

RESETTLING AMERICA

Dr. Tugwell's Dream Cities of Utopia

BY BLAIR BOLLES

A good many years before Goddard perfected the reprehensible horse and buggy — about 1770, to be exact — a European panacea for curing all economic ills, known as the Cottage-Holding System, died of its own futility. Today — under a New Deal that will try anything once — the Washington wizards have resurrected this agrarian phony, polished its bones, pumped \$60,000,000 of supposedly sound money into the corpse, and given us Resettlement. With only an ambiguous permission from Congress, Dr. Roosevelt has appropriated the lives of 11,000 bewildered American citizens, jerked them out of their homes, taken complete charge of their destinies, and set them to tilling soil and producing an abundance — at the same time that he pays their neighbors to grow nothing. He has destroyed their sense of civic responsibility, blue-printed their lives, and dumped them in Alaska, or New Jersey, or Washington, or West Virginia, or wherever some day-dreaming bureaucrat has put a finger on the map, in the hope that a Planned Economy would

follow. The supposition is that, given a home, the occupant will find a source of income; which is in conflict with the old-fashioned human custom of developing a source of income first and building the home afterward.

To the Cottage-Holding skeleton, the Master Minds have added complicating features of the feudal land system, the Soviet co-operative farm, the Oneida Community, the musical republic set up by the Jesuits for the redmen of Paraguay, and overtones of Coney Island. They are determined to prove that the best weapon against the specter of urban over-industrialization is the simple one of running away from it. The 11,000 victims of this rural migration are already indebted to the United States Government for, in at least one instance, as much as \$20,000 per head; almost 1000 owe more than \$5000; and approximately 9000 are on the cuff for the comparatively trifling sum of \$3000. Yet oddly enough, these Americanos were granted federal succor on the sole plea that they were improv-

erished, broken in spirit, hungry, and jobless. Now, however, they must pay monthly installments to a mortgage holder, in this case not a gallus-snapping country banker but the Federal Government, which has proved surprisingly stony-hearted in its treatment of delinquent beneficiaries of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation. And where is the money coming from to meet these mortgage payments? Supposedly from the happy homestead toil of the 11,000 transplanted pants-pressers, fruit vendors, mechanics, cab-drivers, one-crop farmers, garment workers, stone cutters, cabinet makers, apple growers, and radical orators who are to be converted from urban dole-takers into agrarian peers by the simple process of following a blueprint.

Of course, in the end, this whole gaudy experiment in blurred sociology will be paid for by the 130,000,000 solvent Americans who remain un-Resettled, for the myopia of Resettlement itself precludes the hope that any large percentage of the experimentees will meet their debts. Nor is it a plea in extenuation to assert that merely a tiny fraction of America's population is directly benefited; such an argument can only raise the forthright question: Why, in a democracy, are so few to receive the supposed blessings of the decentralization of industry? The truth of the matter is that if Resettlement is to be successful in a practical sense,

the entire economic system of America must be revised. And that motive, perhaps, brings the whole question into the open, where it can be appraised in the light of the New Deal's collectivist program. For Resettlement is, in essence, merely another step toward the ultimate regimentation of the populace. It was born in the fulsome minds of Drs. Rexford Tugwell and Harry Hopkins and is being carried out by the hand-picked adjutants of their Make-America-Over Corps. These hired planners of the New Atlantis right now are in full cry on the spoor of the millennium. And they are confident enough of their conspicuous talents to believe it can be snared as easily as Edward Bellamy fell asleep or as James Aloysius Farley lands a job for a shiftless nephew of a fellow Democratic contractor.

Hence, from the Cowlitz River in Washington to New Jersey's Millstone, the Republic is dappled with ninety-three Resettlement projects. In return for a house, for the privilege of basket-weaving, for the freedom to forge wrought-iron art objects and to spin wool in the parlor, to brush the teeth in a white-tiled bathroom, and to work in any industry God may send their way, the subsidized pioneers of 1936 agree to become inmates of a New Deal zoo for forty years and to leap spryly when Uncle Rex says jump. The homesteaders' existence supposedly is complete within the menagerie.

