

# The Common Welfare

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## The "New" WPA

AT the last possible moment, in an atmosphere redolent of political horse trading, Congress enacted the legislation under which, barring an unlikely change of heart, the WPA will operate for the next year. Just how the new system will function in practice cannot now be foreseen. Many competent observers believe that some of its provisions are full of dynamite and will prove administratively unworkable.

For WPA, now the Works Projects Administration under the new Federal Works Agency, the act appropriates \$1,477,000,000 to provide employment for an estimated two million persons during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1940. This is a reduction of \$673 million from the funds available to WPA during the fiscal year just ended. The National Youth Administration gets \$100 million, an increase of \$24 million.

The act abolished outright the Federal Theatre Project but provided that administrative workers may be carried on the payroll until August 1, certified relief workers until October 1. By making no exceptions to the rule that after December 31 all projects must have local sponsorship amounting to 25 percent of their entire cost, the bill doomed to decay, probably to death, the federal writers, music and art projects and the Historical Records Survey. Except for a few scattering instances only a miracle, it is said, will save them. This same 25 percent proviso is seen as bringing new hardships to persons dependent on direct relief which must be provided by state and local units of government. With such units hard pressed for funds to match federal grants for the social security services this added rigidity of WPA matching will leave scant scrapings for direct relief. As is usual the most helpless people will get the most kicking around.

The act limits WPA participation in non-federal building projects to \$52,000, thus, it seems to many people, dooming the program more or less to busy work. A provision that brings dismay to WPA workers themselves and to those who know them best, is that euphemistically termed "rotation of employment." On August 31 all persons who have been on WPA for eighteen months or longer will be dropped automatically. After thirty days "furlough," if they haven't quite starved, and have survived the process of recertification, they may be reemployed. In theory this turnover would reduce the waiting list of those certified for WPA but unassigned. However along with "rotation" goes a sharp cut in project personnel, from a June average of about 2,600,000 to less than 2,000,000 in the early fall. With this shrinkage at the top the lot of the "furloughed" people, at the end of the waiting list, is not enviable.

The feature of the bill which is seen as holding the most administrative grief is the requirement that all relief employes must work 130 hours a month, about forty hours a week. In effect this destroys the "prevailing wage" principle which was battled into the original WPA law by organized labor and which has been adhered to steadfastly ever since. The same section of the act has another tough spot, the requirement that after August 31 the monthly earning

schedules "shall not be varied for workers of the same type in different geographical areas to any greater extent than may be justified by differences in the cost of living." Since comparative cost of living figures compiled by the Department of Labor show slight differences between regions this wiping out of wage differentials must result either in lowering the average "security wage" in the North or in raising it in the South. If the latter it must inevitably follow that fewer persons can be employed. What, if any, middle ground can be found is not now apparent, but it is clear that there is trouble ahead.

## Spirit of Seventy-Six

THE 736 delegates to the national convention of the American Youth Congress representing some 4,700,000 organized American young people put off celebrating the Fourth of July by twenty-four hours. When they headed for the World's Fair on the morning of July 5, they left behind a declaration of independence which bears a startling resemblance to the document the Fourth of July commemorates.

These young people wrote themselves a creed which won the unstinted praise of Eleanor Roosevelt in her address at the "21,000,000" rally—that being the sum total of American youth in round figures—a creed which crushed an attempt to shatter the very existence of the congress. After putting up a superhuman display of patience in the name of democratic procedure, the delegates were treated to the sight of a crowd of ultra-rightists walking out on the meeting, as though, it seemed to many, they found it impossible to survive in so democratic an atmosphere. The Congress had refused to sanction Red-baiting tactics, insisting that the floor of its convention is open to all comers, be they Young Communist or Catholic. Before they adjourned they put through a resolution denouncing any and all forms of dictatorship; never mind the names. The American Youth Congress is thoroughly pragmatic. It has little patience with name-calling.

The business of being young in a democracy calls for a lot of fact-finding and once found the facts have to be faced. The youth delegates did both in eight study panels. The nerve thread running through the exchange of yeasty ideas was "it's not what you can get as a young person, it's what you can give."

## Progress Report

FOR two long days in Buffalo last month the delegate conference of the American Association of Social Workers labored with the problems of organization structure in which the association has been entangled for the last year or two. How to secure more general representation in the governing body, what machinery to set up for chapter and individual participation, how to make the democratic process work in so large and scattered an organization—none of these is as easy as it might seem.

At the outset the conference, with slight dissent, adopted the report of the president, Harry Greenstein of Baltimore,

which expressed full confidence in the staff of the national office. This cleared the way for the later discussions looking to a more representative and flexible organization. Basic principles relating to membership requirements which, it seems to some of its members, the association ultimately must face if it is to exercise continuing leadership in the changing world of social work, will be the subject of committee study and report.

## Grace Abbott

IT is hard to realize that Grace Abbott, that vital, colorful courageous personality, is no longer a part of the going business of life. Though her friends had known for weeks that her illness was serious, her death in mid-June came as a shock, bringing with it a sort of dismay that these troubled times had lost her fighting spirit.

