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THIS QUESTION OF RELIEF

Are relief standards too high?

Do relief recipients turn down jobs?

Which is better—work relief or the "dole"?

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This Question of Relief*

NEARLY everyone has an opinion on the relief problem. Take the Smith family for instance. Father asserts that the country is going into bankruptcy if something is not done to cut our relief expenditures. Mother declares that she knows for a fact that the Joneses, who are on relief, have an elder son who sends them money regularly. Aunt Sally has heard of a man who has never done a lick of work in his life who is now living luxuriously on relief. Junior feels that it is a shame that all the unemployed are not permitted to work on the W.P.A. A multitude of fragmentary ideas of this type combine to influence the nation's policy toward its ten million unemployed.

And if they are a normal family they are unlikely to recall that they themselves were afraid they might have to go on relief back in the dark days of 1933. Nor are they likely to remember that the five and a half million families who have been receiving federal aid are typical American families. Studies show that few of these relief recipients had ever accepted charity before the depression, and that few of the household heads could be classified as idlers, incompetents, or ne'er-do-wells. They came from all walks of life. Nearly two-thirds were unskilled or semi-skilled industrial workers, but as the depression deepened, a growing number of professional men, "white collar" employees, and skilled workers were forced to appeal for assistance. Men with years of university training—engineers, architects, ministers, lawyers, scientists—rubbed shoulders in destitution with men who were completely unemployable under present-day conditions.

Today, despite a significant measure of business recovery, the relief load is little if any lighter than at the 1935 peak. Direct federal relief has been stopped, but state and local

* This pamphlet was prepared by Maxwell S. Stewart in cooperation with the staff of the Committee on Social Security of the Social Science Research Council.

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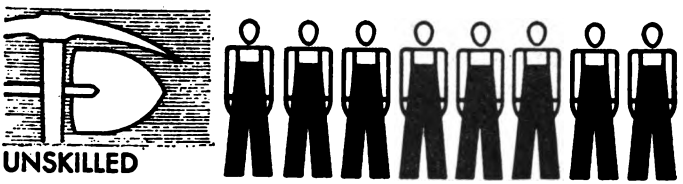
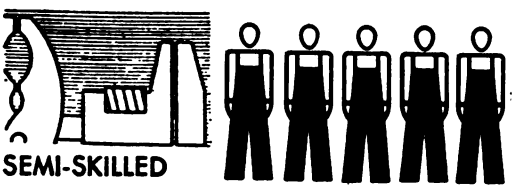
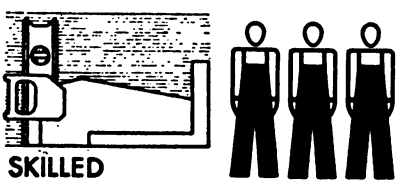
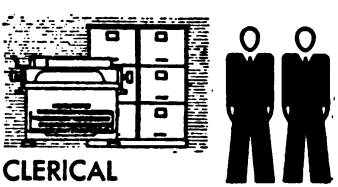
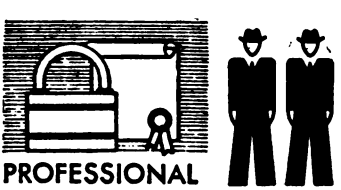
WHO IS ON RELIEF
(BY USUAL OCCUPATIONS)











Each man represents 5% of all workers in U. S.

PICTORIAL STATISTICS, INC.

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agencies were reported to be taking care of approximately 6,500,000 individuals in March, 1936. At the same time 3,926,000 men, or more than 14,500,000 persons if families are included, were receiving their sole support from federal government-work programs. A total of approximately twenty-one million Americans—men, women, and children—are still dependent on government assistance. In the coming winter this number will be increased by approximately 500,000 farm families—victims of the drought. For six years we have based our policies on the assumption that the crisis was merely a temporary one. We have sought to revamp the traditional system of relief, created in the Elizabethan era, to meet the needs of mass unemployment. But who is there to say that we have learned how to provide security for these millions of depression and drought victims?

Why Don't They Work?

Even yet there are many persons like the elder Smiths who refuse to face the facts of a changed world. Accustomed to a day when every American could find a job if he were reasonably diligent and efficient, they maintain that there are still jobs if men really wanted to work. Scattered jobs there doubtless have been, even at the depth of the depression, but they have been few in comparison to the number of unemployed. Official statistics show that there were only three-fourths as many jobs in industry in March, 1936 as in 1920, although the population has increased 20 per cent in the interval. Employment in industry has declined by one-fifth since 1929. During the same period retrenchment in offices, government bureaus, schools, and colleges has closed the door of opportunity to thousands of professional and "white collar" men who had previously enjoyed a high degree of security. In addition, large numbers of farmers, small tradesmen, and proprietors have been forced into bankruptcy and are unable to support themselves in their usual occupation.

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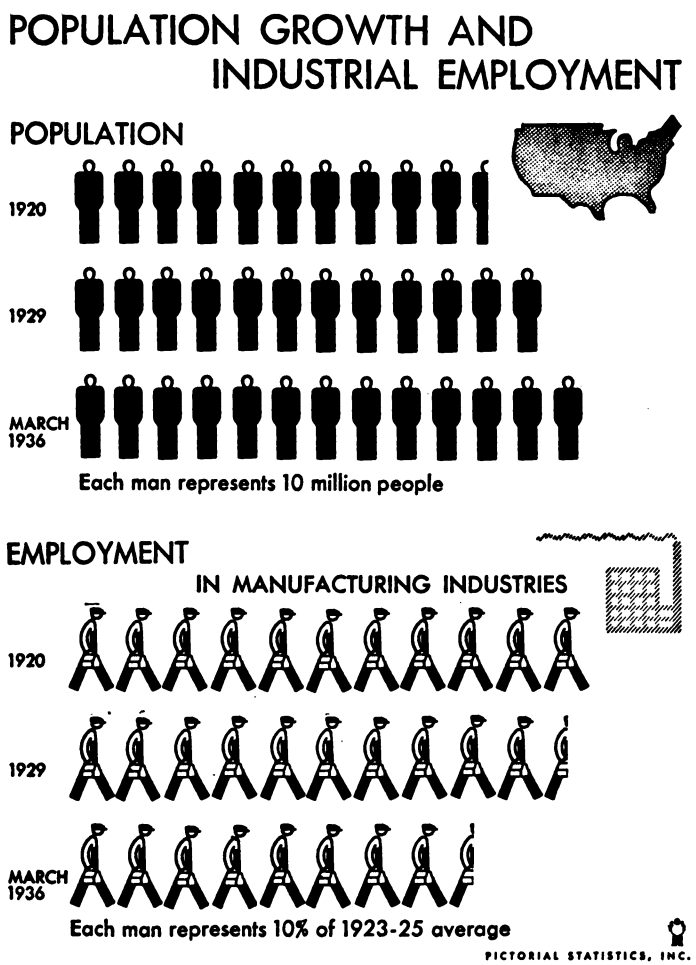
Lack of employment has not been the only factor contributing to the growing need of emergency relief. As high as one-fifth of the cases on the relief rolls are persons who



