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"THE RECOVERY PROGRAM AND A NEW AMERICA"

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ADDRESS

of

FREDERIC C. HOWE

Director, Consumers' Counsel Division

of the

AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMINISTRATION

Before

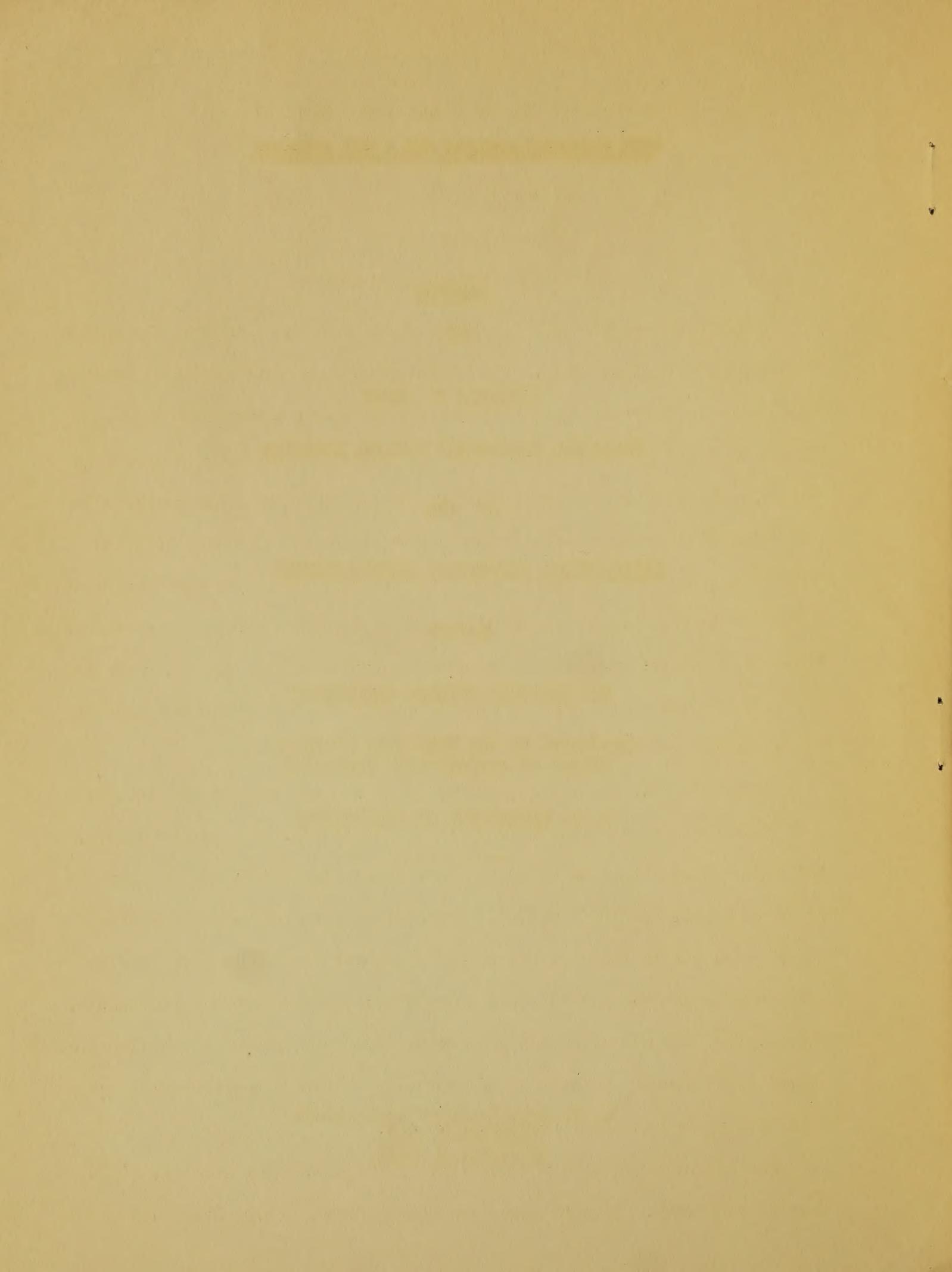
THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

Conducted by the Extension Division  
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C.  
November 2, 1933.