Grace Abbott, the younger of "the Abbotts of Nebraska," was a teacher for nine years before she found her true vocation as a social worker. Residence at Hull-House with Jane Addams, determined the direction that her life was to take. In 1917, when she went to Washington to the U.S. Children's Bureau to administer the Child Labor Act, later declared unconstitutional, she already was a national figure, steadily growing in stature. Four years later, on the resignation of Julia C. Lathrop, she was appointed chief of the bureau, a position she held until 1934 when she resigned to join her sister, Edith Abbott, on the faculty of the School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago. At that time President Roosevelt said of her: "She has rendered services of inestimable value to the children, the mothers and fathers of the country, as well as to the federal and state governments.

In Grace Abbott's career two qualities were unfailing, integrity of purpose and undefeatable spirit. In times like these they can ill be spared.

## Campus Challenges

THE 165-page report of the committee appointed by President James Bryant Conant of Harvard a year ago to study personnel problems in the faculty of the university has been endorsed by a large majority of the faculty and accepted by President Conant as a guide to university policy. Of more general interest than the major sections of the report dealing with faculty rank and tenure are the concluding portions on "extramural relations." Here the committee emphasizes, first, the importance to education of diversity and controversy in faculty opinion. Quoting a statement by President Conant that "we must have our share of thoughtful rebels on our faculties," the committee holds that:

The selection of staff should . . . include those whose views present a serious and thoughtful challenge to orthodoxy. It should not be deterred from continuing this course by the fact that such views may be not only academically unconventional, but distasteful to the general public, to the business community, to alumni, or to any other group. Having made its appointments, it should give its appointees complete freedom to write, teach, and otherwise expound the truth as they see it. The committee believes that this policy is essential to the function of the university both as a seat of learning and as a teaching institution.

Finally, the committee urges the importance of participation in public affairs by university teachers, both as private citizens and as expert consultants, and concludes its

notable report: "Although a university lives within walls as a world apart, there must be perpetual commerce with the world outside, in order that the university may both enlighten and be nourished by the civilization of its time and place."

While the problem of anti-Semitism lay outside the scope of this inquiry, the report points to the danger inherent in any compromise of "time honored educational and scholarly standards by racial or religious discrimination."

## From JVS to NVA

NOTICEABLE was the gap this year at the National Conference of Social Work caused by the lack of any coordinated placement service—a function briskly performed in previous years by Joint Vocational Service. Now breathing its last, JVS came to the conference for only one activity—to conduct a meeting for the announcement of its coming demise, scheduled for December 31, 1939. The recommendations based on the findings of the special study committee (see *Survey Midmonthly*, June 1939, page 191) and accepted by the board of JVS on June 8, were read and explained to the assembled company by Arthur Dunham and George W. Rabinoff. In the place of JVS, whose doom previously had been sealed by board decision, a new agency, tentatively initialed NVA—National Vocational Association—is to be set up to concern itself with research and consultation services for agencies and groups. The NVA as now planned will conduct no individual placement or counseling service. Besides research and agency consultation on vocational needs and trends its functions will include the study of problems related to local and regional placement agencies and liaison and cooperative relationships with public employment services. Main reason for the dropping of the placement service was, of course, financial. The recommendations of the study committee include the hope that the new agency will become "a base from which placements and counseling service might develop through regional organizations or a national placement service serving one or more vocational agencies." Discussion from the floor, including a mild protest in the form of a resolution from the American Association of Social Work Students, indicated that in some quarters the feeling persists that a coordinated placement service is, after all, the *raison d'être* of any vocational agency.

## And So On . . .

THE theme of the Institute of Human Relations, to be held at Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., August 27 to September 1, will be Citizenship and Religion: A Consideration of American Policy with Regard to the Relations of Church and Synagogue to the State. • • A state system of compulsory health insurance sponsored by Governor Olson and opposed by the state medical societies, has been voted down sharply by the California legislature. • • Because they are "known to be aliens" the Florida State Welfare Board has removed from public assistance rolls twenty-four children, ninety-two blind and 832 aged persons. • • The Farm Security Administration announces that its nation-wide survey of the progress of rehabilitation borrowers shows that 186,619 children of school age in these low income families were enabled to attend school last year as a result of the program. The children were members of the 232,947 families covered by the survey of typical rehabilitation borrowers.

# The Social Front

## Among the States

**ALTHOUGH** most of the state legislatures at their latest sessions were flooded with bills calling for increased old age assistance allowances, reports the American Public Welfare Association, very few of such bills were enacted. Many legislatures moved to broaden eligibility and many memorialized Congress to increase the federal contribution, but few put up any new cash of their own.

Liberalizing eligibility provisions, Minnesota increased the amount of property allowed an applicant from \$3500 to \$5000. Missouri made \$500 the maximum cash reserve and \$1500 the maximum value of property that may be held by a recipient. Arizona amended its act to permit those aided to own household furniture, and dropped a previous clause that had made ownership of real estate a bar to assistance.