are unemployable under present-day conditions. The largest number of these are individuals who are either too old or too young to be acceptable to employers. There are also the sick and disabled, and widows with young children. Many

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workers, though physically fit, have lost much of the skill which enables them to bid successfully for a position. Others are victims of the prejudice which bars middle-aged men from new jobs regardless of their ability. Inexperience and lack of vocational training handicaps many young persons who in normal times would have little difficulty in obtaining work. Much of this so-called unemployability springs from social rather than individual causes. In the early days of America farmers and craftsmen were able to work until they were 70 or even 75 years of age; youth was always sure of an opportunity, no matter how inexperienced. Today there are comparatively few jobs open to unskilled or semi-skilled men of either group. The machine has shortened the span of productivity for the greater part of our population.

Then there are numerous cases in which the wages obtained by the family breadwinner are inadequate. Often the wife or a daughter is the sole support for a large family. Or possibly the husband is employed two or three days a week. A study made in New Jersey for the years 1934 and 1935 revealed that no less than 20 per cent of the relief families were obtaining relief to piece out inadequate wages. In other states the proportion has not been quite so high, but the problem is everywhere a serious one.

Charity and Poor Relief

At the outset of the depression we were unbelievably ill-prepared to meet the problems created by mass unemployment and destitution. Other Western countries had established systems of unemployment insurance and old-age pensions. But the United States had no national scheme for dealing with the insecurity that has accompanied the machine. For care of the poor we relied on private charity or an antiquated system of poor relief established by the early colonists. Many of the private charity organizations were efficient, well-organized, and capable of providing reasonably adequate aid

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to those who came within their sphere. They did not, however, meet the entire need. There were thousands of underprivileged persons, particularly in small towns and country districts, who were entirely unaffected by their activities.

Poor relief, on the other hand, was frequently inefficient and corrupt. Each state and very often each county was a law unto itself. Pennsylvania, for instance, has 425 poor districts in the state and 967 persons charged with administration of the poor laws. An investigation in 1934 showed that none of these supervisors had had any training in social work. Thirty per cent were farmers. Four per cent were housewives. The remainder were from 128 occupations, social workers not even being represented. The investigation revealed numerous instances of illegal and unethical practices, as well as the most appalling carelessness in the keeping of records. Other states are as bad or worse. Indiana has 1016 townships, each with its supervisor independent of any state control. Maine, New Hampshire and a dozen other states have laws under which an applicant for relief can be refused a vote. While not ordinarily enforced, they serve as a potential weapon against the poor. Prior to 1932, Alabama had no law permitting the giving of relief outside of the almshouses.

In practically all the states the poor relief system has come down practically unchanged from Elizabethan times. In accord with the views of that period, the payment of relief has been hedged about with safeguards which were supposed to make poverty as unattractive as possible. Back of these safeguards lay certain assumptions which color popular thinking on relief to this day. These might be summarized as follows:

1. Poverty is usually due either to shiftlessness, unwillingness to work or lack of thrift; consequently, the giving of relief should be made as humiliating as possible in order to discourage pauperism.

2. Men will not work except under the lash of hunger;

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therefore it is necessary to grant as little relief as possible so as to encourage them to seek jobs.

3. Only by making each community take care of its own poor is it possible to protect society against the loafer and ne'er-do-well who would like to pass himself off as a victim of misfortune.

By 1929 the private agencies were taking care of the needy in most of the large cities. As a result it was generally assumed that the private agencies would ultimately be able to take over the entire job. Under normal conditions this might have occurred, but the depression brought a fundamental shift in circumstances. At first it was assumed that the crisis would be of short duration, and that by special effort private charity could meet the needs resulting from mass unemployment. Soup kitchens and bread lines were organized to carry the jobless through the first and second winter of the depression. Organizations which had formerly attempted to set up a constructive program for rehabilitating the needy found it necessary to cut their programs to the rudiments of food and shelter. Gradually the cities were forced to assume more and more of the burden. Taxes were raised, but the revenue derived from this source was offset by growing tax delinquencies. Impaired credit put a limit on municipal borrowing. By 1931 it became evident that the cities and private agencies combined could not meet the need. Several states, beginning with New York, took steps to establish a unified system of state relief.

Beginnings of Federal Relief

Soon it became apparent, however, that reliance on the separate states like dependence on the local communities was unsatisfactory. Very frequently the state or locality in which the need was the greatest was the least able to furnish assistance. Despite considerable opposition from those who feared that a federal "dole" would have a demoralizing effect,

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Congress passed a law in July, 1932 authorizing the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to loan $300,000,000 to states and localities for relief purposes. Although allotted very sparingly, these funds were practically exhausted by March, 1933 when President Roosevelt assumed office. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed had risen to more than fifteen million, and an increasingly large proportion of the jobless had exhausted their slender resources. For the first time in American history, we were faced with the threat of mass starvation. Talk of revolution was in the air. Action was imperative.

