects of relief-giving is that the recipient must rely upon a relationship with "a total stranger in a social agency" rather than upon "what he himself can do" in order to receive money "on terms that are indefinite and unrelated to responsibilities he must meet." To have to rely on such a relationship, declares Miss Marcus, "is to experience again the helplessness of infancy." The only defense against this helplessness

¹Bakke, E. Wight, The Unemployed Worker. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940, p. 390.
²Ibid., p. 389.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

on the part of the recipient, she continues, is for him to make the relationship persist by satisfying the social worker who controls the decision as to whether or not assistance shall be given. Although this arrangement, as Miss Marcus says, may have its "comforts" it involves "an abandonment of the ego's healthy need to know what its obligations are and where it is still free to make its personal choices." ¹

To minimize the destructive effects of having to rely upon the discretion of someone else for one's very subsistence, Miss Marcus has suggested that conditions of eligibility for assistance should be defined so clearly that applicants for aid may know what they must show with respect to their own circumstances in order to qualify for assistance. And, upon an applicant's showing that prescribed eligibility requirements have been met, no person should be given power to deny to him such assistance as he may be entitled to receive.

Inasmuch as the number of applicants for WPA employment, as for other types of work-relief jobs, has always exceeded, by a large margin, the number who could be employed on work of this kind, the selection of those to be given jobs has involved a vast degree of discretion. Thus, it appears that until it can provide enough jobs to go around among all those eligible to receive them, not even a program of work relief can avoid robbing applicants of what Miss Marcus has termed their "proper opportunity to exercise the capacities ... which the entire process of a socializing education has made essential to ... [their] justification for living." ²

A well-organized program of direct assistance, under which no person would have the discretionary power to deny to any eligible applicant the aid to which he is entitled, might do less violence to the integrity of human personality than a work-relief program which was inadequate to provide employment for more than a relatively few workers picked from a larger pool of equally eligible applicants.

Furthermore, those who claim that direct relief breaks down and that work relief builds up (or, at least helps to sustain) morale must also answer such questions as these: How much contact

² Ibid.
The Broader Issues

with the direct relief system is necessary before its allegedly blighting influences are felt? Do those who must be found by relief officials to be in need before they can be employed on work projects escape these baneful effects? How about workers who continue to receive direct relief in addition to their meager work-relief earnings or because they lose wages on account of sickness, inclement weather, or for some other reason? What can be said of those who must fall back upon relief during enforced lay-offs after a specified period of continuous employment? If receipt of direct relief, as administration leaders have repeatedly declared, is in itself harmful, it is surely not too much to expect that the work-relief program designed to help workers escape the allegedly ill effects of direct aid should be organized so as to render reliance upon direct relief or relief agencies unnecessary.

Not All Direct Relief Equally Deleterious

Just as there are differences in work and work-relief programs, which range from work conducted in a manner well calculated to preserve morale to that which is intended to be onerous and punitive, so are there differences in programs of direct relief. Judging from what certain WPA officials and other extreme proponents of work relief have said repeatedly about direct relief programs, one would never suspect this, for they almost never mention direct relief except in such derogatory terms as "baskets of groceries on Saturday night," "pantry snooping," paupers' oaths, or gross inadequacy. Obviously, direct relief need not be any—much less all—of these things. It is unfair, therefore, to contrast WPA employment with only the worst kind of direct assistance. This is particularly true since federal aid and leadership might well help to raise direct relief standards to a point where the danger of demoralization or pauperization would be greatly reduced or even eliminated.

It is wholly possible that for unemployed persons, for example, there might be developed a federal (or perhaps even federal-state) system of granting unemployment assistance that would have but few, if any, of the demoralizing and pauperizing influences often attributed to direct relief. Benefits in amounts suffi-


829
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

cient to maintain a decent existence might be paid upon a worker's declaration that he was without work and that his family was of a given size, without recourse to humiliating investigations either of his own needs and resources or of those of close relatives. Such a system might be administered through public employment offices rather than by relief or public welfare authorities. Were direct assistance to be granted to unemployed workers upon terms like these, such aid might serve even better than poorly administered work relief to preserve morale.

"Something for Nothing"

Opposition to direct relief in favor of work relief is often premised upon the supposedly deleterious effects of unearned income—of "getting something for nothing." ^

Somehow, platitudes on this subject are not applied to all persons who get something for nothing. The mores do not, for example, place in the same category with relief recipients those who inherit wealth or become rich through little or no effort of their own. Neither is the principle that people should work for what they get usually interpreted to mean that people should get only what they work for or that rewards should be commensurate with the effort put forth.

Should relief recipients as a group ever adopt the philosophy—widely prevailing among more advantageously situated groups—that it is no disgrace to reap what one has not sowed, it is likely that the sense of obligation "to do something in return" for relief that one may have received may be either destroyed or so weakened that it is felt to be discharged with comparative ease. In

^ This phrase, without further qualification, may easily prove misleading since even those who receive assistance without working for it do not receive it "for nothing." After all, use of direct assistance to preserve health, prevent delinquency, and to foster family life are services of importance to a community.

^This phenomenon has been well described by Mr. Bakke, who points out that "the receipt of material aid takes several forms which violate to varying degrees one's determination to be independent. The source of such assistance is important. One accepts occasional loans or even outright gifts of house furnishings and food from one's economic equals with no damage to his sense of self-support. . . . Sharing from those of a higher economic status which did not involve the possibility of return assistance was in quite a different category, however. . . . One woman's attempt to 'square accounts' took the form of sending a Christmas pudding to a wealthy benefactor. When the delivery was accepted by a kitchen maid the 'squaring' was made less satisfactory. Another felt that the receipt of a ton of coal from a 'high society lady' had been partially made more respectable because she had sent her benefactor a Christmas card and had received one in return. Several workers
The Broader Issues

view of this possibility it is not surprising that persons receiving relief often feel that they are not receiving something for nothing so long as they perform even some token-work in return for what has been granted to them. It is this fact which makes it appear possible to render acceptance of public assistance less of an ordeal by assuring recipients that the care they give their children, for example, is an important return to the community for the relief they are given.¹

In similar fashion the paying of taxes may be regarded as good and sufficient reason why government relief should be forthcoming when needed. Homer Folks has argued this theory:

The idea that the recipient of public relief is getting something for nothing is directly contrary to fact. Public relief is something to which each recipient has contributed all his life, to which he still contributes, and to which he will continue to contribute indefinitely. Public relief is in essence a "contributory" scheme, although the contribution is not expressly so labeled.

Public relief comes from taxes... Who pays the taxes? Everybody...

Instead of something for nothing, public relief is a two-way business all the way, coming and going, everybody contributing roughly in proportion to his ability, and everybody receiving that particular form of public service or aid which at the moment he may require...

... there should be no humiliation and no social stigma in asking for or receiving public relief, in case of real need.²

Contributory social insurance is, of course, the classic example of attempts made to "destigmatize" benefits of one kind or another by making it appear that these are financed in part at least by specific contributions from workers who are eligible to receive them. This device is supposed to give workers a greater sense of "paying their own way" than if their only contributions were what they made as citizens and taxpayers. Values said to be realized rationalized their receipt of Thanksgiving baskets from their employers by citing the 'extra' service they had given their employer over years of employment."—Bakke, E. Wight, The Unemployed Worker, pp. 26-27.

¹This consideration was emphasized in a decision made by the Supreme Court in North Dakota in 1923 when, in a decision on the mothers' pension act then in effect, it declared: "It was undoubtedly the legislative purpose to provide a remedy that would mitigate or remove the evils presumed to result when children are reared in poverty, neglect, or immoral surroundings, and away from the presumptively beneficent influence of home and parental care... The pension awarded under the law is... in the nature of a compensation for services rendered the state in bringing up its future citizens in proper surroundings and giving them the proper care..."—49 North Dakota 682 (1923). Readily available in Abbott, Grace, The Child and the State. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1938, vol. 2, p. 292.

²Making Relief Respectable: A Radical Reconstruction of Our Conception of Public Relief, pp. 10, 12.
by this device appear to the writer to be greatly overrated. Under any insurance scheme (private or social) benefits received may greatly exceed premiums paid. Under social insurance, benefits and contributions bear a peculiarly nebulous relationship to one another since the state itself often pays part of the cost of providing benefits or stands ready to make up deficits incurred by expanding the range of possible benefits without increasing the amount required of workers. Advantages derived from the contributory principle could, with proper interpretation, be realized also through broader acceptance of the idea that as worker and taxpayer one aids in the building up of credits which he may sometime need to draw upon and which should be available to him on a wholly self-respecting basis. This is not to say, however, that the contributory principle may not have other possible values, such as permitting payment of benefits to workers having other income and resources which, public opinion being what it is, might bar them from receiving benefits in the cost of which they had not shared directly.

Two unfortunate but inevitable by-products of emphasizing the higher prestige value of benefits derived from contributory insurance are the implication that other types of benefit are "demoralizing" and the effect this is likely to have upon those who run out of contributory benefits or who are not eligible for them. Though traditional attitudes toward "getting something for nothing" are already undergoing change, and in the future will undoubtedly be further modified, established mores are undoubt-edly too deeply embedded in the American spirit for the present to permit adequate relief to employable persons without requiring work in return. Thus, to make the giving of relief contingent upon recipients' willingness to perform some kind of work may be regarded as a price that—public opinion and attitudes being what they are—must be paid for adequate and decent relief to employable persons.

New Occasions Bring New Social Concepts

Fortunately for those who need public assistance, the mores do change. When President Buchanan in 1860 vetoed the Homestead Bill, denying to countless Americans the free land and new frontier which were later made accessible to them, he did so on the ground that the bill would deprive the nation of a valuable heri-
The Broader Issues
tage, and go far to demoralize the people. Nevertheless, the land later made available to pioneering homesteaders became the glamorous symbol of American enterprise, initiative, daring, and tenacity.

Similarly, public education which is now looked upon as one of our most important free public services was once frowned upon as tending to pauperize the families of children benefiting from it. The National Gazette (of Philadelphia) on August 19, 1830, attacked a proposed tax for educational purposes, declaring editorially:

One of the chief excitements to industry, among those classes, [i.e., working people] is the hope of earning the means of educating their children respectably or liberally; that incentive would be removed, and the scheme of State and equal education be thus a premium for comparative idleness, to be taken out of the pockets of the laborious and conscientious.¹

At about the same time this editorial was written a Working Men's Committee in Philadelphia reported that such public schools as had already been established in those few sections of the state which had taken advantage of a law permitting the organization of school districts were “confined exclusively to the children of the poor.” Nevertheless, the Committee went on to say:

There are great numbers, even of the poorest parents, who hold a dependence on the public bounty to be incompatible with the rights and liberties of an American citizen, and whose deep and cherished consciousness of independence determines them rather to starve the intellect of their offspring, than submit to become the objects of public charity.²

Just as public education has become accepted as a benefit that is not regarded as demoralizing, so may the future see such

²Ibid., pp. 96-97.
In an address “to the working men of the state” a city and county convention of working men declared: “All who receive the limited knowledge imparted by the present system of public education are looked upon as paupers, drawing from a fount which they have in no wise contributed towards creating. The spirit of independence and of feeling in which all participate, cause the honest and industrious poor to reject a proffered bounty that connects with its reception a seeming disgrace. This honest pride in relation to charity schools, however injurious its effects may be on the poor man's offspring, is nevertheless commendable, inasmuch as it is in accordance with the spirit of our free institutions, with our elevated national character—and such a narrow policy is less than they have a right to demand at the hands of our representatives.”—Ibid., pp. 115-116.

833
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

changes in our mores and such improvements in our systems of public assistance that these too may be looked upon as no more "pauperizing" than free schools, public health services, police or fire protection.

Even now, however, there are some who are doing pioneer thinking along these lines. Among these is Stuart Rice, chairman of the Central Statistical Board, who, in testimony before a Senate Committee in 1938, admitted that he was:

... so old-fashioned ... as to feel that a refusal to accept relief in spite of privation is somehow praiseworthy, and ... apprehensive of the so-called "pauperizing of the poor." Nevertheless, the fears that are expressed today regarding the growing willingness to accept relief ... were expressed a century ago regarding public education. ... Our generation disapproves of those who reject public aid by refusing to send their children to public school, when this means a neglect of education. Will a subsequent generation disapprove of those who reject public aid when the rejection means privation, or a neglect of health or personal efficiency?¹

Another observer who has emphasized the importance of modifying existing mores in this field of self-support is Dorothy C. Kahn, one-time executive director of the Philadelphia County Board of Assistance, and more recently assistant executive secretary of the American Association of Social Workers. In an address made before a group of social workers in 1937 she declared:

This problem has its roots in the widely held belief that those who work, with the exception of an increasing group of so-called natural dependents, are the only ones who have a right to maintenance. ... This idea ... is accompanied by a tendency to believe that any provision for able-bodied workers, which does not result directly from their own efforts, is bound to have a demoralizing effect on the individual and tends to increase the numbers of such persons in any community. ...

Social workers must try to modify the social attitudes. ... We must remove the organic connection between work and maintenance, and ... we must assume that communities have a responsibility which precedes every other governmental obligation to maintain with a decent standard of living all of their members irrespective of whether these members are able to engage in gainful work.²

² "Some Professional Questions About Relief," in Four Papers on Professional Function. American Association of Social Workers, New York, 1937, pp. 38-39. That Miss Kahn is not alone among social workers in questioning the propriety of emphasis placed upon self-support and maintenance is evidenced by a number of
The Broader Issues

How far possible shifts in individual and public attitudes toward work and dependency may be expected to go and what their effect upon the morale of unemployed and employed persons may be in the future, cannot now be anticipated. The possibility of such changes, however, suggests that it may not forever be necessary to think of direct assistance as "demoralizing" or to provide work for unemployed persons merely as a means of preserving their own personal integrity. Nevertheless, for the present, since the belief is still widespread that if people's morale is to be maintained they should have work, it is not surprising that work, rather than direct relief, is the preference not only of taxpayers but also of relief recipients themselves who, of course, are part and parcel of society as a whole, and usually prefer to work in return for whatever assistance they may receive from society.

writings on this subject. See, for example, Trout, Bessie E., "How Do We Come to an Understanding of Our Clients?" in the Family, vol. 15, no. 9, January, 1935, p. 308.
CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCLUSIONS

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND DIRECT RELIEF

ONE OF THE TWO major aspects of federal relief policy discussed in this volume is the federal government's refusal, for a variety of reasons, to participate in any way in meeting general relief needs not provided for through special assistance programs administered in conformity with the Social Security Act or through special measures designed to aid farmers or narrowly defined groups thrown into need as a direct result of war.