"The Recovery Programme and a New America"

Address by

Frederic C. Howe

Consumers Counsel

Agricultural Adjustment Administration

I am going to take some liberties today with you, and with the things I am supposed to talk about. I am doing this because it is not worthwhile, especially in these changing revolutionary days, to waste one's time on things that are not of importance to us. Moreover, you know in a general way what is being attempted at Washington; you know its goal; you know we are attempting to put twelve million men back to work and give both the worker and the farmer a share in the wealth, well being and happiness that should be theirs. As to how that should be done is a matter of experiment. What was done yesterday may be changed tomorrow. We are engaged in a war, a war on poverty on the one hand and a war for the better distribution of wealth on the other.

I want to talk about the possibilities of a new and better society, such a society as you want to leave to your children. If you are wise, I think you would rather leave such a society to them and to America than to leave your children great wealth. For wealth is vanishing; as vanishing today as it was in the days of the great Prophet 2000 years ago. Wealth takes wings, and whether it takes wings or not, it is a source of trouble. And poverty, the poverty which we have all suffered or feared the last few years, is of itself creative of a new, and I believe a better social order than than which has brought us where we are.

And let me begin with a quotation. I think you will like it. I like it immensely. I don't know when I have read a public utterance that



gives me more pleasure. It excites my enthusiasm, as it excites my envy as a writer as do few utterances of public men in my lifetime.

Here is that quotation: "We have worked too hard in this country. \*\*\*\*We made a virtue of intemperate greed and effort.\*\*\*\*Toil was holy. It was wrong to sit in the shade and dream.\*\*\*\*

"We have believed that leisure is wrong.\*\*\*\*I believe that now that we are turning our minds around, and discovering that overwork does not pay, neither in money nor in any other sense, we will not continue to make a fetish of overwork. We shall learn as individuals to value and to improve ourselves.\*\*\*\*

"The thought of organizing another man's or woman's private and personal existence is repugnant to me. But I think that all men and women should have the chance to do and think and dream as they please part of the time, not for money, not for fame, but simply because they want to; and I believe that most of us, once the opportunity is afforded, will discover within ourselves a wide variety of stimulating and pleasant things to do."

That, my friends, was not said by a great Athenian in the days of Pericles. It was not said by Epictetus, by Seneca or by any one of the philosophers of antiquity. That statement was made but yesterday. It was made by a member of President Roosevelt's Cabinet, by one of the men who is doing all he can do to lift us back to comfort and security. It was made by Secretary of Agriculture H. A. Wallace.

Strange as it may seem, that statement could hardly have been made at any time before in the history of this country. It could hardly have been made before in 2500 years of progress from the days of Greece down to date. The reason is we dared not cease working as we dared not cease thinking of work.



Do you realize that it is but a few short years since all of us feared want, feared we would not have food enough to go around. We feared that our labor would not protect us from the possibility of hunger, possibly of starvation. That was the necessary fear of America as it was the fear of the Western world until the present day.

We need have no such fear today. Instead of fighting against famine, we are now fighting against plenty. Instead of fighting against too little, we are fighting against too much, too much food, too many shoes, too many clothes, too much wealth that is issuing from the land on one hand and the machines we have created to serve us on the other. It is this that is the extraordinary fact in the world in which we live. It is one of the most extraordinary facts which our civilization presents.

Those who observe the technological changes that are going round about us, observe that the machine has upset every effort of man to establish an orderly society. It has thrown everything out of gear. This machine which man perfected has put twelve million men out of work. It has put from twenty to thirty million people in poverty or on the borderline of poverty. We have too much horse-power. Too little opportunity for man-power. For the machine has absorbed the opportunities for man-power which have been ours for millions of years.

This, my friends, is the problem we are working on today. It is not a problem of too little wealth, but of more wealth than we know how to handle so that it will find its way into the currents of distribution and consumption. The experiment we are occupied with is the greatest experiment the world has ever known. That experiment is directed to the control of plenty, not the consequence of scarcity. We have in fact reached the end of an age long era. We have reached the end of millions of years in man's



long, almost unending struggle against the fear of necessary starvation, of necessary hunger and of necessary insecurity.

There is another fact of outstanding significance. And while I do not want even to approach partisan considerations, I think it is one of those miraculous accidents that sometimes happen to mankind that there is a man at the head of a Nation who says and believes the fact that man has a right to useful work. That he has a right to use the talents, the energy and gifts which God or Nature gave to him. That is another extraordinary fact in the world in which we live. It signifies a revolutionary change in our thought processes. For however it may be stated, one of the messages which issues out of Washington these days is that men have a right to work.

