

Senator Robert F. Wagner

IN the federal social security act is embodied the most concentrated effort made by any nation to alleviate the hazards of modern industrial life. Upon that foundation we have just commenced to build. We must extend the act to those groups as yet uncovered by its provisions. We must develop a higher standard of comfort for the old, a wider margin of protection for the unemployed, a more far-reaching system of aid to the crippled and the destitute. Vocational rehabilitation, a more pressing need now than ever before, must be pushed forward. Methods must be devised shortly for removing the risks which the wage earner faces through ill health. Vistas of human achievement stretch before us, awaiting only our will to achieve.

Experience has taught us that a program's merits do not insure its adoption. The future of low rent housing, of social security, of industrial justice, depends upon the energy, the determination, and the resourcefulness of those who are fighting for social progress in America.

state or local responsibility: "Only yesterday work relief was also traditionally a local program. There is absolutely no reason in theory or common sense why the federal government should aid the states in work relief and not in the general home assistance program." But what is needed, she said, is not merely more relief but more and new ways of removing people from the "great relief pool"; more categories—for the chronically ill for example; retraining for employables and near-employables; better ways of finding jobs for those on relief rolls. As to standards of relief:

The greatest difficulty in getting decent standards comes from the low wages and the inadequate incomes of the families just above the relief level. If the independent wage earners are not able to earn even the minimum of subsistence, we shall not be allowed to give adequate care to families supported by the help of public funds. . . . To find some way to help that group, who are above the relief level, but below the minimum standard of living, is the great problem that the social worker and the community must find a way to solve together.

But what about funds to finance an adequate public assistance program, Miss Abbott asked and answered:

It is one of the tragedies of our democracy that taxes are so often large enough for many of the most urgent needs, but that these great funds are not used for the people's benefit. First, there is that enormous section of the federal taxes that goes for the army and navy, the Veterans' Administration, the national debt incurred for war purposes, and all the other expenditures for past and future wars. Then there is all the money wasted to reward the political friends of the successful party. I am sure you will agree that this is the real boondoggling. . . . It is like a great sieve letting the tax collected funds disappear. You know how it is even in the new social security program which we have been watching so anxiously. Here, there, and everywhere, political friends of somebody are appointed as administrators of old age pensions, administrators of child welfare, administrators of this or that, and then we are told that some social worker will be appointed as an assistant to do the work. The money is there, but it is thrown away. . . . Is it unreasonable then to ask

for enough to give the people a little hope of security? At any rate we are going to ask for more money from taxes, and some other interests can take less.

Senator Wagner's speech at the second evening meeting—and incidentally all the general sessions "played to capacity"—came only a few hours after the Supreme Court decision upholding major sections of the social security act. As the sponsor of that act he was given a welcome that must have been startling to the rafters of the big bleak tabernacle. Social workers long have looked to Senator Wagner for leadership in social legislation, and he gave the conference a lift that lasted through the entire week by pledging his influence toward the establishment of a federal department of public welfare in the President's cabinet and toward child labor legislation, and by staking his judgment that a form of health insurance "can be worked out that will be satisfactory both to the public and the physicians."

On the same program with Senator Wagner was Mayor Neville Miller of Louisville who told of the welfare problems created by last January's floods—"our mid-winter damp spell"—and the community of effort that dealt with them. He pointed out that in dollars and cents a flood is less expensive than a full-blown strike. So rosily did he paint the picture of Louisville's recovery that a flood seemed almost a blessing.

The following evening, Tuesday night of conference week, again brought two speakers to the platform, Charles P. Taft of Cincinnati and Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, Washington, D. C. Mr. Taft, whose subject was Public Welfare and Efficiency in Government, was of the opinion that in the whole matter of unemployment, "the root of our problems today," there can be no coordinated governmental effort until "the governments, from Washington to the townships and villages, think of themselves as partners." More than that, employers, the unemployed and the run of the mill people of each and every community must be taken into a partnership of understanding with all the social agencies, public and private, dealing with the problem. "The democratic way is to educate us all about the facts and then to plan our attack and mobilize everybody in the community. . . . Educate the public in plain simple words, not the shop talk that saves your own time."

Mr. Taft is a firm believer in the function of lay boards, committees and volunteer workers as interpreters:

If you build up over a period of years real lay committees and volunteer workers, you won't need to worry about public relations. They will interpret your work for you and they will multiply your hands. They are likely to be individualists; you can't bawl them out or order them around, and they are sometimes nuisances; but they are nevertheless a cross section of the people of the United States, and you had better learn to make them your friends and helpers if you really want social work to play the part it can in healing the wounds of our machine age.

Dr. Johnson, in a deeply moving address, pleaded for economic opportunity for Negroes who had suffered during the depression out of all proportion to their numbers, and whose mass migration northward has transferred to northern cities the so-called race problem:

It should be the policy of every northern city to open employment to every human being on the basis of ability and standing. . . . It is a serious and solemn obligation on the

party in power to set the Negro peon and the poor white tenant slave free economically. If the party does not attempt that it will be haunted to the day of its inevitable death.