Federal Responsibility for the Establishment of a Socially Defensible Standard of Living

While the federal government may be admitted to have particularly heavy responsibilities toward workers thrown into need because of unemployment, it does not follow that it has no responsibility toward persons whose need is otherwise caused but is not, under existing arrangements, decently met. Most authorities agree that the federal government should participate in establishing a broad nationwide program of direct relief to protect families in all parts of the country from falling below a socially defensible standard of living. It is also widely agreed that an all-embracing relief measure of this type is indispensable to the protection of the integrity of the so-called special assistance measures and even of the work program itself.

Support for undergirding all other relief measures with one broad program to meet need arising from any cause and in any quarter whatever does not stem from belief that relief is any final answer to unmet need. The right to relief about which much has been said within recent years must be superseded by a prior right—the right to live without having to rely on relief. Better ways than relief must ultimately be found. Until then, however, it appears that relief is indispensable to the nation's well-being.

1 As shown in chap. 29.
2 See chap. 3.
The Broader Issues

Inasmuch as other assistance measures are operated on a grant-in-aid basis there is, perhaps, no reason why a broad, comprehensive program to assure to all a socially defensible standard of living might not also be so administered. However, since the purpose of this program would be to establish a level below which no family in the nation should be allowed to fall, it would be particularly important to safeguard this last line of defense against the danger of failing to meet any kind of need, anywhere. In addition to conditions already required for approval of state plans under the Social Security Act, therefore, states should be required to give assurance that needed assistance would be available to applicants without respect to such considerations as age, sex, color, nationality, race, employability, political affiliation, residence, or the resources of relatives.

Whatever may ultimately be found to be necessary with respect to graduating federal contributions for special assistance programs, so as to take into account the wide differences in the financial resources of the several states, such a scaling of federal participation in a program of general assistance is clearly indicated.

Although aligning himself with that ever-growing group which is demanding federal participation in a program of general relief, the writer realizes that, as WPA officials point out, certain risks are incurred. There is, first, the danger that once a general relief program is established on a respectable basis, its apparent cheapness might so recommend it both to the general public and to Congress that measures for providing public work to workers needing this kind of employment might be jeopardized.

While availability of general relief may ease somewhat the pressure of providing public work for workers needing employment, the writer believes that responsible officials and the public should continually be reminded that maintenance is not enough, and that sound national and, for that matter, international policy requires that jobs should be available for the jobless.1

In the second place, say the skeptics, to inaugurate a general relief program at this time will handicap efforts still being made (particularly in the South) to develop programs of special assistance under the Social Security Act. Why ask states to cooperate in making provision for general relief needs, the doubters

1 See chap. 32.
inquire, so long as they have made no adequate provision for their needy aged or needy mothers of dependent children. In the writer’s opinion, unmet needs among such usually favored groups as dependent children, the blind, and the aged should not be allowed longer to defer decent provision for general relief needs, but should rather be looked upon as calling for modification of the present basis of federal participation in the special assistance programs already established.

And What of the Rest of the World?

Both the continuance of the war and the winning of ultimate victory may bring to the people of the United States responsibility to participate in worldwide plans to relieve the elementary needs of men, women, and children in other countries—including those which for the moment are classed as enemy nations. Hardly a single consideration is advanced in support of federal as opposed to state and local responsibility for this nation’s relief needs that might not logically be extended to suggest that the United States should also assume large responsibilities for helping to meet the needs of people in other lands. The selfsame reasons impelling us to use this nation’s resources to help other countries wage war also impose upon us an obligation to continue help to these nations once the war is won. When millions of Chinese and Russians, for example, no longer need tanks, planes, and guns, and return to earth which was scorched in a common cause—shall we have no further responsibility to continue to share our vastly superior resources to make sure that needed food, clothing, and medicines are available?

Clear evidence that administration leaders are already thinking in terms of the whole world’s need was revealed in a momentous address made by Vice-President Wallace in May, 1942. In this he declared:

The people are on the march toward even fuller freedom than the most fortunate peoples of the world have hitherto enjoyed. . . .

We who live in the United States may think there is nothing very revolutionary about freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom from

1 See chaps. 26, 27, 28.
2 In fact, as shown in chap. 28, federal responsibility for meeting relief needs in this country during the early years of the depression was defended, in part, on the ground that our government had previously used its resources for helping distressed people in other countries.
The Broader Issues

the fear of secret police. But when we begin to think about the significance of freedom from want for the average man, then we know that the revolution of the past 150 years has not been completed, either here in the United States or in any other nation in the world. We know that this revolution can not stop until freedom from want has actually been attained.

We failed in our job after World War No. 1. . . . We did not strive whole-heartedly to create a world where there could be freedom from want for all the peoples. But by our very errors we learned much. . . .

The peace must mean a better standard of living for the common man, not merely in the United States and England, but also in India, Russia, China and Latin America—not merely in the United Nations, but also in Germany and Italy and Japan.¹

When this war is over, it may be that the American people will desire to withdraw behind their own boundaries and remain aloof from the rest of the world. It would be a natural yearning on the part of a war-weary nation. But it can no more be done than can the harassed individual find again conditions of intra-uterine nurture and security. The manful course for us to pursue—and the only course that will protect us from further and greater catastrophes—will be to help hold and consolidate, not alone for ourselves but for the planet, the peace we will have helped to win. The national interest can be sought and served only in terms of the well-being of all. And so, when the clash of arms has ceased, the American people, together with other peoples the world around will need to declare in concert what President Roosevelt once said to us in the United States:

Of course we will provide useful work for the needy unemployed. . . .

Of course we will continue our efforts for young men and women so that they may obtain an education and an opportunity to put it to use. Of course we will continue our help for the crippled, for the blind, for the mothers. . . .

For these things . . . and for others like them we have only just begun to fight.²

¹ As quoted in PM, May 21, 1942.

² As quoted in the New York Times, November 1, 1936.
Federal Responsibility for Assistance to Employable Persons

Once federal relief policy has succeeded in undergirding a socially defensible standard of living below which no family in the nation would be permitted to fall, further steps should be taken to provide for such groups as public opinion might approve a more appropriate type of assistance than that provided for needy persons in general. Among groups for which special provisions should be made early is that large body of employable persons for whom the federal government has assumed particular responsibility.

Should special assistance of a type suggested here be made available to employable persons, the administration of this aid might well be vested in the agency to which, according to recommendations presented below, would be given responsibility for the placement, training, retraining of, and where necessary, the provision of public work for these persons.

Such integration should prove a stimulus to the development of the employment program which would keep to a minimum the need for assistance. Integration of this kind would also reduce to a minimum opportunities for "passing the buck" inevitably present when more than a single agency is responsible for important functions which, by their very nature, are inseparably related.

A final reason for placing responsibility for administration of direct cash benefits to needy unemployed persons upon the same agency that is responsible for the administration of the work program is to minimize possible inter-agency friction and the danger that an agency responsible for the administration of direct assistance alone might, in its eagerness to expand its own functions and usefulness, either purposely or unconsciously work against the maintenance of an adequate work program.

Although attempts to distinguish between employable and unemployable persons may sometimes be difficult, particularly if there are no available jobs on which employability can be tested, it is likely that serious questions would arise in only a small proportion of the total number of cases dealt with. Questionable

\(^1\) See chap. 18.
cases, when encountered, might well be decided upon jointly by
officials representing the placement service, training, and retrain-
ing services and the public employment program. Should this
joint decision be to the effect that the person under considera-
tion could not properly be regarded as employable he would be re-
ferred to the appropriate agency for whatever service or aid he
might be eligible to receive.¹

The Federal Government and Jobs for the Jobless

The second major aspect of federal relief policy discussed in
this volume is the provision of work for the unemployed. In the
light of study given to the WPA program and of findings incor-
porated in this volume, it is the conviction of the writer that
federal policy providing work for the jobless—even such work
as the WPA has had the power to give—has been of inestimable
value to millions of workers who otherwise would have been idle
and, in many instances, without means of subsistence. Further-
more, the demonstration that a democracy could assure to a sub-
stantial fraction of its jobless workers an opportunity to work as
well as the actual work that was accomplished represented price-
less gains to the American people as a whole.

Primary credit for success achieved through the WPA pro-
gram must, of course, go to President Roosevelt and Harry Hop-
kins. Without the social vision, deep human sympathies, creative
political leadership, and tireless energy of these two peerless
friends of the disadvantaged, America’s “new approach” to the
problem of unemployment might never have been attempted, to
say nothing of being successfully executed upon a gigantic and
previously undreamed-of scale.

Normal Work Preferable to WPA Type of Employment

To say that the WPA has played a most important role in this
nation’s life is not to imply, of course, that the kinds of jobs the
WPA could offer were good enough or were in sufficiently large
number for this richest of all nations to provide for its citizens.
Even greater benefits than were realized could undoubtedly have

¹ If such a person should, at any time, secure and successfully hold a genuine job
for any considerable period, he might automatically be regarded as eligible for
services available to employable persons. Such a period of eligibility might be for
a stipulated period at the end of which the question of employability might again be
determined as it had been before.

841
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

been gained if WPA employment had had fewer of the earmarks of work relief and had more closely resembled “real work.”

It seems fair to say that the value of WPA employment to workers has been severely limited by the increasingly stringent limitations imposed by Congress upon (a) the kinds and number of people who could be given employment; (b) the kinds of work that could be undertaken; (c) conditions of employment; and (d) the quantities of materials, supplies, and equipment that could be used.

Because of these severe handicaps which have been imposed upon the WPA program from year to year, future plans for assuring jobs to all who want them should contemplate a very different type of provision from that made to date through the WPA. In fact, the writer is among those who question whether any public employment program designed specifically to provide jobs for unemployed workers can offer the satisfaction that one normally expects to derive from work. The very fact that a worker has no other job is likely to brand him, in his own estimate of himself, as well as in that of others, as an “also-ran.” For this reason all who want honest, useful work adapted to their particular interests and skills should have it without being required to turn to jobs that are created for the purpose of providing employment for workers who would otherwise be unemployed.

Having seen unemployment virtually eliminated as an in-

1 Despite the shortcomings of WPA employment, a number of administration leaders have attempted (particularly during the earlier stages of the program) to soft-pedal the true nature of WPA employment and have preferred to make it appear that it was not relief. For example, Nels Anderson, in condemning the practice of referring to the WPA as a work-relief program, once declared: “I want to emphasize again that this program has been one of work. The workers have been paid wages. Why should it be called “relief”? It is true that the workers have been ill-paid. Their desperate need has been taken advantage of; none-the-less they have been paid a wage, a prevailing wage for work performed. In many localities the monthly earnings have been under the earnings in private industry. If there has been any charity in this arrangement, the unemployed have been the donors, and the nation has been the recipient of something for nothing.”—The WPA and Private Industry. Speech before the Third Annual Conference on Social and Labor Legislation, Hartford, Conn., January 14, 1939, pp. 3-4.

Similarly, a handbook prepared by the WPA for distribution among project workers (relatively early in the history of the WPA, it must be noted) gave in answer to the question, “When I take a Government job, am I still on relief?” the following reply: “No. You are off relief. You are working.”—Our Job with the WPA. (Workers’ Handbook.) Government Printing Office, Washington, March 13, 1936, p. 8.

2 Though decidedly lessened, it does not yet appear that unemployment either has been or will soon be completely eradicated. As the war progresses, new types of
The Broader Issues

cident to the pursuit of the war, the people of the United States might well insist that planning for the future be done in such a way as to preclude the possibility of the return of mass unemployment.¹ If this is to be realized, the federal, state, and local governments will need to co-operate in the development of programs of economic security, general education, vocational counseling, training, and retraining that will assure all potential workers adequate preparation to take their places at the nation's workbench. Only in this way can the nation avoid, in the future, those injustices which in the past have been imposed upon disadvantaged persons who have been denied employment in various fields because they lacked necessary training which, in turn, had been denied them because of poverty, lack of opportunity, or social status.

The Role of a Public Employment Program

In case all future endeavors to forestall unemployment should fail—despite the best efforts of those who might be made responsible for averting it—national policy should provide for giving employment not to just a few nor even to a large proportion, merely, but to all who (a) are not already employed at wage rates and under working conditions meeting socially approved standards, and (b) can practicably be given useful employment in keeping with their skills and abilities.²

strategic materials and types of labor are likely to be subjected to ever-changing regulations, throwing out of employment for longer or shorter periods workers whose jobs are affected.

¹ Various authorities both in this country and Great Britain believe that it will be much easier to maintain full employment during the post-war era than it was to get the wheels turning during the 1930 depression. Alvin H. Hansen, for example, has written: "An important gain will, we may hope, be won from the defense program in the struggle to achieve and to maintain full employment. We have every reason to expect the national income to rise to around $100 billions, in terms of 1940 dollars. It will be much easier to muster support for a program to resist a decline from a high income level than it has been in recent years to win approval for an adequate program to raise income to full employment from a low level. But we must be vigilant lest this gain slip from our grasp. If we let the income slide from 100 to 90, 80, 70 billion dollars, we will have to make the old uphill fight all over again. We must deliberately set out to hold the new income level and to push it higher as rapidly as increasing productivity will permit."—After the War—Full Employment. National Resources Planning Board, Government Printing Office, Washington, January, 1942, p. 3.