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration was born in May, 1933 out of this necessity. As its name indicates, the F.E.R.A. was not created because a fundamental change in policy was desired. It was designed to meet an emergency, after which it was assumed that the task of relief would be passed back to the states and local communities. The act establishing this agency appropriated $250,000,000 for outright grants to states on the basis of one dollar for each three dollars of public relief expenditures within the state. An additional $250,000,000 was set aside for grants to states whose financial status was such that they could not match the Government's appropriation. This was supplemented during the winter of 1933-1934 by the Civil Works Administration program. The C.W.A. broke dramatically with all previous relief traditions. It was nation-wide in scope; it provided regular work at reasonably adequate wages to four million unemployed, only half of whom were taken from the relief rolls. It was widely criticized, however, as being excessively expensive, and for the fact that its benefits were only available to a small proportion of the unemployed.

Because of its expense, and because many employers objected that the wages paid by the Government were attracting men from private industry, the C.W.A. was abandoned early in 1934. In its place the F.E.R.A. set up an Emergency Works Program which was open only to men whose families were on the relief rolls. The wages under this

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program were adjusted to the prevailing rates of the local community, but no man was permitted to earn more than his family's budgeted needs as estimated by the local relief authorities.

The W.P.A. Program

As recovery gradually set in, criticism of the F.E.R.A. began to develop. Once more one heard that relief should be the responsibility of the communities and not the federal government. Taking note of this criticism, President Roosevelt outlined a relief program in his annual message to Congress on January 4, 1935 which was basically different from any which had preceded it. He proposed that the "unemployables"—i.e. those who would be dependent on outside assistance even in normal times—be passed back to the states and local communities, and that the remainder—the true victims of the depression—be employed by a newly-formed Works Progress Administration at a monthly "security wage." At the same time the President proposed a system of federal-state unemployment insurance and old-age pensions to reduce the number of persons who might be expected to require relief in the future. His recommendation was adopted by Congress and the W.P.A. was set up in the fall of 1935. It got under way slowly, but by March, 1936 a total of 3,025,000 persons were employed on its various projects. Of these, 285,000 were engaged in work of a professional, clerical, or technical nature. At the same time 350,000 were employed in other work projects and the Civilian Conservation Corps gave jobs to more than 450,000 in the early part of 1936. There was also the regular public-works program under the Public Works Administration which employed approximately 200,000. By mid-July the number of W.P.A. employees had dwindled to 2,235,000, of whom 259,000 were engaged in "white collar" work, but the P.W.A. employees had risen to 400,000.

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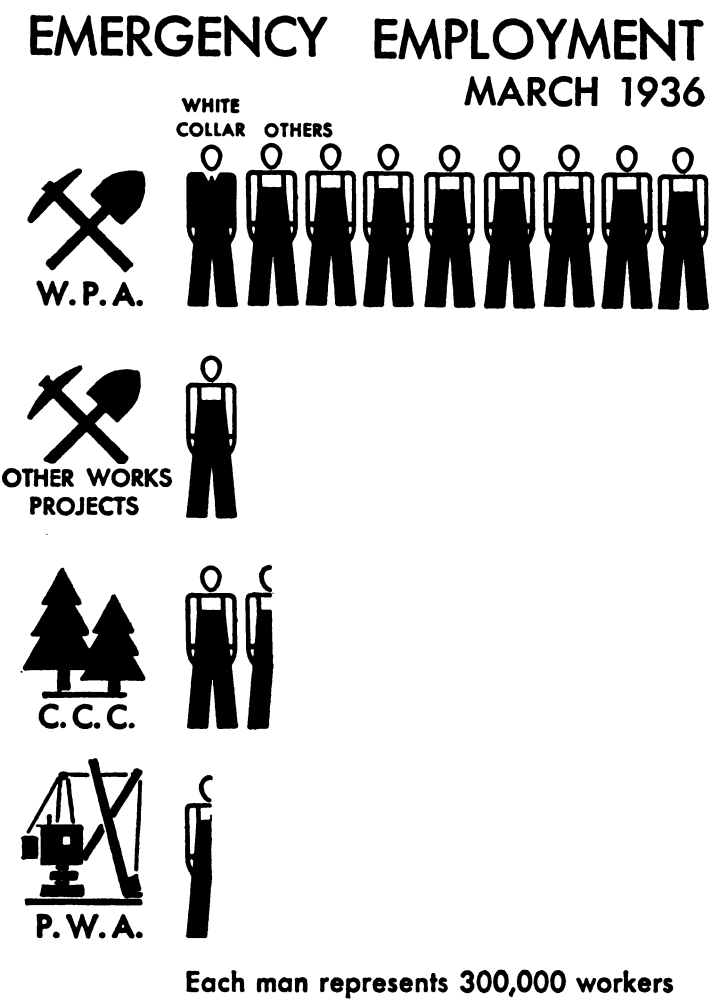

Although the W.P.A. brought higher standards to perhaps the majority of unemployed, it imposed a heavy burden on those whose need was the greatest—the larger families. The F.E.R.A. grants had been based on need, and varied according to the number of a man's dependents. The W.P.A.,

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on the other hand, paid according to the job without regard for need. A social worker's report from New Orleans illustrates the suffering which such a shift involved in some instances:

> "The Jones family of seven had formerly received $44.10 a month plus fuel and milk from the F.E.R.A. Mr. Jones was transferred to the W.P.A. at $38.50 a month. On December 5, 1935, Mrs. Jones came to the Family Service Society. Her husband had already been transferred to his new job, but would not be paid until December 12 when he would receive only $4.50. 'My husband and I are nearly crazy worrying about the children,' she declared. It wouldn't be so bad if we had been having a decent income. We have been so long on just enough to buy food that we have no clothing or bedding left. Marie had to stop school last week because she had no shoes. They were so bad you couldn't put cardboard in the soles because there was nothing to hold it in. Then, because of lack of proper food the children are all thin and undernourished. Two of them are ill and when I take them to the clinic the doctor says they need building up. . . . I am especially worried about Alice. She has always been a sickly child and is now so weak I have to keep her in bed. My husband and I can't talk to each other about it we are both so worried. He has to go to work in the morning without food and has only what some of the men can give him from their lunches. We are thankful for the $38.50 he will receive on W.P.A., but it will be the same struggle all over again and you never know how long that will last. My husband is a good carpenter and yet he was put on a laboring project.' " *

This case was doubtless exceptional in the severity of the suffering involved, but a survey conducted by the American Association of Social Workers showed it to be by no means unique. Although in theory the W.P.A. was supposed to absorb all the "employables," the survey disclosed that many "employables" were not given jobs and were thrown back on the inadequate resources of the states.