They raise their own food, fashion their own tools, build their own houses, and attend their own schools. They are as deliberately decentralized as is possible in a world of steadily narrowing limits. Some of them, it is true, go to work daily at industries established by the old Capitalistic Bosses, but before and after hours, in their homes in the Resettlement villages, their lives are communal and their activities reputedly self-sustaining. Everybody is a builder; everybody is an artist; everybody is a handicrafter; everybody is a potential Leader in the Good Life to Come. As one of the numberless federal pamphlets declares:

Constructive use of leisure time for low-income workers can best be found in the home production of food and its preservation by canning and drying, home production of so-called "handicraft" products primarily for home use but also for sale, all of which will add to the family income. . . . Living expenses will be lowered by supplying better housing at less, or no increase in cost, by reducing the demand for vicarious amusements which necessitated expenditure of funds.

This spells hardship for market-farmers; it takes business from food packers; it is resented by Navajo Indian blanket-weavers and Snuffy Smith mountaineer craftsmen; it steals a large following from the movie theaters — but it all works for the stabilization of America-Made-Over.

The escapists reading books before the throne of Dr. Tugwell expect that the project-dwelling hailers of Backward, Ho! will become rich enough in forty years, through gardening, canning, weaving, and neglect of the movies, to repay government loans averaging above \$5000, while they clothe and feed their families, and meet the bills for electricity coming over New Deal wires. Starry-eyed Dr. Tugwell explained to a radio audience why he advertises as omnipotent the Cottage-Holding System which once was the mistress of poverty: "It is possible to have a new era in terms of assured income, security, and contentment at a high standard of living." But Rex is only hovering ghostlike over the sepulcher of that old irconcilable Utopian, William Cobbett, whose astral body belongs today to the New Radicals.

II

The corpse of subsistence living was revived by the National Recovery Industrial Act, section 208 of Title 11 (which is still constitutional):

To provide for aiding the redistribution of the overbalance of population in industrial centers, \$25,000,000 is hereby made available to the President, to be used by him through such agencies as he may make, for making loans and for otherwise aiding in the purchase of subsistence homesteads. The moneys collected as repayment of said loans shall con-

stitute a revolving fund as directed by the President for the purposes of this section.

To administer this section of the law, the President designated Secretary of the Interior Dr. Ickes, who established the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. A subsistence homestead, according to Bulletin No. 1 of the Division, entitled *Homestead and Hope*, "consists of a modern but inexpensive house and outbuildings located on a plot of ground upon which a family may produce a considerable portion of the food required for home consumption. . . . The homesteads, when completed, are sold on liberal terms to families with annual incomes of less than \$1200. The sales price of the average homestead is \$3000."

This latter figure, however, is the poetic dream of a social visionary. The sales price of only 235 of 2908 homesteads is \$3000 or less; only 1600 rural palaces in the California Migratory Camp cost less than \$3000 among the 7000 houses on the projects planned or in the early stages of development. The average income of each experimenter is incomputable. One dweller in Arthurdale, West Virginia, disclosed that his year's wealth equalled \$590.50, divided as follows: \$85 from the sale of cucumbers, \$18 for wheat, and \$487.50 for hire as a laborer. But he must pay monthly on his \$10,000 house-and-lot loan. As for the \$25,000,000 federal allotment mentioned

in the law, it has been swelled to \$58,000,000 on the books, with no records kept of CWA, FERA, and WPA funds paid to Relief laborers employed on the projects. More than in any other New Deal dodge, the practice prevails here of "throw 'em cake", as long as Congress provides it.

Out of the Subsistence Homesteads Division grew the Resettlement Administration, organized on May 1, 1935, by executive order. Placed under the direction of Dr. Tugwell, it is committed to four functions:

1. To Resettle; meaning a continuation of the subsistence homesteads program, the transfer of farmers from poor land to better (at an average cost of \$5000), and the building of "suburban Resettlements" like the Tugwelltown Greenbelt in Maryland, just outside the District of Columbia line.

2. To rehabilitate farmers by loans for the purchase of farm supplies, for renting land, for repairing farm equipment and buildings, and for subsistence.

3. To adjust farm debts.

4. To make an inventory of the land resources of each State and plan their "proper" use, and to purchase some 9,000,000 acres of unproductive land (206 projects in 44 States) to be developed into grazing areas, forests, wild-life preserves, recreation grounds, and picnic nooks.