² The importance of providing employment for the largest possible number of those who would otherwise be without suitable work would be heightened materially if the United States ever adopted the recommendation of the American Youth Com-
Eligibility for Public Employment

The case is here rested that federal employment should be available to potential workers without respect to race, political consideration, residence, nationality, or economic need. Selection of workers to be employed should be a responsibility of public employment exchanges and should be on the basis of ability to do the work in hand. Those who think themselves denied fair consideration for public employment should have the right to appeal to boards established for the purpose of seeing that the rights of all are fully respected.

Restrictive policies, such as limiting employment to needy families or to family heads (who might not be the workers who could either give most to or profit most from jobs), should be avoided. Responsible officials therefore should be held to strict account for failure to maintain sufficiently high levels of employment. If, for any reason, the number of available jobs should fall short of the need, preference in employment might be given to workers in families in which no other worker is currently employed. Even this, however, is not advisable since it would have a tendency to stigmatize the proffered employment as relief work, thus stripping it of values expected of real work.

Basis for Making Appropriations

Methods of appropriating funds for public work should avoid the hit-or-miss methods used in determining amounts to be made available to the WPA. Provision should be made for giving employment to all persons meeting the criteria prescribed. This would involve no really new principle in federal financing inasmuch as Congress is committed, for example, to pay specified percentages of whatever amounts the several states spend for certain purposes. The commission which has urged that: "Every young person who does not desire to continue in school after 16, and who cannot get a job in private enterprise, should be provided under public auspices with employment in some form of service. . . . "Public work for young people should be planned with special regard to its educational quality. . . . It should be carried on in a spirit that will give to the young worker a sense of being valued by and valuable to his country."—A Program of Action for American Youth. Washington, 1939, p. 9.

Should this nation ever embark upon a policy of this kind it would obviously find itself under no little obligation to assure work for adults too if it is to preserve among those in whom it had previously been inculcated the "sense of being valued by and valuable to" their country.

\(^1\) See chap. 23.
The Broader Issues

tain social security measures. If the amount estimated to be needed and set aside for this purpose proves insufficient, this does not absolve the federal government from paying its agreed share. Neither should failure properly to foresee the need for public employment absolve the federal government from responsibility for providing needed jobs.

Wage Policy

Rates of pay for public work should be approximately (but not less than) minimum rates established in conformity with federal law for similar work undertaken by private enterprise. Similarly, hours of work should approximate but not exceed the maximum established, in conformity with federal law, for the type of work done. Thus, public employment could serve effectively in maintaining and protecting legally prescribed labor standards by assuring workers who need them jobs that meet standards set for employment in general. This significant gain should bring labor leaders willingly to forego the principle of expecting government to be a “model” employer.

Total earnings paid a person for his week’s work on the federal employment program should be adapted to the number of children dependent upon him. This application of the family allowance principle would help to keep what might otherwise be relatively low wages from proving a hardship to workers with families. Moreover, such an adaptation of earnings to family needs would avoid difficulties encountered under work-relief programs when the staggering of hours, resulting in great inefficiency of operations, was necessary to permit different workers to put in enough hours to earn the amounts required to meet their needs. That application of the family allowance system to wages paid on a public employment program would probably prove acceptable to the American people is indicated by the success and popularity of family allowances paid by the federal government to the families of men in the armed forces.

Types of Projects

Projects undertaken should be such as (a) to utilize the skills of available workers, and (b) to provide for the community needed facilities, services, and goods even if this provision should involve competition with private enterprise. Should such competi-
tion in any large field prove to be contrary to the public interest, the federal government might well declare that area one to be given over exclusively to the public employment program. Just as the nationalizing of post offices appeared necessary to efficiency and as governmental operation of ordnance plants and shipyards has been regarded as indispensable to the nation’s military needs, so also might the nationalization of certain fields of employment be regarded as defensible, if necessary to safeguard the nation against a recurrence of mass unemployment or to assure an adequate supply of needed goods or services that would not otherwise be available to any considerable number of families.¹

**Administration**

The federal agency responsible for the administration of the nation’s public employment program should be empowered both to operate projects on a force-account basis and to make use of private contractors should this appear to be in the public interest.²

Responsibility for administration of the program of public work should be vested in a federal agency with such regional, state, and local branches as may, from time to time, be needed for efficient and flexible operation. As unemployment seems imminent or actually occurs in one section of the country or another, local branch offices may be opened. If the threatened unemployment is averted—or after immediate need has been relieved—branch offices opened to deal with it could be closed.

The agency which has responsibility for the work program if not itself a part of, should at least be closely related to, those federal agencies which are responsible for the operation of employment exchanges, vocational training, retraining, and, as suggested earlier, for such service and financial assistance as may be needed by employable persons and their families. The federal government’s responsibility for unemployment compensation might also be transferred to an over-all agency embracing the above-mentioned functions.

The highly centralized control over the public work program envisaged here does not necessarily mean an undesirable degree of inflexibility and too rigid national uniformity. To facilitate


² See chap. 5.
The Broader Issues
desirable adaptation to defensible local differences and to provide full opportunity for the expression of local attitudes toward the program, use might well be made of regional or even state advisory committees composed of representatives of labor, employers, and the public.

The high degree of federal control here recommended for services to employable persons seems to be fully justified by the federal government's record in administering the WPA program, which, in the light of evidence presented in this volume, appears to have been more efficient, more humane and less "political" than if local and state authorities had been given a larger voice in its conduct. In fact, a number of the greatest weaknesses inherent in the WPA program seem to be due to the requirements that sponsors must initiate and contribute to the cost of projects and that local or state relief agencies must participate in the determination of the eligibility of workers to be given WPA jobs. Any role that state and local authorities may be asked to play in the nation's public employment program in the future should be wholly voluntary. It should not be possible for such officials to thwart or even to hamper the federal program. Still, provision should be made for receiving from state and local government bodies such help and financial contributions as they may care to make in order to assure the prosecution of desirable and needed projects that could not otherwise be undertaken.

The part which it has here been suggested that the federal government should fill in the development of a well-rounded program of employment security seems warranted also by the cogency of the reasons advanced in favor of national responsibility for relief needs and "special" federal responsibility for employable persons. Unfortunately, this "special" responsibility has never yet been fulfilled. Instead, such arrangements as the federal government chose, during the depression years, to make for those without jobs were fitful, unpredictable, chronically inadequate, and exclusively unilateral—made without reference to what local and state authorities either could or were likely to do. Moreover, if the federal government has "special" responsibility for giving jobs to unemployed workers it is difficult to see how it can escape

1 Discussed in chaps. 26 through 31.

2 As shown in chaps. 22 through 25.
"special" responsibility for rendering to workers who either are or are likely to be unemployed, other services they need as much as they do public jobs.

*Can the Nation Afford Jobs for All?*

What the United States can and cannot afford in the way of providing work for potential workers who need employment is a highly controversial question to which it is impossible to give a categorical answer. Nevertheless, there is no dearth of economists and others who are confident that this nation can afford to provide work for all its workers. Notable among authorities holding this view is Stuart Chase who, after outlining for the United States a program of post-war objectives, including "full employment," asks: "Where’s the money coming from?" In response to his own query Mr. Chase replies: "Out of that one hundred million man-years of work wasted; out of that two hundred billion dollars of production which never was produced. It will come from the same place the bombers, tanks and battleships are now coming from—out of the full employment of the people." 

Pre-eminent among factors that must be taken into account in any kind of reckoning of the nation’s ability to provide employment for otherwise unemployed workers are, of course, the level of national income, the volume of expenditures for other federal, state, and local governmental services, the effectiveness of social and economic plans aimed at the prevention of unemployment, and, finally, the volume of unemployment resulting from the nation’s failure to maintain full employment.

One final issue involved in this question as to what the nation can and cannot afford is the counter-question as to whether it can afford not to eliminate unemployment and thus to avoid the staggering waste of unused manpower we have tolerated in the past, and to get rid of what has long been a serious threat to democracy itself.

What is all-important for the future is that every conceivable effort be made to avoid unemployment, that the national income be kept at—and even lifted above—the high levels reached as a

---

1 The Road We Are Traveling 1914-1942: Guide Lines to America’s Future as Reported to the Twentieth Century Fund. Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., New York, 1942, p. 93.
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

result of the nation's war effort.\footnote{The importance of maintaining a high national income has been emphasized by Alvin H. Hansen, who has written: "The public expenditures required to rebuild America, to provide needed social services, and to maintain full employment can be provided for out of the enormous income which the full utilization of our rich productive resources (material and human) makes possible. . . . There is not—there cannot be—any financing problem which is not manageable under a full employment income. From a $100 billion income we can raise large tax revenues—large enough to service any level of debt likely to be reached and to cover all other Government outlays—and still retain for private expenditures more than we had left in former years under a $70 billion income with lower taxes."—After the War—Full Employment, p. 5.} However, if these measures were to fail and if, under existing conditions, it appeared to Congress that the government "could not afford" an employment program large enough to provide jobs for all who needed and failed to find them—even then the possibility of having such a program should not be dismissed and the question closed. Under any program of taxation and government expenditure, "priorities" exist. It is possible to make choices with respect to the proportion of the national income used for governmental purposes. It is also possible to choose between functions and decide which should be maintained, and which dispensed with or curtailed. Any consideration which affects such a large proportion of the electorate so fundamentally as does the question of government employment for the jobless versus governmental "business as usual," ought to be opened to public discussion in the widest possible manner, the alternate courses and their results clearly outlined, and the people given a chance to express themselves on the policy to be followed.

What of the WPA?

The name that may ultimately be given to any federal agency responsible for the administration of any one or all federal services to employable persons is of little moment. Perhaps Federal Works Administration or Work Projects Administration is as good as any. What is more important than its name is the nature of the services an agency is expected to render. If the nature of federal jobs to be provided in the future is to be, as it is hoped, significantly different from those hitherto provided by the WPA, it would probably be well to give the responsible administrative agency a new name to make clear the break with the past.

Even though the need for public employment is likely to be lessened materially as the nation's war program progresses, it is
The WPA and Federal Relief Policy

important that provision be made for holding together at least the nucleus of the one organization in the country which has proved its ability quickly and efficiently to put to work in any section of the United States vast numbers of workers. The cost of holding in readiness at least a rudimentary organization of this kind would be small compared with the benefit derived from the knowledge that the nation had a program and organization ready for immediate action should the need arise.

Assurance that the nation was prepared to prevent mass unemployment which might result from a slackening or cessation of war production might not only speed up the war effort but might also hasten the transition from a war to a peace economy once the war has been won. In various European countries, during the early 1930's, one of the excuses advanced in defense of refusals to embrace a policy of disarmament was that such a course would lead to widespread unemployment. Therefore, readiness to avert such unemployment in the future may help to forestall pressures that might otherwise be expected to prolong the war prosperity and with it a war-minded economy beyond the point required by military necessity.

If, as expected, the war economy practically wipes out unemployment so that the need for public employment for employable persons is reduced to a point where the provision of such jobs as are still needed becomes uneconomic and wasteful, the WPA might well be authorized to undertake experimentation in a new field—that of providing useful jobs for handicapped and marginally employable workers not absorbed by the feverish industrial activity which the war has brought. To some critics of the

---

1 James B. Carey of the Congress of Industrial Organizations is quoted as saying: "... we must lay down a guaranty of post-war production levels, assuring full employment and maximum use of facilities, to remove the chief fear blocking the present defense effort—fear of the future."—Strauss, Harold, "Don't Plan for Collapse," in the Nation, vol. 154, no. 1, January 3, 1942, p. 9.

2 Of the importance of doing this in Great Britain, F. Lafitte, member of the research staff of Political and Economic Planning, has written: "Workers partially, but permanently, disabled by injury (whether industrial or non-industrial) should not be left to fend for themselves on inadequate disablement or compensation allowances. Wherever possible 'work support' should be given—i.e. subsidised employment instead of subsidised idleness. 'Work-support' might be provided in special work-projects (cf. blind employment schemes) or as a subsidy to a private employer. It would have to be fitted into a national scheme for rehabilitating and retraining the disabled; simple pensioning off should be a last resort, and when disablement pensions were granted they would have to be adequate."—"The Social Services and Social Security," in Social Work (Charity Organisation Society, London, Quarterly), vol. 2, no. 3, January, 1942, p. 111.
The Broader Issues

WPA program this suggestion, doubtless, will sound like nothing new. The WPA, all along, they will say (with some justification), has been employing considerable numbers of workers who at best were only marginally employable if not "unemployable." When it is recalled what the WPA has been able to do with these workers and what more might be done if a co-ordinated program of training, employment, and placement were developed, both actual results and future prospects appear fully to justify further experimentation in this field.

Furthermore, the sad prospect of the need for rehabilitating and finding jobs for American boys sent overseas to defend their homeland adds grim urgency to the need for experimenting not only with vocational rehabilitation but with means of employing disabled workers who cannot find other suitable jobs. Surely American ingenuity can devise a better way than paying disability pensions to potentially productive workers wasting away in their own homes or languishing in institutions.

While there is wide acceptance of the desirability of providing jobs for handicapped workers, there is the greatest diversity of opinion as to how this might best be realized. In one camp are those who maintain that the solution of the problem is to establish two work programs, one for "strictly employable" workers, the other for workers having handicaps of one kind or another.

In the opposite camp are those who prefer one big program of public work which by its very bigness would provide employment not only for those who are really employable but for handicapped workers as well. Only in this way, say those who hold this view, can handicapped workers feel they are fulfilling useful roles rather than accepting "made work" or "sheltered" employment.