* Quoted in "This Business of Relief," *American Association of Social Workers*, p. 50.

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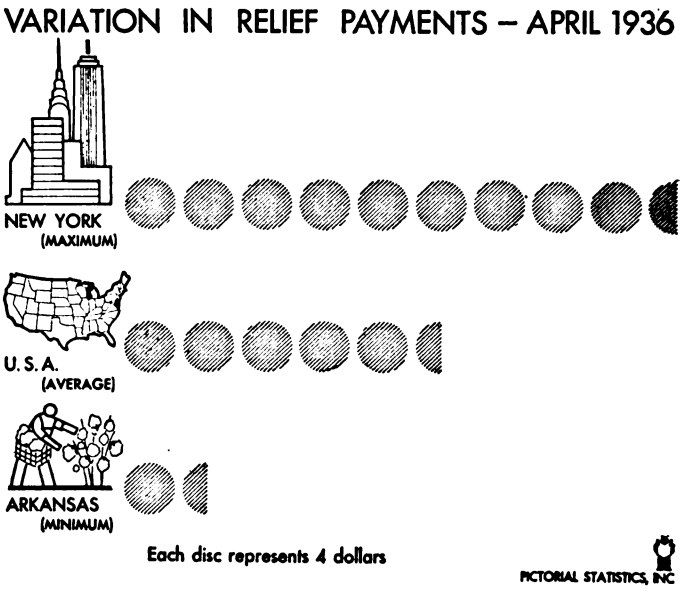
Relief Scales

Even under federal supervision there has been an appalling difference in relief scales. The amount of relief which a man has obtained has depended partly on the number in his family, but more on where he happened to live. In July, 1933 the average family in Mississippi, for example, received $3.96 a month, while the average for Massachusetts was



$32.27. For the country as a whole the average was only $16.55 in May, 1933. As the resources of the relief families became more and more exhausted, the average per family rose steadily. It was $21 in November, 1933, $28.31 in November, 1934, and $30.43 in January, 1935. With the introduction of the W.P.A. in the fall of 1935, carrying with it the transfer of "unemployables" to the local rolls, a rapid decline in relief standards set in. The average for the entire country in November, 1935 was $23.90. By April, 1936 it had dropped to $21.59. In the latter month New York had

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the highest average of any state with $38.59 per family. Arkansas trailed with $5.80 with New Mexico next to last with $6.64. During the past three years 14 out of the 48 states have at one time or another granted less than $10 a month per family for relief.* This does not mean that families can actually live on $10 or even $21 a month. The average is brought down by the fact that many families receive only a few dollars to piece out inadequate earnings, and that others are only on relief for part of a month. Nevertheless, standards have been shockingly low in many states.

Is the Dole Here to Stay?

All the relief programs adopted to date have been based on the assumption that the need for relief will rapidly disappear with economic recovery. The developments of recent months indicate the falsity of this assumption. Economic conditions have improved unmistakably since 1933: in May, 1936 the Federal Reserve Board's index of industrial activity surpassed the 1923-1925 average. Yet despite a marked upturn in business, we still have more than ten million unemployed, and relief rolls are undiminished. Nor is this surprising. Following an economic dislocation as severe as that which we have just passed through, we should have expected an abnormal need for relief for many years. Whole industries have been destroyed which will never again return. Men over 50 years of age who have been jobless from three to six years are unlikely ever again to find employment in private industry. The depression has wiped away the reserves of many families, leaving them unprepared to face the ordinary vicissitudes of modern life. Our sole permanent gain lies in the passage of the Social Security Act which has been hailed as a means of providing protection against destitution result-

* Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming.

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ing from unemployment and old age. However, only about one-half of the employed population is eligible to protection under this law, and the benefits promised are in most instances well below the amount necessary for the maintenance of a family. Since Congress appears to have no intention of extending its protection to the remaining portion of the population, some form of public relief will be needed for many years to come.

Objections to Present Relief Policies

A permanent relief program should be able to avoid many of the blunders of the emergency period. No phase of the Roosevelt Administration has been subjected to more severe criticism than its conduct of relief. Taxpayers' organizations have been particularly concerned over its enormous and apparently growing cost. By the end of fiscal year closing June 30, 1936 the Federal Government had spent almost seven billion dollars for relief. These expenditures have grown very rapidly. In the year ending in June, 1933 the total was only $336,000,000. In the past two years it has averaged approximately $2,350,000,000 annually. This increase has been mainly due to a sharp rise in the number of families obtaining assistance, but it is also the result of larger expenditures per family. Part of this rise was due to more adequate allowances, necessitated by the drying up of personal resources, and part to the development of new and more expensive programs, such as the W.P.A., rural rehabilitation, and student aid. The growing emphasis on work relief has also contributed to the increased cost per family. Many business men feel that full economic recovery is impossible as long as the government continues to incur a deficit to pay for relief. They point to the experience of Great Britain as evidence of the necessity of a balanced budget for stimulating business confidence.

Conservative critics insist, moreover, that the continued payment of relief tends to pauperize the unemployed, and

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causes them to lose all desire for honest work. It is frequently alleged that relief payments are so high that it is impossible to obtain hired help at a wage which the employer is capable of paying. Many instances are cited of individuals who are supposed to have turned down jobs in order to live in idleness on the relief rolls. There has also been a wide-spread attempt to discredit all relief on the ground that it has been prostituted for political ends.