To these four ends, RA, aside from

its drought-relief work, has spent or lent \$98,000,000 of the \$275,000,000 under its control. To administer the distribution of this \$98,000,000, RA employs 15,804 jobholders who are paid \$21,082,000 a year. Rehabilitation loans and grants have gone to 500,965 farmers. Farm debts have been adjusted for 17,460. At work on the Resettlement projects as laborers, averaging sixty-five cents an hour for a thirty-hour week, are 12,086, and on the land-use program, 59,376.

Yet today, because of the impossibility of custom-building economy, Resettlement is more a monument to recreation and leisure than anything else. Leisure, for the cohorts of Drs. Hopkins and Tugwell, has superseded Love as the supreme experience of mankind. The countless memoranda produced by the Subsistence Homesteads Division fondle this theme with all the passion shown by a barfly for *Sweet Adeline*. The pace was set by a ukase declaring: "Subsistence Homesteads offer a means to use leisure time constructively", and every description of every project devotes at least one hundred words to the same end. Dr. Tugwell has the leisure-complex to a lesser degree than his adjutants and his fellow remodelers of America; but from its early momentum, the pursuit of idle time for the multitude now goes on like a planet through space.

This leisure, with well-constructed

homes, plots of ground, and clear views of the purpling sunset, is brought to thirteen Sioux Falls, South Dakota, families on a Resettlement project at an acknowledged cost of \$20,520 each. The benevolent government of a democracy of 130,000,000 inhabitants chose so to spoil .00000009603 per cent of their number because they were underprivileged and because they lacked a sense of leisure. For the sake of leisure, 200 needleworkers from New York City were installed at Hightstown, New Jersey, far from the madding crowd and farther still from the needle-goods market; they went to the wilds, at a cost of \$7850 each, because in Manhattan "the prospects of future employment are limited". Since operating garment factories were unable to give them steady work, the Hightstown homesteaders set up their own plant to compete with the privately owned establishments. Work the Resettled may not have; income may be as rare as a captive gorilla; brains may be dead, incentive lacking; but they can boast instruction in the use of leisure time by the soul-saving agents of a government Magog.

At the New Eden listed as Westmoreland Homesteads, Pennsylvania, 253 Adams at the heads of 253 families must find in communal poultry-raising sufficient income during the next forty years to repay to the successors of Drs. Hopkins, Ickes, and Tugwell the \$5390 each

owes for his five-room house, his two acres of ground, and his barn, while he keeps his property in good repair and stands in the good graces of the tax-collector.

At Arthurdale, the West Virginia Nirvana, sixty former coal miners are at work assembling vacuum cleaners, while the remaining sixty-five Resettlers make furniture which does not sell except to their fellow community dwellers, or work thirty hours a week at sixty-five cents an hour in building each others' houses. When these houses number 165, the men will turn to constructing a twenty-room inn in a community where even the Resettlement manager questions the number of visitors who might seek lodging.

At Crossville, Tennessee, the 334 roamers of the Elysium dubbed Cumberland Homesteads are expected to find in woodchopping and lumbering the wealth that will provide them with a living and the cash to pay off a debt of \$5050 each in monthly installments. These Tennessee Made-Overs were formerly destitute because the business of woodchopping and lumbering around Crossville was at a standstill.

Unless two-acre poultry-raising, then, pays magnificently, unless the Arthurdale inhabitants spend the next forty years in constructing houses which will not be needed, unless the penniless woodchoppers find large incomes in unnecessary woodchopping, unless the Hights-

town needleworkers sell the needlework for which there is no market, the Resettled will find themselves not merely unemployed, or half-employed, but actually failure debtors, evicted from their Paradises by the Earth-Shakers who supposed they could run counter to all the laws of society.

III

The vainglory of such economic contraception is best exhibited at Arthurdale. This \$3,000,000 West Virginia retreat for discouraged coal miners is the oldest of the ninety-three Resettlement communities. It is closer than any of the others to Eleanor Roosevelt's heart. It concerns the woes of an industrial group, the miners, sufficiently large to be representative of all labor in the United States. It has been operating long enough—three years—to demonstrate the failure of the theory which produced it and to explain that failure.