Experience during the past several years and prospects for the years just ahead suggest the desirability of a dual work program because: (a) unless there is a separate program on which duties and pay can be scaled to the capabilities of handicapped workers, they are likely to feel that "jobs are being made for them" or that they are being coddled because of their disabilities; (b) unless workers who cannot keep the pace are eliminated from the program providing employment for those who are genuinely employable, levels of productivity are likely to be affected so adversely

As shown in chaps. 10 and 18.
that the morale-preserving value of the work itself may be greatly
lessened; and finally, (c) practical limitations will probably
never permit the establishment of a single public employment
program on a scale broad enough to include in addition to those
who are fully employable as many handicapped workers as might
need work.

Regardless of what the future may ultimately tell about the
merits of these views, there can be little excuse for failing for
the duration, at least, to experiment with possibilities of pro¬
viding jobs for handicapped workers. This is particularly true
since, as already noted, the war period offers unusual opportu¬
nities for experimentation of this kind because the need for
public jobs for unemployed workers has already been sharply re¬
duced and may shrink even more as the war progresses. Further¬
more, the very increase in employment levels is likely to heighten
the need for morale-preserving work on the part of potential
workers who cannot find jobs despite unprecedentedly high em¬
ployment levels. Finally, as the war progresses and casualty lists
grow, the need for employing to advantage disabled workers
will, unfortunately, increase. Given opportunity during the war
to probe various possibilities in the field of providing employment
to handicapped workers, the WPA may be able to gain enough
experience, by the time the war is over, to help national policy¬
makers and the public to decide upon the course that should then
be pursued.

The total program outlined here is presented with the firm
conviction that only if this nation can provide useful work for its
millions of men and women who stand ready to give to their coun¬
try the services it needs, can America expect to preserve the dig¬
nity of its own people, prove the potentialities of democratic
government, and deserve the respect of the remainder of the
world.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX TABLE 1.—WORKERS EMPLOYED ON WPA AND OTHER FEDERAL WORK PROGRAMS; PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CASES; AND TOTAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS, JULY, 1935, TO JUNE, 1941, BY MONTH AND BOTH FISCAL AND CALENDAR YEAR

(Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and year</th>
<th>Workers employed</th>
<th>Public assistance cases</th>
<th>Unduplicated number of households receiving public assistance or emergency work</th>
<th>Unemployed workers (AF of L estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPAb</td>
<td>Other federal work projectsc</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>CCC and NYAd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 1935</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>2,667</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>3,155</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1,905</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>2,374</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1936 average</td>
<td>2,880</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>3,340</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 1936</td>
<td>3,019</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2,960</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2,626</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>3,291</td>
<td>908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2,397</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>3,169</td>
<td>924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2,286</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>3,146</td>
<td>735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 average</td>
<td>2,544</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>3,257</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>2,245</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>3,123</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>2,332</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>3,209</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>2,449</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>3,294</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>2,548</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>3,348</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>2,546</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>3,285</td>
<td>914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1936-1937 Average</td>
<td>1937 Average</td>
<td>1937-1938 Average</td>
<td>1938 Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 1937</td>
<td>2,127</td>
<td>1,793</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2,145</td>
<td>1,628</td>
<td>2,001</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2,125</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>2,139</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2,075</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>2,538</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>2,838</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1,874</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on next page; footnotes at end of table.)
## APPENDIX TABLE 1.—Continued
### (Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and year</th>
<th>Workers employed</th>
<th>Public assistance cases</th>
<th>Unduplicated number of households receiving public assistance or emergency work</th>
<th>Unemployed workers (AF of L estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPA&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Other federal work projects&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>CCC and NYA&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Social security programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2,676</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>3,178</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2,507</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>3,076</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>2,436</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939 average</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>2,838</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>2,235</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>2,770</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>1,908</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>2,452</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>2,206</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>1,802</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>2,342</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1,877</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>2,397</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>2,040</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>2,512</td>
<td>994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1940 average</td>
<td>1,971</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>2,439</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 1940</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>2,522</td>
<td>1,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>2,604</td>
<td>1,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2,204&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>2,577</td>
<td>1,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2,002&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>2,413</td>
<td>1,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>1,889</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>2,331</td>
<td>1,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1,658</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>2,127</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940 average</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>2,333</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>2,036</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>2,105</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>1,694</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>2,231</td>
<td>851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Nov 40-41</td>
<td>Dec 40-41</td>
<td>1940-41 Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1,723</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1,781</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>2,559</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,638</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>2,378</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>2,662</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>2,186</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>2,103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* As far as practicable the table contains the most recent revisions of data published by the federal agencies concerned, up to June 1, 1942.

*b* Average weekly employment on projects operated by WPA. Data from WPA reports.

*c* Average weekly employment on other federal agency projects (exclusive of those of the CCC and NYA) financed from emergency funds and on regular federal construction projects. Data from WPA and Social Security Board reports.

*d* For CCC, averages of numbers enrolled on tenth, twentieth, and last day of each month, have been used. Student and out-of-school programs of NYA are included. Data from WPA and Social Security Board reports.

*e* Data from WPA and Social Security Board reports. Social security assistance programs are those for: Old-age Assistance, Aid to Dependent Children, and Aid to the Blind. General relief cases exclude cases receiving hospitalization or burial only, and beginning September, 1940, those receiving medical care only. The social security assistance data combined here relate to “cases.” For discussion of differences in the “cases” aided under the three programs reported here, see chap. 1.


*g* Average for eleven months.

*h* Data for only one day in the month.

*i* Estimated.
## APPENDIX TABLE 2.—RATE OF INCIDENCE OF EMPLOYMENT ON WPA AND ON OTHER FEDERAL AGENCY PROJECTS, AND OF GENERAL RELIEF CASES, 1936 TO 1939, BY YEAR AND BY STATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and state</th>
<th>Average monthly number per 10,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPA employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>102 55 102 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>185 126 193 163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>131 83 169 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>250 176 257 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>182 151 217 183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>141 98 152 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>247 171 169 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>206 160 223 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>256 185 249 181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>233 152 337 272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>218 156 261 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>222 164 273 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>170 106 295 216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>197 135 231 191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>200 142 221 185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>108 80 123 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>223 172 257 220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>347 198 222 178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>395 224 237 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>162 146 214 186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>231 172 195 147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>101 74 130 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>91 61 77 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>132 101 159 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>115 75 94 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>256 176 245 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>98 65 115 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>150 105 202 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>132 86 162 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>173 137 226 223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region and state</td>
<td>WPA employes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Cont.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Sources of data: WPA and other federal agency employes, WPA memorandum to author and WPA statistical reports; general relief cases, WPA processed memorandum, Number of Cases Receiving General Relief in Individual States, by Months, January 1936 through March 1937, and Social Security Yearbook, 1939, pp. 218-220.
## APPENDIX TABLE 3.—SCHEDULES OF MONTHLY EARNINGS PRESCRIBED AT VARIOUS STAGES OF THE WPA PROGRAM

### 1. Schedule Prescribed May, 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Counties in which 1930 population of largest municipality was:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100,000 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unskilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional and technical workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*States included in each region in this schedule:


II. Delaware, District of Columbia, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia.

III. Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia.

IV. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee.*

Source of data: Executive Order No. 7046, May 20, 1935.

(Table continued on next page.)
APPENDIX TABLE 3.—Continued

2. Schedule Prescribed June, 1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Counties in which 1930 population of largest municipality was:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100,000 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unskilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional and technical workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b States included in each region in this schedule:


II. Delaware, District of Columbia, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, West Virginia.

III. Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia.

Source of data: WPA Administrative Order No. 62, June 27, 1938.

(Table continued on next page.)
APPENDIX TABLE 3.—Continued

3. Schedule Prescribed August, 1939 c

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Counties in which 1930 population of largest municipality was:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100,000 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unskilled B workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$52.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>52.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>46.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unskilled A workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>57.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>57.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>50.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>68.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>68.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>61.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>89.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>89.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>79.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional and technical workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>94.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>94.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>81.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

States included in each region in this schedule:
III. Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia.

Source of data: WPA General Order No. 1, August 15, 1939.
INDEX

Note—This Index is not intended to be exhaustive. For example, no attempt has been made to list every state, county, and city referred to by the author to illustrate different local applications of relief and WPA policies. Similarly, the Index does not refer to all persons or publications mentioned in the text; neither does it include reference to every page on which mention is made of persons whose names are included.

Abbott, Edith, 352
“Able-bodied” persons: considered synonymous with “employable,” 65; denied relief, 728, 766; Pennsylvania denied WPA certification to, if between ages 20-40, 272-3. See also Employable persons
Abramson, Victor, 135, 692n
Absence, workers’, 218, 225n, 396
Accident prevention and compensation, 264-6
Adams, A. B., 110, 309, 352, 407n, 788, 809
(The) Administration: vs. Congress, 576-8; vs. WPA, 578-80
Administrative costs: 111, 121-3, 608, 743-6. See also Certification, costs of
Administrative organization: district, 109; federal-local, 375-6, 380-1, 666-7, 770, 820; headquarters set-up, 108-9; incorporation within FWA, 108; instability of, 107; proposed, 846-8; regional, 109, 110n, 111; reorganization proposals, 110-2; state, 109-11, 603. See also Federal-local co-operation; Personnel, administrative
Advisory Council, New York City. See New York City Advisory Council
Affidavits, in eligibility determination, 303, 310, 320, 321n, 322
Age: eligibility requirements, 271-7; distribution according to, 273-7
Relation to: dismissal, 275-6, 425 ff.; duration of employment, 274, 523n; employability, 457
Aid to dependent children, eligibility for, as related to WPA eligibility, 425 ff.
Alabama, relief reports, 75, 80
Alexander, W. W., 508
Aliens: administrative jobs barred to, 119; general relief denied, 66-7; liable for deportation if Communists, 379n; number employed, 304, 306, 309; separation percentage, 290n; special assistance for those affected by war, 25. See also Citizenship requirements; Subversive activities
Allen, R. S., 625n, 747n
Allocation of funds. See Funds, control of state allocation of; Grants-in-aid
Allocation of jobs. See Employment quotas, distribution to states
Altmeyer, A. J., 97
American Association for Social Security, 479
American Association of Social Workers: eligibility policies criticized, 59n, 314, 353, 377, 471, 505, 522; employment quota inadequacy reported, 623-4; federal responsibility for relief advocated, 96; socially useful projects urged, 156n; unmet needs reports, 73, 75, 76n, 79-80, 81, 83, 91
American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, 314
American Farm Bureau Federation, 810
American Federation of Labor: certification policies condemned, 354n, 377-8, 412, 422; collusion between WPA and private industry charged, 490; protest on reduction in number of women employed, 279-80; unemployment estimates, 535n, 581n, 854-7; upgrading assailed, 237; wage rate protested, 158n, 215-6. See also William Green
American Institute of Public Opinion poll, 105, 478, 710n, 811
American Legion, 456
American Public Welfare Association, 81, 96, 314, 624, 749, 796
American Security Conference, 219
American Security Union, 120, 462-3
American Youth Commission, 843n
Anderson, Nels: addresses quoted, 670, 699, 721n, 728n, 786, 842n; writings quoted, 166, 240, 257, 354n, 776n, 784-5

803
Index

Appeals of grievances. See Grievances, hearings, and appeals
Applications: appeals on denied, 300, 378, 466, 844; delayed action on, 371
Appropriations: deficiency and supplementary, 107, 583-4; determination of amounts, 559-61, 562-3, 582-5; provided by ERA acts, 106-7; proposed basis for making, 844-5; sliding-scale proposal, 584
Arkansas, relief studies and reports, 72, 75, 80, 83
Arts projects, 140, 236-7, 238-40, 319
Assignments: awaiting, 276-7, 281-2, 524, 610, 612-6; near homes, 262-4; preference in, 245, 329n, 404-5; priority, 346-7
Assignments of wages, prohibited, 179
Associated General Contractors of America, 136, 137
Athearn, Leigh, 475n
Atlanta, relief studies and reports, 78-9, 95
Automobile ownership: in eligibility determination, 399-400; local attempts to discourage, 180
Availability for assignment, in eligibility determination, 483-5
Availability of jobs, in eligibility determination: private employment, 486-99; WPA, 499-513. See also Private employment, encouraging and aiding return to

Baker, Jacob, 229, 563n
Bakke, E. W.: quotations from his Citizens Without Work, 174n, 355, 480, 815-7; quotations from The Unemployed Worker, 46, 235, 250-1, 258-9, 261, 302, 498-9, 816n, 827, 830n
Ballantine, A. A., 440, 710n
Baltimore, relief study, 81-2
Bancroft, Gertrude, 186n, 199n, 233n, 238n, 276n, 455n, 478n
Barkley, A. W., 520
Bauer, John, 131
Bead, C. A. and M. R., 695
Benson, G. C. S., 651, 702, 703n, 745n, 756, 771n
Bettis, P. V., 701-2
Bever, J. C., 275n, 478n
Biddle, F. E., 317, 320n
Bird, D. G., 346n
Blind persons: exemption from eighteen-month employment provision, 464-5; receipt of social security benefits as affecting eligibility, 432, 464-5
Blough, Roy, 661n
Boards, arts projects, competence-examining, 236-7
Bone, H. T., 521
Bonus, veterans'. See Veterans, bonus and eligibility
Bookman, C. M., 51-2, 197n, 730
“Boondoggling.” See Projects, accomplishments; Projects, criticism of; Efficiency, project
Bristol, M. C., 813
Brown, J. C., 98, 352n, 462, 764n
Brown, Malcolm, 807
Buchanan, J. P., 312, 824
Buchanan, James, vetoed Homestead Bill, 832-3
Bucklin, D. R., 63n
Budgetary deficiency, basis of pay, 172-8
Budgetary standards, as measurement of need: relief, 58n, 64-5, 86-96; WPA, 384-97; WPA vs. relief, 387-90, 825
Building trades, pressure for project limitations, 136-8
Burdock, U. L., 793
Burns, A. E., 159n, 166n, 196n, 255
Burns, A. T., 174
Burns, E. M., 351n, 700-1, 773n, 801n, 818n
Burton, H. H., 430, 654, 701, 790
Businessmen, eligibility of, 512-3
Butler, E. B., 789
Byrnes, J. F., 162n, 309, 407n, 428, 518, 577, 603, 654n
Byrnes Committee: recommendations of, 112, 444n, 602-3; testimony before, 208-9, 234, 437, 518-9, 763, 779, 800, 834
California: relief studies and reports, 55, 92-3; work-relief program, 638-9
Calkins, Clinch, 45n
Camps, work. See Work camps
Canada, National Employment Commission, recommendation on work vs. direct relief, 818-9
Canada, Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, findings and recommendations, 670-2, 722-3, 744, 745, 741-2
Cancellations. See Certification, cancellation
Carey, J. B., 314, 840n
Carmichael, F. L., 192n
Cash relief, 57
Catastrophes. See Disasters
Categorical assistance. See Social security benefits
Census of unemployment. See Unemployment census
Central Statistical Board, 677n
Centralization, public welfare: arguments raised against, 751-8; case for, 734-51; trend toward, 643-52, 709-14, 832-5