The Myth of Job Refusals

Instances of "chiseling" have indeed occurred, but investigations of the supposed cases in which men and women on the relief rolls have turned down jobs have proved somewhat of a boomerang to the critics. In Buffalo, 262 alleged job refusals were investigated and only 8 were found to be unjustified. In Washington, D. C., where there were 16,000 cases on relief, 220 persons were said to have refused jobs. Careful inquiry revealed that only 4 of these could be said to have turned down a reasonable offer. These and other studies have indicated that approximately two-fifths of relief clients who had been charged with unjustifiably turning down jobs did so because they were already employed, because they were permanently or temporarily unemployable, or could not do the work offered them. In 27 per cent of the instances the supposed refusal was the result of defects in the method of notifying the persons of the prospective jobs. A third group, comprising about 17 per cent of the total, consisted of individuals whose refusal was due to special factors attached to the particular type of job offered. Many cases were reported in which the employer sought to take advantage of the relief status of the relief client by offering substandard wages. In other cases, women were forced to refuse jobs because of the necessity of caring for children or invalids. Occasionally, the excuse given was found to be

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merely a pretext, but such instances made up a very small proportion of the total.

Low Standards

Social workers object to the current relief program chiefly because of its inadequacy. Investigations of the American Association of Social Workers, carried out some months after the establishment of the W.P.A., reveal that the unemployed who were not included in the W.P.A. were thrown on the mercies of the states and local communities. In almost every instance this involved a drastic lowering of relief standards and in some cases a complete suspension of public aid. It was found that Dallas, Texas, for example, had cut off all assistance "except in cases of permanent disability," while Louisiana discontinued relief to employable persons "except in extreme emergencies." A particularly serious situation developed in New Jersey toward the middle of 1936 when the state legislature passed a bill placing responsibility for relief on the local rather than state authorities. In their zeal to administer relief as "economically" as possible, the majority of communities slashed their standards drastically. In 10 out of 41 communities studied by the American Association of Social Work single men had been taken off the rolls altogether; 3 communities had cut off all aliens; 18 had eliminated the rent allowance; 15 had stopped the distribution of clothing; while 12 had refused to continue medical care.

What these "economies" meant in actual life may be illustrated by two of many case histories collected during a study undertaken by the Works Progress Administration in New Jersey. The reports read:

> "The baby in the Downing family died two weeks ago from lack of milk. Their fifteen-month-old child has whooping cough. With a mounting drugstore bill and no money on hand, the Downings don't know where they will get their medical supplies and medical care. The mother of this

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family of 13 is ill of heart disease, complicated by stomach trouble. The children complain of continuous hunger as a result of scant supplies provided by the local relief agency. For cooking fuel they have whatever the boys can collect from dump heaps. Flies from a nearby swamp swarm in through broken windows of their house, on which taxes have been unpaid for seven years."

"Boris Hanson is 78 years old, badly ruptured and with a wounded leg which pains him constantly. He is alone in the world. He has not had a cent of income since E.R.A. was discontinued in April. His one-room shack stands in a small community in an oystering section along the southern coast of New Jersey. The shack is about two blocks from his nearest neighbor, and Mr. Hanson, with his rupture, his advanced age, and his wounded leg can walk only a few steps. An old neighbor gives him small amounts from his old age pension and a Negro friend gives him fish from time to time. He has no other food. Recently a friend gave him some jam but he has no bread to eat it on. The county overseers are doing nothing to help this man."

Even in New York City, boasting the highest per capita relief expenditures of any large city in the country, investigation has shown standards to be disastrously low. A commission appointed by Mayor La Guardia found in 1935 that the budget allowed by the home relief authorities averaged 40 per cent less than that of the various private charity organizations. The food allowance was inadequate for maintaining decent health standards in 30 of the 34 precincts in the city. Moreover, rent allowances averaged from $3 to $25 a month under the average rent in the district in which the families lived, necessitating a further drain on the inadequate food allowance in a large number of cases. The average family allotment for clothing in 1934 was $16.20, while fuel and ice distribution was inadequate. There was a monthly allowance of 25 cents per family to cover such "incidentals" as carfare, recreation, and insurance. Although the committee made definite recommendations for a general improvement in standards, little has been done in the past year to remedy

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conditions. Since prices have risen in the interval, the average recipient of home relief in New York is probably not as well off today as when the report was made.

WANTED: A POLICY!

Work Relief vs. the "Dole"

FEW PERSONS would deny that grave errors have been made in meeting the problem of relief. But perhaps the most needless of these errors have been due to the fact that, as a nation, we have been unable to make up our minds on fundamental policy. Our relief program has been a political football practically devoid of careful planning. Delays, unexplicable reversals in policy, and inconsistency in relief standards have occasioned much waste and no end of controversy. Throughout the entire period, for example, there has been sharp disagreement as to whether the emphasis should be on relief or on jobs. At the beginning most relief was given outright in the form of charity. Gradually, however, many local communities began to require the unemployed to work for whatever benefits they received. The C.W.A. was an experiment in work relief on a vast national scale, and after its demise the F.E.R.A. provided both home relief—for which no work was required—and work relief which frequently yielded slightly higher benefits. Since the advent of the W.P.A., all able-bodied men have been expected to work if they wished to obtain aid. Those unable to work have been thrown back on the states.

The popularity of work relief lies primarily on the assumption that idleness is demoralizing for the unemployed. In his annual message to Congress on January 4, 1935, the President asserted:

> "I am not willing that the vitality of our people be further sapped by the giving of cash, of market baskets, for

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> 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 . . . but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination."

Work relief may also be defended as an important recovery measure. Like direct relief it stimulated consumer purchasing power by placing money in the hands of those who need it most. But it does even more. If men are to work, they must have tools and supplies. Sometimes, therefore, a large part of the work relief appropriation goes for purposes other than relief labor. But the additional money is not lost. It goes to the men normally employed in the tool and supply industries. Since these industries tend to be the most depressed in an economic crisis, every dollar spent in work relief goes to stimulate business where aid is most needed. Work relief has the additional advantage over the "dole" in that it adds to the national wealth by creating tangible assets which otherwise would be neglected. Public housing furnishes a good illustration. During the depression private house building has been practically at a standstill. Knowing that houses for the masses of the people cannot be built at a profit at a time when public purchasing power is at its lowest ebb, private enterprise has not attempted to supply houses on a mass scale—even though they are desperately needed. A large-scale public housing program, on the other hand, would do much toward restoring economic conditions to the point where such building will be economically practicable.