This Tugwellian Sparta occupies the 1133 sylvan acres of the old Richard M. Arthur estate, bought by the government in 1933. Two centuries ago the land belonged to Col. John Fairfax, the Virginia Colonial gentleman made famous by Parson Weems because George Washington—may he rest in his grave!—surveyed a part of his property. The well-built Arthur House, perhaps the sturdiest in the county, was

scrapped by the new owner, the Body Politic. Twenty-eight miles of tile were laid by 1000 CWA laborers to drain the glades, which are not yet drained. Nine miles of road were planned. From a mail-order firm, fifty houses were bought. Presto! Arthurdale was ready to operate.

The center of Arthurdale today is the Community Square, an open rectangle dedicated to the proposition that the New Deal is great stuff. Its buildings include a co-operative store, with profits returned to the Resettled as dividends. Below it is a cafeteria, with profits bound in the same direction. Then comes the church, where services are conducted on Sundays after its use on Saturday nights for square-dancing, admission 25 cents per man, with proceeds earmarked for community picnics. Beside the church is the furniture store, where sales are rare, and The Forge, where mighty smiths fashion art objects of iron. Next is the Resettlement office, presided over by G. M. Flynn, RA manager. Tacked on his door-frame is the Arthurdale theme song, a sugar verse clipped from a spirit-reviving magazine, *Be Strong!*

We are not here to play, to dream, to drift.

We have hard work to do and loads to lift.

Shun not the struggle—face it; 'tis God's gift.

Be strong!

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,

How hard the battle goes, the day how long!

Faint not, fight on! Tomorrow comes the song!

Mr. Flynn is the third guardian of the business of the Happy Homes of Mt. Briery. His predecessors were frowned upon by Resettlement because curious writers from the world beyond the Dream City learned too much about the silly doings of the inspired Duffs. The result is a ban on conversation. "Nice view, isn't it?" is the Arthurdale official's share of a dialogue with an outsider. Freedom of speech is a memory, and Mr. Flynn therefore is blessed by Washington. This sealed-lip policy is invoked to keep a family secret—the inanities of Arthurdale. The number of these is great; many have become standard gags among the neighbors and furnish a belly-laugh for the mourner at the dwindling Federal Treasury. For ease in cataloguing some of the more astounding items in this miscellany of mismanagement, we list them here in the handy style of the Winchellian litany, or Things the Taxpayer Never Knew Till Now:

That for the benefit of a colony of 400 children, the United States Government has erected six school houses, at a cost of \$9000 each.

That in April, 1936, seven months after they were built, the school houses had to be repaired because the caves ended so near the walls that water entered the cracks, froze, and split the timbers.

That the school houses are built close together in a row; but that for each of the six buildings there is a separate heating plant and each has its own janitor.

That the Arthurdale High School is not recognized by the school system of West Virginia, and that the three pupils who graduated from it last June received no credit from the State.

That the United States, which razed the sturdy, 26-room Arthur House, plans now to build a similar 21-room structure at a cost of \$11,000.

That the Division of Subsistence Homesteads bought fifty halters for fifty cows and then neglected to buy the cows.

That copper plumbing in the second set of houses has been replaced by brass in the third because the homesteaders inadvertently drove nails through the copper pipes, which are laid beneath the floors.

That eight wells were dug and then capped, when house sites were abandoned.

That at a cost of \$278, the United States carted eighty rhododendron plants to the project, where rhododendrons abound.

That every sink in every kitchen is equipped with a \$37.50 grease trap.

That for \$1100, a church 150 years old was bought and moved six miles, relodged, and then its sides knocked out to make possible easy access to the community furniture store and the cafeteria.

That the original plumbing contractor, whose work was completed in 1934, has not yet been paid.

That the roofs still leak on the famous "Shotgun" houses bought from the mail-order firm and rebuilt eight times before they became habitable.

That the average indebtedness of

the holder of a six-room Arthurdale house erected by the government is \$10,750; but that just two and a half miles from Arthurdale there was for sale in 1933 an eight-room and bath, two-story and basement brick dwelling, four years old, in a thirty-five acre plot, for \$5000.