Certification: agencies, 359-68; cancellation, 368-9, 380, 442-3, 445-6, 483, 484, 501, 514-5; costs of, 372-8; exemptions from, 356-9; local policies variable, 270, 291-4, 332-7, 401-3, 433, 445, 457-8, 474-6, 499-500, 610-2, 728; political pressure, 300-3; restricted, 500; responsibility for, 346, 359-69; standards, 361, 402-3; suspended, 371-2, 499-500, 611. See also Eligibility; Negroes, certification discrimination; Veterans, certification

Certified status, exemption from. See Non-certified status

Chamber of Commerce of the United States: appropriation decreases favored, 580-1; federal responsibility for relief, views on, 665-6, 705, 711, 760-1, 767-8

Chambers of commerce, local, 581-2, 709

Chapin, F. S., 813-5

Chase, Stuart, 322-3, 693n, 7760, 848

Chicago, relief studies, 84, 87-9

Children, aid to dependent. See Aid to dependent children

Cincinnati: relief study, 81-2; work-relief program, 639n, 762-3

Citizenship requirements: general relief, 66-7; WPA, 303-18, 622n. See also Immigrants

Civil service status, administrative personnel, 117, 120-1

Civil Works Administration, 352-3, 776

Civilian Conservation Corps: allotments from as related to family budgets, 207, 393; earnings from, exceed WPA, 188n; one job per family exception, 341, 342; total number employed, combined with NYA employment, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7

Clague, Ewan, 45, 97

Clark, J. M., 784n

Clark, J. P., 376, 707, 739n

Cleveland, Grover, disclaims federal responsibility for support of the people, 652

Cleveland, relief studies and reports, 76, 84, 94, 95

Colcord, J. C., 656n, 657n

Commager, H. S., 643n

Committee on Economic Security. See President's [Roosevelt] Committee on Economic Security

Commons, J. R., 833n

Communists: dismissal of, 225; eligibility of, 119-20, 318-24; theater project allegedly dominated by, 139, 295

Community Chests and Councils, Inc., 97

Compensation, accident, 265

Competition with private enterprise. See Projects, competition with private enterprise

Conditions of work. See Work conditions, for list of subjects

Congress: legal basis of WPA and its program provided by acts of, 106-8; position on work vs. direct relief, 809; relief responsibility assumed and disclaimed arbitrarily, 732; reorganization proposals, 110-2; vs. the administration, 576-8. See also Byrnes Committee; Dies Committee; Sheppard Committee; Tolan Committee; Woodrum Committee; also individual members closely connected with WPA legislation, such as A. B. Adams, J. F. Byrnes, C. A. Woodrum

Congress of Industrial Organizations: appropriation increases urged, 580, 582; eligibility policies criticized, 314, 324, 353n, 354n, 422; utilization of skills favored, 229. See also Ralph Hetzel, Jr., J. L. Lewis

Connecticut, work-relief program, 636

Construction projects, 126-8, 129-31, 136-8, 232. See also Contract system vs. force account; Projects, cost and expenditure restrictions

Consumer income payments. See Income payments

Continued need. See Need, continued

Contract system vs. force account, 136-8, 150-3, 846

Convict labor, employment of, 340-1

Corwin, E. S., 652n

Cost of living, in relation to WPA wage rates, 175-8, 872-3

Costs. See Administrative costs; Expenditures; Project costs; Sponsors, contributions

Council of Local Public Welfare Administrators, 97

Council of State Governments, 97

Crawford, Kenneth, 216

Criticisms, WPA program. See Political activity, critics' charges of; Projects, criticism of; Workers, criticism of

Davis, J. P., 286n, 287

Debt limitations, federal, state, and local, 653-9, 849n

Debts, workers', 179
Index

Defense projects: exemptions from wage and hour requirements, 164, 165, 213; magnitude of, 132-3; some taken over by government, 242; special register, 275
Democracy, preservation of, 706-9, 757-8, 789-94, 852
Democratic vs. Republican platform on federal responsibility to provide work, 775
Dennison, H. S., 43n, 710n, 811n
Denver, relief studies and reports, 80, 93
Dependents, in relative need determination, 419-21. See also Family responsibility
Dewey, John, 787-8
Dies Committee, 319, 710n
Direct relief. See Work relief vs. direct relief
Disabilities, physical and mental. See Blind persons; Handicapped persons; Mental condition; Physical condition; Physical examinations
Disasters: effect of, on WPA employment levels, 574-5; federal aid in early, 695-7. See also Drought areas
Discrimination: federal control as affecting, 765-8; relief eligibility as affected by, 57-67; WPA eligibility as affected by, 386, 390, 608-9, 635. See also Negroes, certification discrimination; Veterans, preference
Dismissals: effect of, on relief rolls, 625-8; post-election justification for, 587-8; need resulting from, 628-33; resulting from eligibility reviews, 443-7
Reason for: absence, 218, 225n; alien, 307-8, 310; Communist, 225; eighteen-month employment provision, 522, 525, 631-2; failure to sign affidavits, 320, 322; job refusal, 487, 493; obstructionist or agitator, 225; part-time job in private employment, 486n; physically handicapped, 465; private employment increase anticipated, 492; project completion, 515, 517; social security eligibility, 271-2, 426-7, 433-4; striking, 225; subversive activity, 321-2; unsatisfactory work, 244-5, 514-5; use of pay for non-acceptable purposes, 179-80
See also Suspensions
District of Columbia, consequences resulting from non-meshing of federal-local welfare programs, 728
Domestic and personal service workers: Negro, 292; number of, 230; training of, 128, 164-5, 241; upgrading, 238
Douglas, P. H., 800, 801n
Drought areas: certification agencies, 367; employment in, 510, 574-5, 588
Dryden, F. H., 109-10, 579
Dual nature of WPA program. See Work-and-relief dilemma
Dunn, C. M., 811n
Durant, Ruth, 292, 295n
Duration of workers' employment, 515-27. See also Eighteen-month employment provision
Earnings: actual, 168-9, 181-6; monthly schedules prescribed at various dates, 860-2; not assignable, 179; restrictions on spending of, 179-80, 348-9, 393, 394; Social Security Board ruling on nature of, as related to unemployment compensation, 436-7
Comparisons: FERA grants, 819-20; per inhabitant amount vs. annual income per inhabitant, 685-6, 688; relief and assistance grants, 35-7, 186, 188-98, 549-50, 551-3, 762-5, 820-1
See also Supplementary income; Wage rate
Education, public, once considered charity, 833-4
Educational projects, 128, 240, 293
Efficiency: administrative, 743-6; project, 100n, 136, 151-2, 214-5, 241, 246-62, 467, 499; worker, 240, 244-62, 422, 465, 467, 526. See also Handicapped persons; Shirking on the job; Skill for the job; Skills, utilization of
Eighteen-month employment provision, 519-22; effects of, 171, 522-3, 631, 632-3; modification of, 523-6; Negroes, 288; older workers, 275, 277, 348; veterans, 329, 523; women, 284-5
Eligibility: appeals, 300, 378-9, 466, 769, 844; requirements need defining, 828-9; reviews of, 368-78, 391, 441-7; suggested basis for, 844; variable policies as to, 269-71. See also Age; Assets; Certification; Dependents; Eighteen-month employment provision; Employable persons; Family responsibility; Income, budgetary treatment of; Need; Negroes; Occupational status; Residence requirements; Subversive activities; Supplementary income; Veterans, need standard; Women
Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund, Study by, 88-9
Ellis, W. J., 740n
Emergency Relief Appropriation Acts, 106-7
Index

Employable persons: definition of, 449
Relief: denied, 73 ff., 91, 367, 775; eligibility of, 63-5; granted, 311, 617-28
WPA: age, physical and mental condition, 99-100, 272-3, 457-65; President Roosevelt's promises of jobs for, 716, 775, 777, 839; previous work experience, 453-7; relation to available jobs, 449-51; relation to labor market, 451-3; responsibility for determination of employability, 466; success of limiting employment to “employables” appraised, 466-71
See also “Able-bodied” persons; “Employables” vs. “unemployables”; Unemployable persons
“Employables” vs. “unemployables,” 99-100, 466-71, 715-33, 840-1, 851-2. See also Handicapped persons; Physical condition
Employees. See Personnel, administrative; Supervisory employees; Workers, project
Employment, federal projects, other than WPA: average, Jan., 1936-Jan., 1941, 531; compared with WPA and general relief, 543-5; monthly totals, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7; workers required to accept, 491
Employment, private. See Private employment
Employment, WPA: effect on business, 581-2; lack of defined goals, 561-6, 582-3; monthly fluctuations, 531-3; monthly totals, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7; state rate of incidence, 687, 858-9; vs. direct relief, 805-35
Adequacy of: contentions pro and con, 606-7; criteria used in measuring, 609-40; nature of program one cause of inadequacy, 607-9
As related to: annual income per inhabitant, 683-4; general relief, 535-6, 542-3, 546-9, 594; other relief and assistance programs, 34; population, 539-42, 858-9; private employment, 533-5, 570-4; states, 537-9, 858-9; unemployment, 533-7, 550, 554-7, 570, 587-9, 593-4, 684-6, 689, 854-7; war contract employment, 557-8, 569, 573-4, 592
As forces for and against more jobs: administration vs. Congress, 576-8; administration vs. WPA, 578-80; various interest groups, 580-3
Volume determinants: amount of money available, 559-61; catastrophes, 574-5; forecasting and estimating difficulties in, 567-70, 583-5; private employment changes, 570-1, 573-4; public employment changes, 571-2; uncertainty as to numbers needed by armed forces, 575; unemployment changes, 596-9
Employment, WPA and other federal projects: compared with incidence of general relief, 545-6; monthly totals, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7
Employment offices, public. See Public employment offices
Employment quotas: determination of monthly, 586-96; local agencies' practices as affecting, 610-2; political use of, 587-95; sponsorship lack as affecting, 542, 546, 608, 634, 685; states' use and non-use of their authorized allocation, 603-4
Distribution to states: devices and proposals for controlling, 600-3; methods of allocating jobs, 596-9
Employment rotation. See Duration of workers' employment; Eighteen-month employment provision
Employment standards, protection and improvement of, by public work programs, 784-5
Epstein, Abraham, 479
Equipment, project, as related to costs, 252-5, 601
ERA Acts. See Emergency Relief Appropriation Acts
Exempt status. See Non-certified status
Expenditures, total public assistance benefits and work program earnings, 1936 to 1941 by year, 35
WPA: economic and social effects of, 798-804, 807; limitations on, 586-7; non-labor, 256; project, July, 1935-June, 1941, 129, 149; question of what nation can afford, 848-9; taxation as related to, 680-1, 682-3, 688-91
See also Administrative costs; Funds; Project costs; Sponsors, contributions
Experimentation, social, opportunity for, 755-6, 852
Ezekiel, Mordecai, 723
Faddis, C. L., 134n
Family: as a unit in need determination, 381-2; budgetary measurement of need, 384-92; employment of secondary wage-earner, 394; one job per, 341-7, 381; size of, 33, 192, 194-5, 200-1, 203-4, 206, 210, 347-8, 419-20; wages as related to need, 172-5
Family allowances. See Wage rate, family allowance principle