Criticisms of work relief center largely around its cost. The more valuable the project—generally speaking—the more costly the materials. Only a fraction of building costs goes directly to labor. Since relief funds are usually limited, a strong case may be made for giving the needy as adequate relief as possible rather than dissipating funds in expensive work projects. The National Economy League maintains that if direct relief alone were granted, it would be possible to support five million families at an annual cost of only

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$1,200,000,000—only half of which need come from the federal government. It contrasts this with the approximately $4,000,000,000 spent by Washington alone in the present fiscal year for all forms of relief.

From the worker's standpoint, there have been many objections to the ordinary work-relief projects because so little account has been taken of the training and aptitude of the workers—particularly the professional and "white collar" men. And when a deliberate attempt is made, as by the W.P.A. to adapt the projects to the qualifications of the men who are on the relief rolls, there is danger of wasting time on comparatively trivial pursuits. It is also difficult to find projects which do not conflict with private enterprise. The ancient American word "boondoggling" has been revived as a term of opprobrium for work-relief projects whose value was not immediately apparent. Undoubtedly, most of these undertakings have had definite social value. Who is to say, for example, that a municipal golf course, or the W.P.A. theater is not "useful"? Frequently it might be said, however, that their cost has been out of all proportion to their dollar-and-cents worth. It is also important to remember that no man likes to waste his time and energy on a job that is of doubtful utility. When millions of Americans are inadequately fed, poorly clothed and indecently housed, it seems indefensible for a man to devote his efforts to raking leaves.

What Should They Be Paid?

To add further confusion to the situation, proponents of work relief differ widely on the question of wages for relief workers. During the earliest period, when the local communities were largely responsible for relief, the unemployed were frequently required to "work out" their relief allotment. The amount of money or groceries obtained usually depended on the needs of the man's family, and he was expected to work for the city at prevailing wages until this amount had

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been earned. The C.W.A. adopted a radically different principle. On the theory that labor was worth its hire, hours and wages were standardized for the entire country, and the weekly pay was made comparable to that prevailing in private industry at that time. Immediately, these arose a storm of protest from employers, particularly in the South, who complained that men were being lured by C.W.A. wages to abandon their regular employment. The wages on the F.E.R.A. work projects were also paid at prevailing rates, differing in various parts of the country. Still the protest that men were being taken from private employment continued, though no statistical evidence was ever advanced to show such was the case.

In an effort to get away from the wide local fluctuations and at the same time relieve the workers of the anxieties associated with outdoor work when pay is by the hour, the W.P.A. introduced a flat monthly "security wage." The "security wage" varied from $19 to $94 a month depending on the classification of the employee, the type of community, and the section of the country. Since these wages were in every case materially below the prevailing wage for similar work in the same community, they were bitterly opposed by union labor and organizations of the unemployed. As the result of pressure by these groups, Congress reestablished the principle of paying prevailing wage rates in its W.P.A. appropriation for 1936-1937, which was approved by the President, June 22, 1936. Wages have not been increased, but reductions in hours of work have been made to bring the hourly wage to the prevailing rate.

Again there is something to be said for each viewpoint. It may be argued that since the problem is solely one of preventing destitution, public assistance should be entirely on the basis of need. A standard wage for work-relief employees, on the other hand, is important from the standpoint of morale. Needy persons, like other human beings, resent having outsiders snoop into their personal affairs. While investigation

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into a family's needs can be carried on tactfully and with dignity, there have been many cases in which inexperienced social workers have made the application for relief unnecessarily humiliating. In New Jersey several instances are reported in which investigations were carried out by uniformed policemen. Cases are recorded in which needy families have faced starvation rather than undergo the mental agony of seeking relief.

Cash Relief vs. Food Orders

A subsidiary problem relates to the method of payment. At first there was a strong sentiment against giving cash to the unemployed. Food allowances or grocery orders were considered preferable for two reasons: (1) the recipients of relief were presumed to be none too careful in the use of money, and (2) lower prices could be obtained from grocers if buying were concentrated on a few articles. It was also argued that this is the only means of making sure that the poor obtain scientific balanced rations. Enlightened social workers in general, however, have opposed the giving of food orders on the ground that it is undignified and tends to stigmatize the relief recipient. Cash, on the other hand, maintains morale and makes the relief families feel a part of society. The relief families very definitely prefer to be paid in cash, since no two families have the same tastes, standards, or needs. Too often the food order is merely a device for enforcing low standards. It is based on the traditional idea that the state is only responsible for keeping the families of the unemployed alive, for furnishing the bare necessities of existence. The giving of cash is a recognition of the fact that even the unemployed cannot live on bread alone. Modern life carries with it a multitude of needs—including clothing, fuel and light, medical and dental care, carfare, cleaning and household supplies—which vary for each family and can only be met through a cash allowance.

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Part-time Earnings

The fact that needs such as these have been so rarely met in the average relief budget intensifies the problem of how to deal with part-time earnings. Even in the cities where relief practices have been the most liberal, the customary rule has been to deduct in full any earnings obtained by the relief client or any members of his family. This action has usually been defended on the ground that public opinion would not tolerate a more liberal policy in face of the perennial shortage of relief funds. The results, however, have been most disquieting. Many individuals are known to have turned down temporary or part-time jobs for fear they might be taken off the relief rolls. Others have sought to conceal the income obtained from odd jobs because they desperately needed the money for purposes not included in the relief budget. In some instances, members of a relief family have turned down jobs because the amount that they were allowed to keep would not take care of carfare and lunches. As a means of stimulating desire for employment and preventing relief recipients from becoming permanently unemployable, the La Guardia Committee in New York recommended that minors in a relief family be allowed to keep half their earnings and that other members of the family be permitted to retain half until the total family income reached a really adequate amount. The fear of being thrown off the relief rolls hase been overcome in some cities by giving each man who obtains a job a card entitling him to receive relief once more if his job folds up.