At the final evening meeting of the conference, Governor Murphy, fresh from the auto strikes of Michigan, asserted that the one outstanding failure in efficiency in American industrial organization has been "in the relationships between the two groups who together run industry—the employers and the employees." He discussed strikes as an index of the status of industrial relations, went on record as "unable to endorse" proposals for compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes, and outlined the role of government as the agent of the public interest in such disputes. He summarized the role of government as a mutual friend, intelligent moderator and active participant with labor and employers in finding a solution and reiterated his faith that "the peaceful way is the right way."

Although Harry L. Hopkins, Works Progress administrator, spoke under the auspices of the American Public Welfare Association and not of the conference proper, his address gave to the association's big dinner all the interest and impact of a general session. Mr. Hopkins' topic was The Works Program, but he had little to say bearing directly on it. Rather he argued for "a permanent social policy, not only to mitigate the evils of unemployment, but also to provide for those who are unable to find work inside the economic system." He discussed at some length the necessity of extending and strengthening the coverage of the social security act and emphasized his belief that "any unemployment insurance is a step forward so long as we realize that it acts only as a first line of defense and must be supported by other means of helping the unemployed."

Mr. Hopkins studiously ignored all the challenging gloves that had been cast in his direction during the week and entered into no discussion whatever of the question of federal funds for direct relief. This, it might be added, to the disappointment of those who had anticipated if not actually hoped for a revival of the controversy over federal responsibility for relief that ran through the conference last year in Atlantic City. With the WPA appropriation on the floor of Congress and the whole program in the balance, Mr. Hopkins perhaps had enough argument on his hands without taking on the social workers.

In attempting to trace major currents of interest through the conference it is not possible to stick to the divisions of subject matter as indicated by the section and committee programs. It didn't work that way. Anyone who expected to get the full range of discussion of a subject by following a single section found, long before the end of the week, that he was missing some pretty important contributions. Take, for example, the subject of public assistance. Against the backdrop of Miss Abbott's presidential address that subject, in one aspect or another, ran through two or three sections and as many committees.

In considering the "great relief pool" the social workers at this conference gave less attention to analyzing the size and content of the pool—all of which they knew too well—than to proposals for liquidating it and to problems of administration, planning and finance, not only of relief but of all public assistance. Charlotte Carr, executive director of the New York City Emergency Relief Bureau, set the stage when she said, "Public relief must now meet the challenge of contraction. Its expansion was not planned; its contraction must be, as it is related to a permanent set-up."

Miss Carr reviewed the methods of reducing the relief

Administrator Harry L. Hopkins

A COMPREHENSIVE and well integrated program for the unemployed must be established for the future. It must include the unemployment insurance program to care for the short term type [of employment]. I believe that the unemployed should be given some other form of public assistance as soon as their unemployment benefits run out, and that form of public assistance should be work. I believe that there will always be projects of a worthwhile character to furnish work for the unemployed. The basic elements in the proposed remedy are in existence and functioning. There is need to integrate and strengthen what is being done now in order that the unemployed will be assured the security they have the right to expect from their government. . . .

During the past four years we have laid the groundwork for a system of social economic justice in America. There remains the greater task of its growth and fulfillment. All of these things can and will be done because they must be done. For me, the question is, "How long must we wait?"

pool in New York, and concluded that unemployment insurance offers the most impressive prospect.

But the answer to much of the relief problem, Miss Carr holds, is not in security services or in bigger and better relief, but in better labor conditions and higher wages:

I am tired of hearing of minimum wages. I want to hear of maximum wages to enable men to care for their own families and to meet their own needs, including unemployment. As for large families now on relief—if they are to be removed from the relief rolls, wages must be higher than any minimum figure that I have yet heard proposed.

In more than one conference session William Hodson, commissioner of public welfare in New York City, urged the proposal, first broached last year, of a presidential commission "to study the baffling national problem called relief and unemployment." To the American Association of Social Workers he posed some of the questions that are perplexing the whole country and said:

The time has come when the President should bring to his aid the best brains of the country to study this national problem. We need such study, not only by government officials but by the ablest private citizens and recognized experts in the fields of finance, economics, industry and social work who can be brought together in a presidential commission along the general lines outlined in the Murray-Hatch resolution now pending in the U. S. Senate.

Such a commission will need time and money to undertake this monumental task of study, analysis and program making. This is no job for politicians and headline hunters; the solution of this problem requires the highest type of statesmanship and its work can be made of inestimable value to the country. It may take a year or longer to do this job—it will certainly cost more than \$50,000 if the work is properly done, but it will be worth its weight in gold if it gives the nation a true appraisal of the situation and some sound leads for future action.