867
Index

Family responsibility: general relief, 58-9; WPA, 341-50, 381-2, 382n, 394. See also Dependents
Family Welfare Society of America, 97
Farm Security Administration: agreement with WPA, 506-7, 508-9; as certification agency, 567; grants, 28-9, 503-10, 588, 808; total number of cases, Jan., 1936-June, 1941, 854-7
Farmers: eligibility, 502-12; employment estimates, 509; job rotation, 517; percentage certified, 511. See also Drought areas; Rural areas
Faulkner, John, 505n
Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, 582n, 787
Federal Emergency Relief Administration: benefits, 819-20; effect on relief standards, 764-5; efforts to limit aid to employables, 715-9, 725-6; grants system, 735-7, 749, 768; studies of former relief recipients, 78-9; transient program, 62n
Federal employment programs. See Public employment, for listing of agencies
Federal government, suggested role of, in development of an employment security program, 843-52
Federal-local co-operation, need for, 376-8, 413-4, 584-5, 843
Federal responsibility for providing work: as related to cost of jobs for all, 848-9; integration with relief proposed, 840-1, 846-8; precedents for, 697-9; President Roosevelt on, 563-4, 566n, 716, 775, 777, 785-6, 797-8, 839; proposed program of, 843-8, 849-52; public belief that all needy unemployed were to be given jobs, 563-6. See also Unemployment; Work
Federal responsibility for relief: arbitrary and unpredictable, 584-5, 731-3; better understanding among federal officials of existing needs claimed, 701-6; cost participation, 35-6, 660-91, 739-46, 773-4; court decisions, 42-3, 646, 705-6, 721; debt limitations as bearing on, 653-9; employable-unemployable principle in division of, 715-33; "national interest" as affected by, 706-9; possibility of more prompt action than by state and local, 652-3; precedents for, 692-701; standard of living improvement as related to, 836-8; tax problem as it affects, 660-91, 763; trend toward centralization, 643-52, 709-14, 832-5
General relief: administration's hands-off policy, 96-101; results of refusal to assume, 70-96, 212, 250, 338, 340, 350, 413-4, 557, 648-9, 690-1, 721n, 726, 728-33
Opinion pro and con, 96-101, 296, 663-71, 709-14, 717-9, 832-5; administration's view as stated by Aubrey Williams, 68-9; Herbert Hoover, 649-50, 658, 712-3, 748, 752; President Roosevelt, 713, 716, 775, 777, 839; Republican, 710-11, 729-30, 740n, 743, 746-7, 775 See also South; States; Taxation; Unemployment
Federal spending for recovery, 652-3, 693, 797-804, 821, 848-9
Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation. See Food stamp plan; Surplus commodities
Federal vs. state and local control: administrative vs. financial responsibility, 739-42; economy vs. waste, 743-6; in time of national stress, 756-7; non-discrimination and humane administration, 765-9; political machinations, 746-51; preservation of democracy, 757-8; relief standards, 763-5; social experimentation, opportunity for, 755-6, 852; uniformity vs. local differences, 769-74; wage standards as threatened by local control, 762-3. See also Grants-in-aid
Fellows, P. A., 151-2
Fiscal capacity, federal, state, and local. See Taxation
Fleming, P. B., 109, 138
Florida, relief studies and reports, 72, 80, 95
Fogg, G. A., 234n
Folks, Homer, 49n
Food stamp plan, 72, 210, 211
Force account. See Contract system vs. force account
Foreign relief, 695, 696-7, 709, 838-9
Foremen. See Supervisory employes
Fortune surveys: federal responsibility for relief, 710; relief, 46, 100; WPA, 154, 488, 745; work vs. direct relief, 811
Fuller, W. D., 723n
Funds: control of state allocation of, 600-3; spending limitations, 586-7; supplied by ERA Acts, 106-7. See also Grants-in-aid; Sponsors, contributions
“Furloughed” workers. See Eighteen-month employment provision

Gallup poll. See American Institute of Public Opinion

Garner Bill, 125

Garnishment of wages, prohibited, 179

Gebhart, J. C., 657, 761

Geddes, A. E., 40-1

General relief: chaos of, 51-2; definition of, 29; federal responsibility for undergirding all relief by broad nationwide program of, 836-8; history, 40-1; income payments per capita and incidence of, 683-4; need standards, 58-9, 64-5, 86-96, 387-90; state costs participation, 55-7; state supervision, 54-5; unmet need evidences, 70-85

Grants: amounts, 40, 85-6; grant expenditures per capita vs. WPA earnings, 549-50, 551-3; income per inhabitant, 1939, in relation to, 688; standards of, 86-96, 763-5; vs. WPA earnings, 189-98

Number of cases: combined federal employed in relation to, 545-6; increased rolls due to WPA lay-offs, 625-8; state differences, 67-9, 687; total number, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7; WPA employment in relation to, 533-6, 542-3, 546-9

See also Budgetary standards; Cash relief; Citizenship requirements; Employable persons; Family responsibility; Federal responsibility for relief, general relief; Residence requirements; Single and unattached persons

“General welfare,” 42-3, 653n, 706

Georgia, relief studies, 78-9

Geyer, L. E., 704

Gifford, W. S., 659, 753

Gilboy, E. W., 46


Hansen, A. H., 658-9, 664-5, 839n, 843n, 849n


Harris, J. P., 668

Harvard University Graduate School of Public Administration, Bureau for Research in Municipal Government, relief survey by, 234n, 302

Haskell, H. J., 252n

Hatch Act, 117, 751

Hauser, P. M., 231n, 511n

Hayden, Carl, 353

Healy, A. D., 324n

Hearings and appeals. See Grievances, hearings, and appeals

Heer, Clarence, 660, 661n, 662n, 667

Henderson, Leon, 745n

Hetzel, Ralph, Jr., 171-2, 354n

Hewitt, Oscar, 254n

High, Stanley, 588-9

Hill, Polly, 166n

Hillman, Sidney, 317, 649

Hinckley, R. H., 745n

Hodson, William, 526, 585, 622n, 826

Hoehler, F. K., 314, 624, 796

Holidays, making up earnings lost by, 217

Hollander, Sidney, 791

Homestead Acts. See Public domain

Grayson, F. V., 346n

Great Britain: national responsibility for unemployment assistance, 722, 740-1, 773; politics and unemployment program, 701; poor law history, 660n, 691; unemployment assistance, 101n, 351n, 370, 382, 663n; unemployment insurance, 166n, 516n; work vs. direct relief, 817-8

Green, R. A., 436

Green, William, 215n, 216, 223, 810

Green Bill, 456

Greenstein, Harry, 100n

Greer, Guy, 658-9

Grievances, hearings, and appeals: in denial of eligibility, 300, 378-9, 466, 769, 844; in work conditions, 220-2

Haber, William, 51

Hall, Helen, 45

Hamilton, Gordon, 427

Handicapped persons: efficiency drives as affecting, 465; eligibility of, 264-5, 452, 459-65; proposals for, 470-1, 850-2. See also Blind persons

Hansen, A. H., 658-9, 664-5, 839n, 843n, 849n


Harris, J. P., 668

Harvard University Graduate School of Public Administration, Bureau for Research in Municipal Government, relief survey by, 234n, 302

Haskell, H. J., 252n

Hatch Act, 117, 751

Hauser, P. M., 231n, 511n

Hayden, Carl, 353

Healy, A. D., 324n

Hearings and appeals. See Grievances, hearings, and appeals

Heer, Clarence, 660, 661n, 662n, 667

Henderson, Leon, 745n

Hetzel, Ralph, Jr., 171-2, 354n

Hewitt, Oscar, 254n

High, Stanley, 588-9

Hill, Polly, 166n

Hillman, Sidney, 317, 649

Hinckley, R. H., 745n

Hodson, William, 526, 585, 622n, 826

Hoehler, F. K., 314, 624, 796

Holidays, making up earnings lost by, 217

Hollander, Sidney, 791

Homestead Acts. See Public domain

Gibbs, Sarah, 285n

Glass, Carter, 216n-217n, 474n

Glassberg, Benjamin, 488n

Goals, WPA employment, 561-6, 578-83

Grant standards, general relief: federal participation probable effect on, 764-5; local not always lower than federal, 762-4; studies of, in various areas, 86-96; work relief vs. direct, 819-21. See also General relief, grants; Unmet need evidences

Grants-in-aid, federal-local system, 733-42, 747, 759-60, 761-2, 768, 837

Grauer, A. E., 672n, 742n
Hoover, H. C.: growth of federal power during his administration, 644, 712, 792; views on federal responsibility for relief, 649-50, 658, 711-4, 748, 752. See also President's [Hoover] Organization on Unemployment Relief

Hoover administration, federal aid under, 504-5, 665, 692-3, 697, 713-4

Hopkins, H. L.: addresses and interviews quoted, 448, 507-8, 693, 715, 720, 747-8, 763, 782, 791-2, 796-7, 798-9; administrator, term as and ability as, 108-9, 746n, 841; political activity of, ii6n; testimony before Congress, 304-5, 306-7, 448n, 562, 578-9, 601, 725, 806, 825; writings quoted, 778, 784

Hoppock, Robert, 780n

Horner, Henry, 565

Hours of work: exemptions from 130-hour provision, 213-4; general ruling, 213; policies, early, regarding, 214-6. See also Overtime; Time lost

House Committee on Investigation and Study of WPA. See Woodrum Committee

House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities. See Dies Committee

House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration. See Tolan Committee

Household training projects, i25, 164-5, 241

Households, unduplicated number receiving public assistance or emergency work, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7

Howard, D. S., 95n

Hughes, J. H., 110

Hunter, H. O.: addresses and interviews, 107-8, 489-90, 576n, 593, 594, 744, 747, 759, 761-2, 763n, 793-4, 800; term of, 109; testimony before Congress, 139-40, 150, 316-7, 423, 446, 489, 598, 735

Illinois: relief studies and reports, 54n, 55, 89-90, 807; work-relief program, 637

Illness. See Sickness

Incentives to work, 255-7, 354-5. See also Morale; Work habits

Income, budgetary treatment of, 392-7

Income, in eligibility determination, 414-7

Income, national. See National income

Income, supplementary. See Supplementary income

Income payments: incidence of general relief and of WPA employment as related to, 683-6, 688-90; index of, Jan., 1929-Dec., 1941, as related to relief and assistance benefits, 39; state and intrastate differences in, 674-9; taxes as percentage of, 661-3

Indians, employment of, 297-8

Injured workers: compensation for, 265; reassignment of, 458-9

Institute of Public Opinion. See American Institute of Public Opinion

Insurance, life. See Life insurance

International Ladies Garment Workers Union, 361

Investigation of need: costs of, 372-8; critics of, 441, 827-30; hope of eliminating, 173; methods and standards of, 369-72, 816

Irwin, R. B., 464-5

Jacoby, N. H., 664

Jahn, J. A., 813-5

Japan, absence of social services, 785n

Jenkinson, B. L., 231n, 511n

Job refusals: dismissals for, not to exceed 90 days, 493; eligibility as affected by, 486-7, 490-3, 497-9

Job rotation. See Eighteen-month employment provision

Johnson, H. S., 167, 232, 318, 412-3, 789

Johnson, Margaret, 702n

Joyner, R. G., 85n

Kahn, D. C., 834

Kansas City, Mo., relief study, 90-1

Kansas, relief study, 91

Keller, K. E., 254

Kelly, E. J., 826

Kerr, Florence, 239

Kerr, Peyton, 159n, 166n, 255

Key, V. O., Jr., 738

Kirstein, L. E., 412

Labor complaints. See Labor relations

Labor market, as affecting eligibility, 451-3, 782-5. See also Labor shortage

Labor organizations, workers' right to join, 218-20

Labor, organized: contract system favored, 151; physical examinations opposed by, 459; project limitations favored, 136, 572n; skilled worker efficiency study, 240n; strikers being ruled ineligible sometimes favored, 476; undercutting wage rates charged to two-job workers, 208; upgrading protested, 237; wage rate anomaly complaint, 158n. See also American...
Index

Labor—Cont.
Federation of Labor; Congress of Industrial Organizations; International Ladies Garment Workers Union; Labor relations
Labor relations: grievances, hearings, and appeals, 220-2; right to organize, 218-20, 226; right to strike, 222-4, 226
Labor shortage: allegations and denials of, 487-92. See also Labor market
Lafitte, F., 830n
La Follette, R. M., 106n, 355, 578
La Guardia, F. H., 156, 229, 234, 411, 654, 785, 822n
Landon, A. M., 488, 729-30, 743
Lane, M. D., 98, 174
Lanham, F. G., 308, 309, 312n
Lanham Act vs. WPA, 138
Lansdale, R. T., 737n
Larsen, A. E., 462n
Lasser, David, 119-20, 168-9, 223-4, 250, 763
Lay-offs. See Dismissals; Duration of workers' employment; Eighteen-month employment provision
Legal basis: general relief, 41-2, 52-3; social security, 42-3, 646, 705-6, 721; WPA, 106-8, 362
Lehman, H. H., 565
Leigh, R. D., 739, 749n
Leland, S. E., 664n
Lend-spend program, proposed, 572-3
Lenroot, Katharine, 97
Lescobier, D. D., 235-6
Lewis, J. H., 289n
Lewis, J. L., 354n, 790-1
Life insurance, as related to eligibility, 398-9, 403
Lippmann, Walter, 644
Liquor, spending for, 180
Little Rock, Ark., relief study, 79
“Little WPA’s.” See Work-relief programs, state and local
Local control and responsibility. See Federal responsibility for relief; Federal vs. state and local control
Local fiscal capacity, 633-6, 660-72
Local surveys and studies of relief, 58n, 71-95
Local work-relief programs. See Work-relief programs, state and local
Lost time. See Time lost
Louisiana, relief studies and reports, 75, 80, 91-2
Luce, Robert, 766n
Ludlow, Louis, 174n
Lyon, L. S., 134-5, 692n
Maciora, L. J., 317n
Macmahon, A. W., 109n, 125, 563, 750
MacNeil, D. H., 233n-4n
Macon, Ga., relief study, 78
Maintenance work: projects displacing regular employees prohibited, 141-2; use of relief labor by local governments to perform regular work, 634-5, 639
Manufacturers Record, editorial, 709
Marcantonio, Vito, 424, 578
Marcus, G. F., 827-8
Martin, J. W., 115n
Massachusetts, relief studies, 46, 619
Materials, project, as related to costs, 252-5, 601
Mathews, P. A., 327n
Matthews, W. H., 748
Mayors, Conference of. See United States Conference of Mayors
McCullough, Frank, 224
McInerney, J. A., 237n
McKellar, K. D., 111n, 580
McLennan County, Texas, relief study, 633
McNary, C. L., 711
McNutt, P. V., 97
Means test. See Needs test
Medical examinations, workers. See Physical examinations
Memphis, relief study, 84-5
Mental condition, as related to eligibility, 447-8
Michigan, work-relief program, 638
Migrants, need of federal responsibility for, 62, 263, 333-4, 335, 349, 646-7, 715. See also Residence requirements
Military service: recruiting for, among workers, 331-2; reinstatement after, 331-2
Miller, Frieda, 235
Millett, J. D., 109n, 125, 563, 663n, 741n, 750
Milwaukee Citizens’ Bureau, 573, 762
Minneapolis, project strike trouble, 225-7
Minority groups. See Aliens; Discrimination; Indians; Migrants; Negroes
Mississippi, relief report, 85
Missouri, relief studies and reports, 74-5, 80, 90-1, 623
Moore, A. H., 430
Morale, preservation of, 215, 229, 412-3, 729-31, 778-81, 805-6, 827-30, 851-2. See also Incentives to work; “Pauperization”
Mort, P. R., 757, 758
Mothers with dependent children, eligibility of, 425 ff.
Mundt, K. E., 297
Murray, J. E., 384, 522n, 578, 793
Index