Who Is to Pay for Relief?

Back of all of the conflict over relief policies lies the fundamental fact that no one has wanted to foot the bill. At first public authorities tried to push the responsibility on the private agencies. The latter were not unwilling to expand their activities, but soon found that the need was vastly

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greater than could be met by voluntary gifts. All sorts of ingenious schemes were concocted for making the poor care for the poor. Attempts were made to persuade workers voluntarily to share their work with the unemployed. Most corporations instituted plans by which the available work was distributed over as many employees as possible—thus spreading the hardships of the depression over the greater part of the working class. Most indefensible of all, was a system of "block aid" whereby each block in a city was asked to look after its own destitute. When these voluntary schemes had broken down, many communities hit upon the sales tax as a device for shifting the burden of relief upon the least able to bear it.

The belief that each community should look after its own unfortunates is deeply rooted in American tradition. In part the feeling is doubtless a reflection of sectional jealousies and a mistrust of a far-away central government. The North resents having to carry part of the burden for the impoverished portions of the South. The South, in turn, is not anxious to have outsiders dictate the terms of relief. Then, there is the feeling that local control serves as a better check on imposters. This probably has little basis in fact, for adequate investigation can eliminate fraud under either federal or local control. The greatest argument against relying on local finances, however, is practical rather than theoretical. Some states can collect adequate funds, while some cannot. Why should an unemployed man in New York be well taken care of, while a man in West Virginia cannot obtain decent relief. In many communities there are serious legal and constitutional obstacles in obtaining the funds needed. Texas, for example, is unable to increase its general relief appropriation without a constitutional amendment. This would require at least two years. Nebraska and Florida have also encountered constitutional difficulties. The extent of tax delinquency is a barrier to further taxation in a number of other states.

During the depression most relief funds, whether con-

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tributed by local or federal authorities, have been obtained by borrowing. With tax yields far below normal and the demands for assistance far above normal, the state and federal governments have had little choice other than to borrow the needed funds. Obviously, this cannot go on indefinitely. Many communities have already pushed their borrowing to the limit prescribed by law. The federal government has increased its debts by approximately 17 billion dollars since 1929. If the need for relief is to be permanent some way must be found to finance it out of current taxation.

This would unquestionably be easier for the federal government than for the states or local communities. Local governments have found that the real estate tax was practically the only form of taxation, apart from licenses, which they could impose and administer successfully. As a result it has been badly overworked and could not possibly bear the full burden of relief. The federal government, on the other hand, has several possible sources of revenue which are relatively untapped. Income and inheritance taxes could be made to yield considerably higher revenues. These levies have the advantage over all other forms of taxation in that they can be adjusted in accordance with ability to pay. Federal financing of relief would mean, moreover, that the Government could standardize relief practices, so that no American need be penalized because of the state in which he happens to live.

Politics in Relief

During the Presidential campaign the administration of relief has become very largely a partisan issue. The Republicans have charged the Democrats with using the relief funds for political purposes, an accusation hotly denied by the Democrats. In a sphere where partisanship plays such a rôle, it is difficult to obtain an honest picture of the situation. Doubtless some politics has crept in. In many states, on the other hand, it can be shown that the administration of relief

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has been maintained on a completely non-partisan basis. Political influence could conceivably take four forms: (1) the supervisors might, as is the case with other officers, be drawn from the dominant political party even though more suitable men might be found outside; (2) relief might be made available only to members of the dominant party, and others might be told that they could only obtain assistance if they voted as they were told; (3) work-relief projects might be chosen more with eye to humoring some local political leader than on the basis of genuine usefulness; (4) contracts for supplies might be let out exclusively to men who vote right and who contribute to the party campaign funds.

It is always difficult to say definitely when any of these offenses have been committed. Opinions vary regarding the suitability of administrators; there are certain to be differences of opinion with respect to work-relief projects. It can be said, however, that instances of men being denied relief for political reasons have been rare. Nor have there been many cases of dishonesty or graft in the giving of contracts. Despite the haste with which the C.W.A. program was put through—involving hundreds of millions of dollars—only 22 administrators out of 70,000 have been convicted of serious irregularities. Politics has probably entered in most frequently in the selection of projects. This does not mean, however, that the project selected by the local political leaders is necessarily greatly inferior to those which might have been selected by federal authorities. Some concessions to local politics must obviously be made if the work is to be done properly. The only question is whether they have been too large?

CONFLICTING PROGRAMS FOR RELIEF

OUT of this welter of conflicting viewpoints, it is apparent that there are two wholly irreconcilable approaches to the problem of relief. Few individuals are opposed to all relief. But many persons would impose the most drastic

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safeguards in order to make sure the recipients are "worthy" and in order that there will still be an incentive for the poor to work for a living. Persons who hold this view believe that the unemployed should be made to work for every dollar's worth of relief, that the wage-scale should be materially under that of the lowest-paid private industry, and that remuneration be given either in kind or in food orders. They usually believe that the responsibility should be borne entirely by the local community.

On the other extreme may be found those who would use relief as an instrument for equalizing wealth. They would impose no restrictions save that of need, and they insist that society should see to it that every American has adequate standard of living. The great majority of persons hold not very clearly defined views somewhere between these extremes.

The Relief Policy of the Democratic Party

In line with the Administration's policy, the Democratic Party platform declares that unemployment is "an inescapable obligation of our government." It advocates that the government furnish work at prevailing wages "in keeping with state and local governments on useful public projects." But no effort is made to deal specifically with relief standards, or the exact division of responsibility between the federal and state governments.

The Republican Program

The Republican platform implies a complete reorganization of the relief program. It calls for the abandonment of work relief on the ground of economy. In its place the Republicans would provide direct relief financed jointly by the federal and state governments. It would turn the administration of relief wholly over to "non-political local agencies."