Quite as explicitly it is being declared that men have a right to eat even if they cannot work. The machine has so altered our industrial system that poverty has ceased to be personal, it has become social. It is no longer traceable to the individual man. It is traceable to the collective maladjustment of our industrial system. In consequence poverty has ceased to be a disgrace. It has become a social problem for which no individual man is responsible.

And so we have three facts before us. 1. The machine has given us an abundance of wealth. 2. We have a political leader who believes in the fact that men have a right to work, and 3, a warm-hearted statesman who insists that those who cannot work shall no longer be treated as objects of charity, they shall no longer be set aside as unworthy, they are merely those members who have had to step aside because of some accident which has thrown them out of employment.

That brings me to another thing which I want to say. I am saying it



as a reporter of a changing point of view, of a new social psychology, of a political philosophy which I have never dared expect would be ours in my lifetime. We are undertaking relief work from a new viewpoint. The man on the bread line is in the same economic situation as an official of a bank, of a railroad system, of a great industry which has been unable to survive the industrial crash, which has so dislocated the foundations of society that men's jobs and their opportunity to live has passed from under their individual control. Twelve million workers have been thrown out of work by this dislocation. Thirteen thousand banks have been closed. Possibly one million farmers and home owners face the loss of their farms and their homes while friends and neighbors to the right and left of us, find themselves without the wherewithall with which they can sustain their families in customary comfort and send their children fully fed and fully clothed to the schools.

And so the Relief Administration set up at Washington under Mr. Harry Hopkins is serving the Nation with a declaration different from that of any similar public official in the history of the Western world. Not only is he giving men work, not only is he disbursing food and relief more generously than it has heretofore been done, he is announcing this relief as something made necessary by a collapsing industrial civilization, for which collapse no individual or group of individuals is entirely responsible.

And now I come to you and to me. Each one of us has a new job. That job is to think differently than we ever thought before. We as individuals, have to my mind, / a more important service to perform than to do some labor from day to day to help in the recovery program. The real obligation upon us is to recast our understanding of life. Also to recast our attitude toward our fellows. Also, and possibly most important of all, to contemplate how this behemoth machine which has become a Frankenstein monster,