Murray, Philip, 582
Music projects, 239, 240

Nassau County, N. Y., Emergency Relief Bureau, separation of employables from unemployables criticized in report of, 730
Nassimbene, R., 1920
Nation, editorial, 170n, 700
National Appraisal Committee. See United States Community Improvement Appraisal
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 296
National Association of Manufacturers, 581
National Council of State Public Assistance and Welfare Administrators, 97
National economy. See Federal spending for recovery; Income payments; National income; Purchasing power
National Economy League, 166, 250, 568, 573, 581, 657, 711, 761
National Emergency Council, 650, 669, 703n
National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, 324
National Federation of Settlements, 45
National Gazette, editorial, attack on proposed tax for free public schools, 833
National government. See Federal government
National Guard Association, 137
National income: cost of jobs for all as related to, 559-60, 848-9; future possibilities of, 832n; work and direct relief expenditures compared with, 37-9. See also Income payments; Taxation
“National interest,” in relation to federal responsibility for relief, 706-9, 782-4
National Resources Committee, 677n, 795
National Resources Planning Board, 131, 786, 795-6, 799n, 801n, 803
National Right-to-Work Congress, 287, 429
National Unemployment League, 650, 786
National uniformity, effect of federal control on. See Federal vs. state and local control
National Youth Administration: benefits from as related to family budgets, 207, 393; one job per family exception, 341, 342; total number employed, combined with CCC employment, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7

Nation’s Business, editorial, 229
Nazib Bund members, eligibility of, 119, 318-24
Nebraska, relief report, 79
Need, in eligibility determination: continued, 441-7; measurement of, 380-403; relative, 329, 348, 397, 404-24
Standards of: relief, 8-9, 64-5, 86-96; WPA, 384-7; WPA vs. relief, 387-90, 825
See also Eligibility, reviews of; Investigation of need
Needs test, 351-6, 382
Negroes: certification discrimination, 291-4, 386, 390, 767n; proportion employed, 288-91, 294; re-employment difficulties, 289-91; theater projects, 139, 294-5; women, 282, 292, 294, 452; writers’ project, 237
New Haven survey, effects of unemployment. See E. W. Bakke
New Jersey, relief studies and reports, 54n, 55, 79, 85-6, 622-3
New Republic, editorial, 236n, 700
New York City Advisory Council, 152, 230, 354, 470
New York (City), relief studies and reports, 31, 32, 87, 386, 621-2
New York Herald Tribune, editorial, 229n
New York (State): relief reports, 32, 85, 619, 621; work-relief program, 639-40
New York Sun, editorial, 319
New York Times, editorial, 229, 600n
New York World’s Fair, WPA building, inscription on, 228, 786
Newcomer, Mabel, 660n, 802n
Niles, D. K., 438
Non-certified status, 356-9
Non-settled persons. See Migrants
Norris, G. W., 222-3
North Dakota Supreme Court, decision on mothers’ pension act, 831n
Norton, M. T., 125n
Nurseries, children’s day-care appropriation for, 125
Occupational classification, workers’, 466
Occupational history. See Work experience, previous
Occupational status, effect of, on eligibility, 501-13
Occupational therapy. See Rehabilitation
Ogden, Gladys, 109n, 125, 563, 750
O’Grady, John, 377, 790
Ohio, relief studies, 76, 77
Index

Old-age assistance, eligibility for, as related to WPA eligibility, 425 ff.
Old-age insurance, eligibility for, as related to WPA eligibility, 435
O’Neal, Emmet, 584
Opinion, public. See Public opinion
Organization. See Administrative organization
Outside earnings. See Supplementary income, private employment
Overtime, policy on, 218
Palmer, G. L., 289n
Parker, H. G., 259, 418n
Paroled persons, eligibility of, 458
Parran, Thomas, 778-9
Part-time employment, private, 207-9, 215, 395-7, 444-5
“Pauperization,” 47-8, 811-9, 830-5. See also Morale
Pay. See Earnings; Wage rate
Payne, S. L., 275n
Penal and correctional institutions, employment of persons in, 340-1
Pennsylvania, work-relief program, 636-7, 826n
Pepper, Claude, 162n, 580
Performance on the job, 514-5
Personnel, administrative: civil service, 117, 120-1; curbs on political activity, 116-8; district, 114, 119; federal officials listed, 108-9, 745n; number of, 115-6; preferences and restrictions, 118-20; publicizing names, 114-5; regional, 113; senatorial confirmation, 111n, 112, 113-4; state, 113, 114, 119. See also Supervisory employees
Philadelphia relief studies and reports, 58n, 94, 95
Physical condition, as related to eligibility, 457-65. See also Blind persons; Rehabilitation
Physical examinations, workers’, 459-63
Physically handicapped workers. See Blind persons; Handicapped persons
Pittsburgh, relief reports, 87, 94
Political activity: critics’ charges of, 49, 357-8, 509, 510, 533, 583-4, 587-95, 746-7; curbs on, 116-8; pressure from, 250-1, 299-303, 362, 376, 377, 601-2, 747-51. See also Personnel, administrative; senatorial confirmation
Polls, public opinion. See American Institute of Public Opinion; Fortune surveys
Powell, Webster, 45
Preferential treatment. See Discrimination; Veterans, preference
President’s [Harding] Conference on Unemployment, 699n
President’s [Hoover] Organization on Unemployment Relief, 657-8, 753, 792
President’s [Roosevelt] Committee on Economic Security, 170, 351n, 553-4, 646, 717-9, 721n, 776-7
Pressure groups: pro and con administration’s fiscal policy, 800-2; pro and con WPA jobs, 576, 580-3; public fear of unemployed banding together as, 699-701, 792-4. See also American Association of Social Workers; American Farm Bureau Federation; American Legion; National Security League; Associated General Contractors of America; Congress of Industrial Organizations; Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; National Economy League; National Manufacturers Association; National Right-to-Work Congress; National Unemployment League; Sentinels of the Republic; United States Chamber of Commerce; United States Conference of Mayors; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Workers Alliance of America
Priority, in family group employment, 346-7
Prison industries, ban on promotion of, 133
Prisoners, employment of, 340-1
Private employment: availability of, in eligibility determination, 486-9, 497-9; collusion with charged by AF of L, 490; encouraging and aiding return to, 165-7, 207-8, 217, 242-3, 251, 277, 490-9, 516, 751-4; rate of return to, 241, 284, 289, 497; supplementary income from, 207-9, 215, 395-7, 444-5; war work, increase in, 557-8, 569, 573-4, 598; WPA employment as related to, 533-5, 570-4. See also Labor market
Private enterprise, competition with. See Projects, competition with private enterprise
Production-for-use projects, 134-6
Professional and technical workers: percentage employed, 186, 187; use of skills, 139n, 231, 233, 234, 783; wage rate, 165, 860-2
Professional persons, practicing, eligibility of, 512-3

873
Index

Project costs, 136, 147, 261, 279, 801n, 823.

Project efficiency. See Efficiency, project
Project employees. See Supervisory employes; Workers, project
Projects: accomplishments, 125-9, 156-7, 807; appraisal, 153-7; approval, 144-5; competition with labor, 132, 133, 340; competition with private enterprise, 132, 133-6, 139, 230n, 233, 253n, 783, 845-6; cost and expenditure restrictions, 125, 136-8, 252-5, 572n; criticism of, 1310, 1410, 154-6, 254, 258, 357n; expenditures, 129, 130, 144, 149, 255; permissible types, 124-5; prohibited types, 131-40; requirements regarding, 140-3; types of, 125-31; worker percentage on various types, 129. See also Arts projects; Construction projects; Defense projects; Educational projects; Efficiency, projects; Equipment; Music project; Production-for-use projects; Sewing projects; Sponsors; Theater projects; Women, projects for; Writers' projects

Property ownership, in eligibility determination, 397
Public domain, grants from, 692-5, 832-3
Public employment. See Civil Works Administration; Civilian Conservation Corps; Employment, federal projects, other than WPA; Employment, WPA; Federal Emergency Relief Administration; National Youth Administration; Public Works Administration vs. WPA
Public employment offices: co-operation with, 466, 493-4, 746; required registration with, 481-3; suggested role, 830, 844
Public opinion: public spending for recovery, 800-1, 802-4; relief, 29-30, 44-50, 811, 830-5; social legislation, 197-8; WPA, 105, 154-5, 180, 215, 229-30, 232, 257-60, 351, 418. See also American Institute of Public Opinion; Fortune surveys
Public order, maintenance of, 789-94
Public relief, all programs: amounts paid to recipients, 35-40; conditions adverse to development of, 43-50; history of, 40-1; legal basis, 41-3; numbers aided, 30-4; turnover of rolls, 31-3
Public Works Administration vs. WPA, 108, 572n, 776n, 801n
Public Works, Department of, proposed by Byrnes Committee, 112

Public works, development of federal policy of, 657-8, 697-9, 706n, 712
"Pump priming." See Federal spending for recovery; Purchasing power
Purchasing power, stimulation of, 652-3, 797-804, 807, 819n, 821

Quotas. See Employment quotas

Racial discrimination. See Indians; Negroes
Ramseck Act, 121
Rarig, F. M., Jr., 259n
Rauch, F. R., 358n
Reading, R. W., 669

Real estate ownership. See Property ownership
Reassignment. See Reinstatement
Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 692-3
Recruiting for military service. See Military service
Reductions of workers. See Dismissals; Eighteen-month employment provision; Separation; Turnover
Reed, E. F., 82n
Re-employment in private industry. See Private employment, encouraging and aiding return to
Referral, 356n, 363-5, 364n. See also Certification
Regional differences, as related to federal vs. state and local control, 769-74
Regional organization, WPA, 109-11
Registration with public employment offices, requirement, 481-2
Rehabilitation, worker, 252, 458-9, 465, 851-2
Reinstatement, 227, 322, 330, 494-6, 514-5, 524, 525-6
Reinvestigation. See Eligibility, reviews of
Relative need. See Need, relative
Relative responsibility. See Family responsibility
Relief, public. See Farm Security Administration; Federal Emergency Relief Administration; General relief; Social security benefits; Food stamp plan; Surplus commodities; Work-relief programs
Relief recipients, willingness to work, 44-7, 824-6
Relief status requirement, in eligibility determination, 335-7, 406-14, 424, 517, 566, 611, 825
Republican opinion on federal responsibility for relief, 710-4, 746-7, 775. See also H. C. Hoover; A. M. Landon;
Republican opinion—Cont.
C. L. McNary; R. A. Taft; A. H. Vandenberg; W. L. Willkie
Resettlement Administration. See Farm Security Administration
Residence, proximity to projects, 262-4
Residence requirements: general relief, 59-62; WPA, 332-7
Resources. See Assets
Review of eligibility. See Eligibility, review of
Rhode Island: relief report, 85; work-relief program, 636
Rice, M. W., 311-2
Rice, Stuart, 834
Richberg, D. R., 648-9, 653-4, 668, 789
Ridder, Victor, 220, 2600, 442
"Right to work." See Work, right to
Rights of workers. See Labor relations
Roberts, V. E., 275n, 284n, 289n, 630n
Rogge, O. J., 226
Roosevelt, F. D.: appropriation requests to Congress, 57in; credit for WPA accomplishments primarily due to, 841; discrimination banned, 285; eligibility views, 315-6, 318, 351, 430-1, 441, 446, 520-1, 524; federal responsibility for providing work, views on, 563-4, 566n, 716, 775-6, 777, 797-8, 839; federal responsibility for relief, views on, 713, 716; grants-in-aid, views on, 666, 739-40, 759; 130-hour month supported, 216; project criticism answered, 155; right to organize upheld, 219; right to strike denied, 222, 226; security wage favored, 166n, 170; skills preservation held of prime importance, 228; theater project ban criticized, 139n; work vs. direct relief favored, 805-6, 809, 822
Ross, J. E., 788
Rotation of jobs. See Duration of workers' employment; Eighteen-month employment provision
Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Canada. See Canada
Royal Institute of International Affairs, unemployment report, 46-7
Rural areas: number unemployed, 555; proportion of women obtaining jobs after separation, 284. See also Drought areas; Farmers
Rural vs. urban legislators, as related to meeting of relief needs, 701-3
Ryan, P. E., 647n
Savings accounts, in relation to eligibility, 397-8, 402-3
Schwellenbach, L. B., 400n, 578, 663, 710
"Seeking work," in relation to eligibility, 481-3
Self-employed persons, eligibility of, 512-3
[Senate] Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures and Use of Governmental Funds. See Sheppard Committee
Senate Special Committee to Investigate Unemployment and Relief. See Byrnes Committee
Sentiment, public. See Public opinion
Sentinels of the Republic, 754-5
Separations, 497, 628-33. See also Dismissals; Eighteen-month employment provision; Suspensions: Turnover
Settlement, legal. See Residence requirements
Sewing projects, 257n, 279, 281, 285, 285n
Sharecroppers, referral of, 506, 511
"Sheltered" employment, proposal, 470-1, 851
Shepherd, S. M., 186n, 199n, 233n, 238n, 276n, 455n, 478n
Sheppard Committee, 116n, 590-1, 600n, 750-1
Sherrill, C. O., 762-3
Shirking on the job, 208, 244-5, 251-2, 257-8. See also Efficiency, worker
Shoup, Carl, 661n
"Shovel-leaning." See Shirking on the job
Sickness: as primary cause for supplementary aid, 203-4; making up lost time due to, 217
Sidel, J. E., 337n
Simons, S. C., 422n
Single and unattached persons: discrimination against, 348, 417-8; employment percentage, 419; general relief eligibility, 65-6; Illinois two-month work limit, 517-8; veteran proportion, 330
Sinnock, Jean, 93n
Skill for the job, 236-41, 247, 307
Skilled workers: assigned to unskilled work, 233, 234, 235; percentage of, 186, 187, 209n; wage rate, 167, 860-2
Skills: distribution of workers according to, 186, 187; utilization of, 100n, 228-36, 281, 292, 781-4, 845
Smith, A. D., 67n
Smith, A. E., 287n
Social Security Act, court decisions on, 42-3, 705-6, 721
Safety, emphasis on. See Accident prevention
Index