Delaware acted to defer collection of taxes on property of the assisted aged until their death; Iowa to permit persons in public correctional institutions to apply for assistance, and to remove non-eligibility of "professional" tramps or beggars; North Carolina to lighten residence requirements and to cooperate in the care of non-residents and transients. Texas enacted a bill which would add possibly 85,000 to the 114,322 beneficiaries who in March were receiving average monthly grants of \$13.96. This liberalization, assuming that the Social Security Board should approve its terms, would raise the state's share of the bill from the present \$9 million to \$20 million. The legislature has not been enthusiastic about levying taxes to fill this gap and has rejected all proposals thus far offered.

In amending their laws this year many states changed the concept of old age aid to "financial assistance to those in need" rather than a "pension" granted as a "right." The Washington and Utah laws, for example, now limit eligibility strictly to those "actually in need," and Washington made \$30 the maximum instead of the minimum monthly grant. Maine henceforth will refuse aid to aged persons who have transferred property to others in order to become eligible.

Few of the states have enacted specific taxes to finance old age assistance. Most of them are taking these monies from their general funds. The Minnesota legislature, however, voted proceeds of the state property tax for this and other welfare purposes. The Utah legislature earmarked all sales tax revenues for old

age assistance. Oklahoma and Wyoming did likewise with a portion of their consumers' taxes. The Connecticut legislature authorized towns to levy a \$3 annual "rate bill" tax to help pay for old age assistance. Iowa raised from \$5,500,000 to \$7 million the amount for the old age assistance fund to be turned over from income, corporate and sales tax revenues. North Dakota provided for a special election to decide whether or not new highway construction should be halted for two years and state gasoline and motor vehicle license revenues diverted to financing the old age program.

The most recent record of average amounts actually paid old age assistance recipients shows only one state—California—with a figure over \$30. Eight states pay less than \$10; the lowest, Arkansas, \$6.11. The average for the country is \$19.37.

**Try, Try Again**—A new fight for "ham and eggs" in California got under way recently when a truck transported to the office of Governor Olson a monster petition signed, it was claimed, by a million voters, asking for a special election on a new version of the scheme to pay \$30 a week for life to citizens past the age of fifty. The original "ham and eggs" was voted down last November by a majority of 255,000 out of 2,542,000 votes. The new scheme, called the California Retirement Life Payment Plan, differs from the old one in certain details only. Payments would be in the form of state warrants validated by affixing a 2-cent stamp every week to each \$1 warrant. Since bankers and business houses announced that they would not touch the warrants it is proposed to establish a credit clearing bank to handle them. A bond issue of \$20 million would put the plan into operation.

Although Governor Olson has promised to call a special election on the proposal he does not seem likely to do so immediately. Charges of political maneuvering are rampant. Meanwhile he is being urged to appoint a committee of competent economists to pass on the whole question of whether or not it is possible for the state to pay \$30 a week for life to citizens over fifty and still remain solvent.

**Plus and Minus**—The Pennsylvania legislature which sat for twenty-one weeks and considered more than 2000 legislative proposals, left a record of pluses and minuses. The most serious losses, say competent observers, probably were in the field of labor legislation

where amendments to the workmen's compensation and labor relations laws were all on the reactionary side. On the constructive side were the Tallman bills, sponsored by the Merit System League, which set up a uniform civil service system for the Department of Public Assistance, the Division of Unemployment Compensation and the Liquor Control Board. Some 15,000 of the state's 33,000 employees will be affected. Present employees, if in service six months or more before the law becomes effective (June 1, 1940), will retain their positions. All others will continue until their positions are filled from the proper lists.

Definitely on the plus side was a bill which, if signed by the governor, would give the state the parole system long urged by social agencies and recommended by a commission that has been at work for more than a year. It sets up a paid state parole board of five appointed by the superior court, which would have authority to organize five parole districts, with their staffs under civil service. Political activity by either the parole board members or the staff is forbidden under severe penalties. The board will grant all paroles from the Eastern Penitentiary, Western Penitentiary, State Industrial Home for Women at Muncy, and all those from county prisons where the sentence is more than one year. It will supervise all persons it releases on parole and will also supervise parolees from the Pennsylvania Industrial School at Huntingdon. It can only parole within the limits of the minimum-maximum sentence set by the sentencing judge.

Another plus bill was one that raises the juvenile court age from sixteen to eighteen.

In the field of public assistance there was a bitter fight over the Van Allsburg bill which as originally presented would have broken up the present state department and turned public assistance, along with 4000 jobs, back to the counties. Some of the most objectionable features were removed before the bill was passed (it now awaits the governor's signature or veto), but it still retains a provision that permits the governor to remove personnel, regardless of civil service, on the recommendation of county boards. Some observers see in this the possibility of cleaning up some not-so-good county situations; others see it as a grave threat to the civil service system. The same bill requires a county board to make available to taxpayers, on request, information regarding recipients of relief, but a protecting clause indicates that county boards may make their own rules and