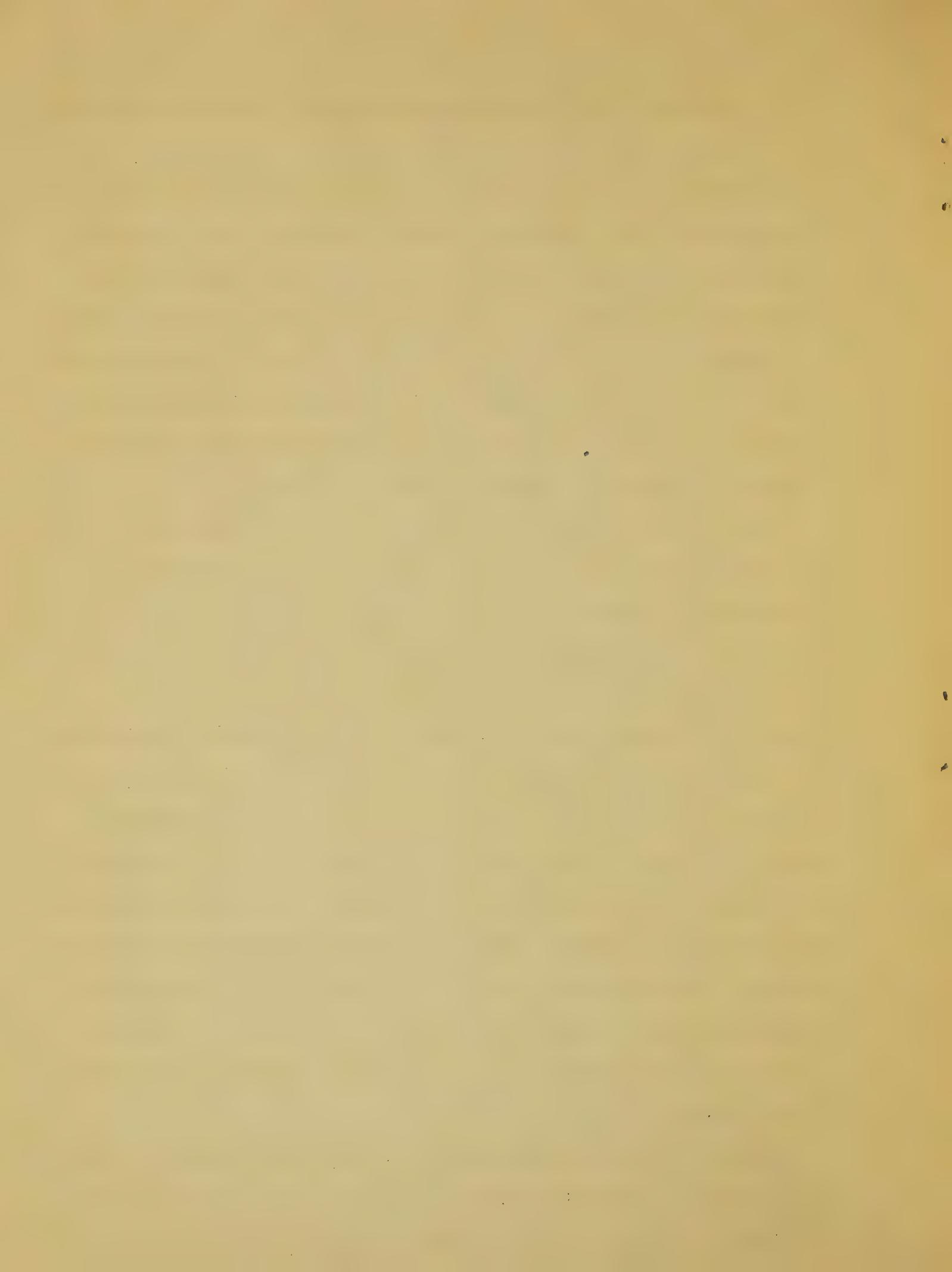


can be harnessed to that want and fear will disappear from the face of our fair land.

I should like to stop and let this suggestion sink into your minds. I am quite willing to have you forget everything I have said, if you will give some thought to the fact that recovery means a recovery, which will end worklessness, end insecurity, end fear and end poverty. And that involves a new approach to this Nation of ours, to its functions, to what it should do for all of us so that we will joyously wake in the morning, joyously go forth to enjoy the wealth which is here in abundance and waits only to find its way through the current of commerce to all of us.

It was possibly this new approach to the problems which confront us that led to the creation of the Consumers' Counsel Division of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. So far as I am aware, no similar official, whose duty it was to devote his time and energy to the protection of unorganized millions, has ever been provided before. Scan the political changes of Government and you will find that our thought, our emphasis and our political organization for three hundred years has been directed toward the production of wealth, to more and more production in our attempt to escape from want. We have legislated to produce more food, to manufacture more clothes, to speed all the wheels of industry to bring more coal, iron, and oil from the ground, to build more mills and factories, to erect great apartment houses and hotels. The land of America, from pioneer days, has been dedicated to the production of wealth. Not to its use, not to its consumption, but to add to this wealth as though that were a satisfactory end in itself.

And now I may be merely expressing a fervent hope when I say that we may be entering a Consumers' Society, on a Society in which men in places of power, will think of wealth as something to be used, something to be



enjoyed, something to contribute to our happiness. This suggestion, as I said, may be wishful, and yet it is my belief that economic forces which we cannot control will drive political forces to the contemplation of wealth as a thing to be dedicated to use, to find its way into every one's hands and to so control the machine, the engines of production, and the ends of distribution as well, so that this end will be consummated.

You will realize now, I think, why I chose to neglect the details of the Recovery Administration. You will understand why I introduced what I had to say with the quotation which I read. Let me repeat a part of it. "We have worked too hard in this country. We have made a virtue of intemperate greed and effort. A country was here to be occupied and subdued. It was wrong to sit in the shade and dream. It was wrong to go fishing in working hours.

I continue the quotation. "We have believed that leisure is wrong. We have not trusted ourselves sufficiently to believe that we might be trusted with leisure. We will not continue to make a fetish of overwork. We shall learn as individuals to value and to improve ourselves." I especially like the way this statement concludes. The ending is: "I think that all men and women should have the chance to do, and think, and dream as they please part of the time. Not for money, not for fame, but simply because they want to. And I believe that most of us once the opportunity is afforded, will discover within ourselves a wide variety of stimulating and pleasant things to do."

That is the final note of this invigorating quotation. I want you to think of it. It is far better than anything I can say. It is far better than anything I ever have been permitted to say. It says that we shall now



have time and I hope opportunity to turn in on ourselves and contemplate that there is a fine life within each one of us that is full of unknown and undreamt possibilities of happiness.