Social security benefits: administration of, 27-8; contributory, 831-2; eligibility for, as bearing on WPA eligibility, 271-2, 278, 425-40; need for federal direct relief to undergird, 836-8; total number of cases, July, 1935-June, 1941, 854-7. See also Unemployment compensation benefits

Social Security Board: administration of special assistance programs, 27-8; ruling on nature of WPA wages as affecting unemployment compensation, 436-7; withholding of federal funds, 737-8, 749

Social Work Conference on Federal Action on Unemployment, 700n

Social Work Year Book, survey of relief and WPA employment policies, 334n

Social workers: favor work as opposed to direct relief, 811; role of, in needs investigation, 173, 179, 346. See also American Association of Social Workers

Somervell, B. B., 396, 518, 746n

South: consumer income distribution, 677; employment increases, 507-8, 589, 593; FSA grants, 508; needs standards, 581; Negro eligibility and employment, 287, 293-4, 386, 390, 452; public works policy curbs migration, 263; surplus commodities, 210; tax capacity, 668-9; unemployed as affected by poll tax, 7030, 704; unemployment extensions, 438n; wage rates, 159, 162-3, 166, 184, 188, 201, 206-7, 395, 771-2; women, 281, 452

Special assistance. See Social security benefits

Spending for recovery. See Federal spending for recovery

Spending of grants or earnings, restrictions on, 57, 179-80, 348-9, 393, 394

Sponsors: attitude toward non-residents, 336; contributions, 145-50, 253, 256, 546, 608, 634, 773-4, 823; failure to provide projects, 292, 293, 542, 608, 634; frauds, 143; law requires, 140; types of, 144-5

Springer, Gertrude, 95n, 193n, 505

St. Louis, relief reports, 84, 87

Stamp plan. See Food stamp plan

Standard of living: federal responsibility for, 770-4, 836-9; in relation to wage rate, 175-8, 188n, 770-2

Standards. See Budgetary standards; Earnings, comparisons; Grant standards; Need; Wage rate, local control as threat to

Starnes Bill, 306

State organization, WPA, 109-11, 603

State plans for social security assistance: approved by Social Security Board as of Jan., 1942, 27-8; prescribed conditions under which federally approved, 27

States: consumer income differences, 675-9; employment monthly average per population, 858-9; fiscal capacity, 653-6, 660-72, 679-90; income payments per capita differences, 674-5, 676, 689; legal foundation of relief programs in, 52-3; needs unmet by, 79-96, 648-52; numbers granted relief, differences in, 67-9, 687; numbers in need of relief, differences in, 674, 675; participation in general relief costs, 55-7; supervision of general relief, 54-5; unemployment extensions, differences in, 672-3; WPA employment as related to unemployment, 684-6, 689; WPA expenditures as related to tax collections, 680-1, 682-3, 689; work-relief programs, 609, 633-40. See also Federal-local co-operation; Federal responsibility for relief

Statutory basis. See Legal basis

Stead, W. H., 135

Stecker, M. L., 176n, 178

Steegmuller, Francis, 98n

Steele, Mary, 293

Steiwer, Frederick, 304, 746-7

Stevens, Alden, 64n

Strauss, Harold, 850n

Strikers, eligibility of, 227, 473-6

Strikes, called, 216, 224-7, 434. See also Labor relations, right to strike

Studenski, Paul, 757, 758

Subsidies to business, 692-3, 699

Subversive activities, alleged, 218n, 225, 295, 316, 318-24

Sullivan, Mark, 332

Supervisory employees: certification exceptions, 356-9; how selected, 114; lack of competent, 250-2; name publicizing, 114-5; number of, 164, 186, 187

Supplementary income: from CCC and NYA, 207; from private employment, 207-9, 215, 395-7, 444-5; from relief, 82, 192, 198-207, 422-3, 618, 764; from surplus commodities, 210-2

Supplies, project, as related to costs, 252-5, 601

Supreme Court decisions, relief and social security, 42-3, 646, 705-6, 721

Surplus commodities, 70-5, 88, 210-2, 809
Index

Surplus Marketing Administration. See Surplus commodities

Survey Midmonthly, relief reports, 83, 94-5

Suspensions, worker, 244-5, 322n, 493, 515. See also Dismissals; Eighteen-month employment provision

Sweeney, M. L., 825-6

Taber Amendment, 809

Taber, John, 239, 312, 407n

Taft, C. P., 97, 155-6, 711, 761n

Taft, R. A., 263, 743

Taxation: ability to pay, 660-7, 679-80; as percentage of income, 662; broader tax base of federal government, 667-72; differences in WPA expenditures in relation to state and local, 680-1, 682-3; resources vs. needs in relation to, 681-91; sources, 660-72

Technical workers. See Professional and technical workers

Temporary National Economic Committee, 662

Tenure of jobs. See Eighteen-month employment provision

Teske, A. J., 63n

Texas, relief studies and reports, 71, 73-4, 77, 83, 92. See also McLennan County

Theater projects, 132, 138-40, 229, 239, 294-5

Thirty-day lay-offs. See Eighteen-month employment provision

Thompson, Dorothy, 323-4

Thurston, Floyd, 312

Time lost: injuries as cause of, 266; policy on, 168-70, 202, 203n, 210-1, 213, 217-8, 247

Tolan Committee, recommendation as to non-settled persons, 62

Toledo, relief study, 76-7

Training on the job, 128, 164-5, 237-8, 241-3, 252, 285. See also Rehabilitation

Transients. See Migrants

Transportation costs, worker, 203n, 204, 206, 263-4, 634

Tuberculous workers, special project for, 465

Turnover: relief rolls, 31-3; WPA, 518, 519, 525. See also Dismissals; Eighteen-month employment provision; Separations; Suspensions

Twenty-first Century Fund Committee on Government Credit, 656-7

Unattached persons. See Single and unattached persons

Unavailability for assignment, in eligibility determination. See Availability for assignment

Uncertified status. See Non-certified status

Unemployable persons: federal government's policy on, 716-9, 725n, 808; physical examinations in doubtful cases, 459-63. See also "Employables" vs. "unemployables"

Unemployed "through no fault of their own," in eligibility determination, 472-3. See also Strikers

Unemployment: allocation of job quotas based on, 596-9; effects of, 777-84, 794-7, 817-8; estimates of, 535n, 567n, 581n, 599, 854-7; median since last private employment, 477-8; problem and cure national, 720-5; question as to length of time before jobless given public work, 478-81; state differences in extent of, 672-3; WPA employment as related to, 535-7, 550, 554-7, 570, 587-9, 593-4, 684-6, 689. See also Federal responsibility for providing work; Work

Unemployment census, findings of: 1937, 277, 282, 290, 420, 554, 672; 1940, 555-7, 672-3

Unemployment compensation benefits: average monthly compared with WPA wage, 439-40; eligibility for, as related to WPA eligibility, 435-40, 476-7

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, living costs survey, 772-3

United States Chamber of Commerce. See Chamber of Commerce of the United States

United States Conference of Mayors: appropriation increases advocated, 572, 580, 582; employment quota inadequacy estimated, 616, 624; federal responsibility for providing work supported, 654-5, 719; federal responsibility for relief opposed, 98; means test approved, 353; project appraisal report, 154; work vs. direct relief favored, 810, 826

United States Department of Agriculture, report of secretary, 511-2

Unmet need: evidences of, in local studies and reports, 70-96; federal responsibility as related to, 648-52

Unskilled workers: assignments as, 233; comprise largest group of family
Index

Unskilled workers—Cont.
heads, 230; Negro women, 292; percentage employed, 186, 187; upgrading protested by AF of L, 237; wage rate, 161n, 176-8, 194-5, 860-2
Upgrading. See Training on the job
Urban vs. rural legislators, as related to meeting of relief needs, 701-3
Utley, Freda, 758n
Vandenberg, A. H., 740n
Van Sickle, J. V., 263, 509n
Veterans: bonus and eligibility, 400-2; “bonus march,” 367; certification, 357-8, 377, 378; discrimination, 331, 387; eighteen-month lay-off ruling exemption, 523, 525; employment totals, 330; hours of work, 213-4; need standard, 383-4, 400-2; no work history requirement proposed, 456; preference, 118-9, 164, 175, 245, 269, 274, 276, 307, 325-9, 383-4, 407n, 415, 417, 456n; relative need, 415, 417; unemployment compensation benefits, 438-9; wage policy, 175, 331, 383
Veterans of Foreign Wars, 308, 326, 401
Vocational training. See Training on the job
Voorhis, Jerry, 134n, 254, 317n, 376, 578
Wage rate: budgetary deficiency basis, 172-8; differentials, 159-78, 183-4, 770-1; family allowance principle, 845; hours of work as affecting, 213-8; in relation to family needs, 172-5; in relation to living costs, 175-8; local control as a threat to, 762-5; monthly schedule basis, 158-65; prevailing, 214-6, 224-5, 256-9, 261, 845; private employment comparison, 165-7; protection and improvement of, 784-5; relief grants comparison, 193-8; security, 159-78, 342, 382-4, 387, 420-1, 821; trainees', 241-2. See also Earnings; Supplementary income
Walker, M. L., 661n
Wallace, H. A., 838-9
Walsh, D. I., 665
War contract employment, effect of on WPA employment, 557-8, 569, 573-4, 598
War material, ban on production of, 132
Warren, Charles, 665
Washington, D. C. See District of Columbia
Washington (State), relief reports, 80, 83
Watson, Carl, 396
Webb, J. N., 478n, 807
Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, 660n, 691n
Webb, W. P., 694
Welfare Council, New York City, 211
Westbrook, J. Lawrence, 170
White, L. D., 645, 771-2
White-collar workers: declared “unemployable” in some areas, 449; limitation on assignments of, 232; Negro, 292-3; upgrading, 238; utilization of skills, 233, 607, 783
White House Conference on Children in a Democracy, 97
Whitten, J. W., 293
Williams, A. W.: addresses and interviews, 98-9, 1160, 258, 352-3, 441, 589, 614, 778, 792, 819; testimony before Congress, 427, 615, 740, 766; writings quoted, 709-10, 783
Williams, E. A., 726n, 735n, 762
Willingness to work. See Relief recipients; “Seeking work”
Willkie, W. L., 593n, 711
Wilson, Woodrow, plea for foreign relief, 709
Wisconsin, work-relief program, 637-8
Women: awaiting assignment, 281-2; certification denied, 449-50; characteristics, 282-5; duration of employment, 283-4; eligibility, 278-9; family status and responsibilities, 283, 349-50, 420n; Negro, 282, 292, 294, 452; number employed, 280-1; projects for, 281; return to private employment, 284-5; “seeking work” given special interpretation, 481; single, 419n; special employment difficulties, 278-80. See also Domestic and personal service workers; Household training projects; Sewing projects
Woodrum, C. A., 112n, 113n, 128-9, 179, 180, 521
Woodrum Amendment, 586n
Woodrum Committee, 153, 225n, 241, 294-5, 319, 591-2
Work: as stimulus to economic recovery, 352, 797-804; makes use of idle manpower, 794-7, 822-3, 848; right to, 352-3, 441, 785-8. See also Democracy; Employment standards; Federal responsibility for providing work; Morale; Public order; Purchasing power; Unemployment; Work habits
Work-and-relief dilemma, 246-50, 277, 336-7, 380-1, 421-2, 447, 455-6, 465, 480-1, 526-7, 842n
Work camps, 262, 338, 358n
Work conditions. See Absence; Accident prevention and compensation; Assignment near homes; Dismissals; Earnings, restrictions on spending;
Index

Work conditions—Cont.
Efficiency; Grievances, hearings, and appeals; Holidays; Hours of work; Labor relations; Overtime; Sickness; Skills; Suspensions; Time lost; Transportation costs; Wage rate
Work experience: previous, 453-7; register of, 494
Work habits, preservation of, 235, 781-4, 815-6
Work program, dual, proposed, 470-1, 849-52
Work-relief programs, state and local, 609, 633-40, 762-3, 824-5, 826n
Work relief vs. direct relief: administration's stand, 805-8; benefit standards, 819-21; costs and economy, 822-4; morale preservation, 827-30; "pauperization," 811-9, 830-32; position of Congress, 809; President Roosevelt's views, 805-6, 809, 822; public opinion, 810-1, 830-2; relief recipients prefer work, 824-6; work always better than direct relief questioned, 827-30. See also Skills; Work habits

Workers Alliance of America: communistic tendencies charged to, 120, 319; eligibility recommendations of, 314, 424, 429; WPA labor relations, views on, 219n, 221. See also David Lasser
Workers, project: characteristics, 248, 256, 260-1, 812, 813-6; criticism of, 208, 257-8; curbs on political activity, 116-8; distribution according to age, 273-7; distribution according to skill, 186-7, 209n, 230-1; distribution according to type of community, 338, 339. See also Domestic and personal service workers; Indians; Negroes; Professional workers; Skilled workers; Unskilled workers; White-collar workers; Women
Wright, Richard, 237
Writers' projects, 236-7, 239
Yates, M. D., 461n
Youths: public work recommendation, 843n; work experience waived, 453

Zachry, H. B., 137

879