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Useful public works might be continued, but they would be administered, as is the P.W.A., independently of relief. In common with the Democratic platform, nothing is said on the crucial question of standards. Nor is there any suggestion as to how the states and local communities can overcome their constitutional and legal obstacles in order to provide funds for adequate relief.

The United States Conference of Mayors

In a report presented to President Roosevelt on March 11, 1936, the mayors of 100 of America's largest cities unanimously went on record in favor of work relief along the lines of the W.P.A. Most of the mayors were extremely emphatic in praising the advantages of work as contrasted with direct relief or the "dole." They also agreed that work being done under the present program is useful and urgent, and pointed to other useful projects which they hoped would be undertaken in the near future.

Program of The American Association of Social Workers

A somewhat different view of the W.P.A. and the principle of work relief has been taken by the American Association of Social Workers. While admitting that wages were more satisfactory than direct relief, the Association points out that there are millions of unemployed, both on and off the relief rolls whose needs for jobs is as great as those accepted by the W.P.A. For these persons, the withdrawal of federal relief funds has caused a situation fully as precarious as existed in 1932. Under such conditions, it holds that the first task of the federal and state governments should be to devise a program which will meet the needs of the whole body of jobless. It suggests a plan whereby the federal and state governments jointly undertake to provide general assist-

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tance to all families in need. Where states are unable because of poverty to furnish a fair share of the relief burden, the Association advocates a special equalization grant by the federal government. This public assistance should in every case be sufficient to maintain life, health, and decency as indicated by a standard budget.

In addition to direct relief, the Association proposes an employment program which will offer jobs to as many as possible of the unemployed. This would be entirely separate from the relief program, and would develop only such projects as offer genuine work of undoubted usefulness which is suited to the capacities of the unemployed. Eligibility for these jobs, the Association believes, should be based on the skill of the worker rather than his need. Wages and conditions of work should be at least as good as those prevailing for similar work in the locality. Workers should have the same rights of organization and collective bargaining as are guaranteed to workers in private employment. Under this program it would be unnecessary to speed up employment or hire superfluous workers because all the unemployed would presumably be receiving adequate relief until either a public or private job is obtained. In order to integrate relief, public works and private employment, the Association would establish a public employment service. Such an institution, if effectively organized, would be a bulwark against fraud, and serve as a protection against the shelving of the unemployed until they become wholly unemployable.

Security or Relief?

There are those who maintain that relief of any kind carries with it the stigma of charity and should be avoided. As an alternative, they would propose a far more audacious scheme of social insurance than is found in the Social Security Act. If all persons who are unemployed for reasons beyond their control, whether it be because of sickness, old age, inca-

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pacity or breakdown of the industrial system, be provided adequate and regular security benefits, there would be no need for a system of relief. There surely is no moral or logical reason why the risks associated with modern industrial life should not be borne by society as a whole rather than by individuals. The insurance principle is applied to practically every type of business risk, as well as to accidents and death. Why, it is asked, should it not be extended to cover the risks which most profoundly affect the lives of the majority of present-day American families? An adequate system of social insurance like an adequate system of direct relief need not be inconsistent with a large-scale public works program. If public works are still necessary they could be carried on simultaneously with a social-security program on exactly the same terms as private enterprise.

While some groups are working for a more adequate relief program in face of a growing need, others are urging that we get "back to normalcy." With the steady improvement in economic conditions many persons tend to overlook the fact that a fifth of America's workers are still unemployed and that at least a sixth of the population stands desperately in the need of public assistance. Although it seems incredible that individuals could forget the crisis which faced the nation only four years ago, there are many—usually those who suffered little themselves—to whom insecurity is just a word. It is true that relief is not a substitute for jobs. Nor can it take the place of a fundamental reordering of our economic system which will remove the ever-haunting threat of unemployment. But it makes comparatively little difference to the average worker whether the jobs are provided by industry or the government. He only asks that they be real jobs, not charity dressed up as work.

Meanwhile, we have not as yet formulated a policy for stabilizing our economic system. Nor have we adopted a scheme for social security which will care for more than a fraction of the persons facing destitution in America. And it

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will be years before the old age and unemployment insurance section of the present Security Act becomes fully effective. Consequently, we dare not allow the rising figures of production and stock market prices to blind us to the tremendous volume of poverty in this country. Our humanitarian impulses should be strong enough to demand an adequate relief program. But if not, we should be deeply concerned about the type of America in which our children are to grow up in.

Basic Principles of Relief

We have seen that there are wide differences of opinion regarding the nature of a satisfactory relief program. These differences must be pounded out on the forge of public discussion. After five years of intensive experience dealing with a great emergency, we ought to be in a position to formulate a policy far more intelligently than was possible at the beginning of the depression. Many of our traditional ideas have been revealed as utterly unsuited to the problems of present-day mass unemployment. They will have to be discarded. In their place there are certain basic principles which should appeal to every American:

1. It is evident, in the first place, that we need a carefully integrated national program of relief. The day of complete local control of relief is past. The exact relationship between national and local responsibility remains to be determined.

2. Whatever form relief takes, great care should be taken to protect the self-respect of the recipients; when there is no job and resources are gone, relief should be a right to be availed of without hesitation or conscience.

3. Relief must be adequate. It is not enough that Americans should not starve. They should be assured at least the minimum essentials of health and decency—which means a balanced diet, a home which meets the minimum requirements of warmth, air, light and sanitation, adequate clothing, medical care, educational advantages, and a sufficient amount for

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the incidentals which are an integral part of the American standard of living.

4. The whole program should be administered with as little cost to society as is consistent with the above standards.

5. Administration of relief should as far as possible be taken out of politics and placed in the hands of an expert staff of trained social workers.

For the sake of emphasis it is perhaps necessary to repeat that relief is not the ideal solution of the problem of insecurity and destitution. Under present conditions, however, any measures taken by private industry or the government toward social security are almost certain to be partial and incomplete. A second line of defense must be created for those who are not protected by other schemes. Direct relief available to all who have no other source of support would constitute a final line of defense. It is for future social tacticians to construct the front line defenses so that it will never be needed.

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