The persistence of the idea that unemployment is a temporary phenomenon calling only for emergency treatment is a serious handicap to dealing with it, said Joanna C. Colcord of the Russell Sage Foundation, New York, in discussing provision for the unemployed:

The British know better. They realize that once unemploy-

ment seriously attacks an industrialized capitalistic economy its grip cannot be completely loosened again. The British have decided to live with unemployment, checking it by all means possible and cushioning its inroads by means of the social services. . . . Eventually we shall reach the same conclusion.

Saying, "Let's keep our feet on the ground and set down only what might really come to pass," Miss Colcord offered a three point program which she called "lines of defense":

First would be a combination of health insurance with a liberalized system of unemployment insurance . . . set up and financed so that income and outgo will balance, over a period of years. This means necessary restrictions upon eligibility and upon amount and duration of benefit, though none of these need to be so rigid as in our present laws.

The second line should be a work program to absorb as many as possible for a second limited period after right to cash benefit is exhausted. Such a program should be headed up in a federal department of public works, with funds to distribute on a grants-in-aid basis to states and through them to localities.

The third line should be a nation-wide, federally-supervised and federally-subsidized system of public welfare. Here, for the first time in the course of his period of unemployment, the worker would be expected to demonstrate his need for assistance.

When it came to the problems of administering public assistance there was plenty of testimony from people close in to the job, but abundant evidence that the whole thing is

a tough proposition and that no one knows all the answers.

Personnel, it was agreed, is the crux of good administration. Without it the best of programs however adequately supported will falter and fail. But how to get it is something else again.

In this connection Lewis Meriam of The Brookings Institution, Washington, D. C. discussed civil service tests for social work positions, admitting somewhat sadly that, "No one has yet discovered a method for testing, in the examination room, those skills in human relationships and those basic attitudes toward life and work that are the heart of the profession of social work."

Mr. Meriam looked far ahead in the difficult business of catching personnel. Agnes Van Driel, of the Bureau of Public Assistance of the Social Security Board, came closer in to the current situation when she talked of in-service training. "It does not work miracles but it helps." Both of them left unanswered some of the most plaguing questions. For example: What price high qualifications if the residence rule rears its ugly head? What chance is there for in-service training in places where a single worker is at once the crew and the captain bold?

The discussion of the administration of public assistance ran the whole gamut of relationships, federal-state-local, right down to the man in the street. The problems of the state, said William Haber, administrator of the Michigan Emergency Relief Commission, are made more difficult because of the fact that it is a relatively new agency in wel-

Governor Frank Murphy

THE positive role of government, if it is to aid in settling industrial disputes, should be, first, as a fact-finding agency. It ought to have all the facts pertinent to each dispute, to make possible an intelligent public understanding of the issues in controversy. It should sift the conflicting evidence, the controversial data, and get at the truth insofar as it is possible to ascertain the truth in a conflict involving not only facts but emotions.

Second, the government's function ought to be that of a mutual friend and intelligent moderator. On its own initiative, or at the request of either or both parties, it should enter the arena to aid in the search for those formulas upon which peace can be built. Nothing dispels suspicion so quickly as a discussion of the issues. Nothing makes for better mutual understanding and self-respect than the give and take which inevitably comes from the comparison of the problems which face both labor and industry. Fortunately employers have been changing the attitude that there are many issues which "are not subject to discussion." The two parties must ap-

preciate their respective responsibilities and find that meeting ground upon which mutual confidence and understanding can be obtained.

THIRD, THE GOVERNMENT MUST ALSO BE prepared to take its place as an active participant with labor and employers in finding a solution. Its attitude must always be impartial. Its influence must always be in the direction of moderating the attitudes and demands of the two parties. Its view must always be the public view. Public interest is paramount. The government must insist on peace and orderliness. It must insist on the building up of mutual self-respect. To these ends, the public must be represented by continuing agencies specializing in the problems of industrial relations. Government must make available at all times the most effective possible kind of mediation agencies. These must be set up on the basis of each industry if necessary, as well as on a geographical basis. Every measure and method of conciliation and mediation must be at hand, always in the name of impartial government.

First and last, we must all remember that industrial peace is no easy goal. It will be achieved only when industry and its leaders realistically face today and tomorrow and forget the past which trained them to resist instead of to cooperate; when labor and its leaders courageously assume the great responsibilities which are theirs; and when government exerts a positive, enlightened, and constructive influence. . . .

THE PRESENT SITUATION IN INDUSTRIAL relations presents an incomparable opportunity for enlightened government to show its worth. The need for sound judgment and insight is more profound than at any time in the past, for we have no successful pattern for dealing with industrial disputes. A proper appreciation of the forces involved, a proper understanding of the issues in the conflict will show that the peaceful way is the right way. In time, as these are achieved, the parliament of industry, embodying the intelligent, peaceful methods of democracy, can and will result from self-organization and mutual self-respect.