The Arthurdale man arises early, tends his garden, averaging 3.9 acres, eats his breakfast from a maple table, and goes to his work — whether it be back to the garden, to the community field, building another house, to the \$78,000 factory, to the store, to the cafeteria, to The Forge, or to the furniture shop. If he earns \$400 a year, he is lucky. He must buy coal for his stove, but fuel is cheap — about \$1.50 a ton for run of the mine. He must pay the high rate of six cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. He must amortize his debt in monthly payments for forty years: but if each Made-Over paid \$20 a month, ignoring the interest charge, the sum recaptured by the United States would be but \$9600, while the debt averages \$10,750. And since the socio-economists who inspired subsistence homesteads and RA allot one-fifth of a man's income for housing, the Arthurdale homesteaders should be making \$100 a month or \$1200 a year. The real total for the more wealthy Arthurdalean, however, is less than half of this. The monthly payment, actually, is not a constant figure; it is to be raised gradually for five years on the supposition that by the end of such a

period, each homesteader will have become self-sustaining through the operation of test-tube economy. But \$1200 was an income denied millions of Americans in 1929. It is a rarity in the Arthurdale neighborhood today even among successful and self-supporting citizens.

In this connection, it is worthwhile to note that Arthurdale was established to fetch the Balm of Gilead to the jobless coal miners in the camps of Scott's Run, a little Dawson on the outskirts of Morgantown, one of West Virginia's most respectable communities. Until the middle 'Twenties, Scott's Run did pretty well, but the Depression brought unemployment. Mrs. Roosevelt, whose interest in miners transcends even her interest in other people's children, heard of conditions at Scott's Run and went to see for herself. The result was wire-pulling in Washington and the choice of northwestern West Virginia as the site of the first Utopia.

The news got around that applicants were wanted to enjoy the Preston County heaven. But here arose the first problem. The planners of Arthurdale insisted that the settlers meet a high standard. Hence, they admitted only the cream of the Scott's Run distressed, the group which could most easily land jobs in a normal world. The result so far has been to prove that for \$3,000,000, the American taxpayer can support in mild luxury 165 men and their

families, capable of supporting themselves elsewhere.

The basis of Arthurdale thus shows itself to be that eighteenth-century phony, the Cottage-Holding System. It has also certain evidences of feudalism, with the homesteader serfs owing a limited bondage to the lord of the manor, the local manager; the homesteaders' contracts hold them to their homes unless they can find satisfactory successors, but they may be banished at any time they outrage their master. Regarded from another viewpoint, it is a Russian collective farm, with the common fields tilled by employees of the co-operative, their produce marketed by the co-operative, and the profits, if any, distributed as dividends among all the homesteaders.

But perhaps New Deal Congressman Jennings Randolph of West Virginia knows better than anyone just what Resettlement is. At the June graduation of Arthurdale students who won't be accepted by West Virginia colleges, and to an audience of vacuum-cleaner assemblers, basket-weavers, art-object molders, and highly proficient pupils of Leisure, he said, addressing his portentous remarks to the agog person of Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt:

"We are deeply and sincerely appreciative of the work you, Mrs. Roosevelt, have done here in Arthurdale, knowing that you are making a pattern for future Americans."

SOLILOQUY IN LATE AUTUMN

BY TED OLSON

YEAR's ebb again: the slow tide sagging
Torpidly sleepward; earth's veins, and men's
Sluggish with frost; shell ice along the fens;
Meadows flint to the heel; the wind bragging

Empty and loud in the eaves. So all years ended:
Another harvest; hay once more in the stack
Rain-rotted, a stench of dust, tobacco-black;
All to do over, nothing as he intended.

Sick of it, sick of the imbecile recurrence
Of life, he watched the cattle turn away
Unsatisfied from the counterfeit of hay,
And envied them their stoical, drugged endurance.

Life's ebb, he knew: the sap as surely
Draining out of the arm as from the bough;
The mind a flinty furrow where the plow
Turned rust; and twilight coming down, too early.

World's ebb. . . . Above him the windy ceiling
Of cloud tore wide a moment to an immense,
Star-pitted gulf; he had a giddy sense
The flimsy planet underfoot was reeling

Drunkenly on through space to some appalling,
Inscrutable doom, to wreck on cosmic shores
Swept clean of its cargo of men and their greeds and wars,
And better so. . . .

He heard the cattle bawling,
And took his pails, and went about his chores.