I do not have much time to read these days. Yet I do occasionally think of the ancient Greeks, who because of slavery, were able to talk this way and live this kind of a life. And these Greeks produced a civilization which has not been approached in subsequent centuries. They knew that the life within us was of more value than the life without. That the things Nature gave us were of more importance than the things we sought to own. They dared to live in the sun and write and think and talk in a way that has survived the bankruptcies of business for 2500 years. For today wherever any European or the English language is spoken, men go back to the thought of these Athenian philosophers for inspiration to help them in the better understanding and the fuller enjoyment of life.

And just as slavery made such a life possible to the Greeks, so the modern machine may make such a life possible to all of us. For the machine has taken over our work. The automatic factory is crowding its way into many industries. Great plants are operated with but a handful of men. The electric switch turns out steel rails as it spins for us valuable fabrics. Man has either created a Frankenstein monster which has made man himself superfluous, or he has created the lamp of Aladdin which he only needs to rub wisely to lift him from the struggle on which he has been ceaselessly engaged for a million years.

Many of you may think I have wandered far afield from my subject matter because I have said so little of the Recovery Administration, of the problems of industry, of agriculture, of labor. In the sense that men spoke of recovery in the past, that is quite true. I have neglected the old



concept of life. The old emphasis on thrift, on labor, on concern for material things, yet I have talked on recovery, on the recovery of our individual mind, on the recovery of our individual self, so that we may understand and take enjoyment out of the things that are inside of each of us. And that is a real recovery. It is a recovery of man himself. Not of the right to work in a mine or factory, but the right to the possession of our own individuality and its use for the fullest possible individual life.

Now I confess I feel elated that I should be out among the pioneers in this new dispensation, just as much of a pioneer as my grandfather and great-grandfather were when they moved West and still further West for the breaking of new acres and the building of new commonwealths. They were pioneers to escape from the serfdom of old Europe. They were escaping from a kind of personal slavery. For a man with a homestead in the West under himself was as free as he then could be. Those men were great individualists. Each man for himself, was the philosophy of that old society, a philosophy made necessary by conditions which man could not control. He could not control it because he had few tools, no machines. What he produced, he produced oft-times with his naked hands. Today that is ended. We no longer work with our hands. We have harnessed power. Society does most of these things for us. We almost turn a spigot and the things we need flow into our laps. And men in Washington are in a sense pioneering in this new field of consumers use, of wealth for enjoyment, of new and abundant leisure. We are breaking down old traditions. On them we are creating new ones. We are thinking of a new concept of society in which undreamt of harnessed power, will relieve us of unnecessary labor and will lift unnumbered millions of men, women and children into comfort that kings did not know of a century ago.



The machine has done for our age what free land did for our fathers. One gave us freedom of one kind the other gave us freedom of another kind, and so we are confronted with a new kind of statesmanship, a new kind of engineering. It involves a kind of statesmanship and engineering that consciously or unconsciously is going on all about us. Often it is not recognized as such. Yet that is the motive that is shaping the thoughts and actions of men today as it never shaped them in the past. I find an expression of this philosophy running through the utterances of the Chief Executive of the Nation. I see it in such changes as the Federal Relief Administration. I see it in such activities as the building of model homes throughout the country, in the clearance of slums, in the development of subsistence farms to which men thrown out of work can retire and live upon the land. And I see it in the expenditure of public monies to add beauty to our cities and country in the form of work of public improvement.

I said there was a second problem which confronted us. That problem is the problem of leisure, of free time, to do with it as we will, of time to become ourselves, to enrich ourselves, to get a deeper acquaintance with our own personality, with our own ego. Now I have always had a great respect for that thing which we call human personality. That thing that sets one man off from another. That distinction is not a question of wealth. It is not a distinction borne of place, fame or recognition by one's fellows. William James, the great Harvard philosopher talked much about the distinction which he found in men whom other men passed by. And I hope I am not tiring you recalling back those lines which give me so much pleasure. The first is, "We shall learn as individuals to value and to improve ourselves." Again, "The thought of organizing another man's or woman's private and personal existence is repugnant to me, but I think," said this statesman philosopher, "again" "all men and women should have the chance to do and think and dream as they



please part of the time, not for money, not for fame, but simply because they want to. I believe that most of us", he says, "once the opportunity is afforded, will discover within ourselves a wide variety of stimulating and pleasant things to do." And so it is up to you, not in an organized way, not through clubs or groups, it is up to you as individuals, to ascertain what you will do with this leisure which has been conferred upon you. Not what you will do with it, but what you will do with you yourself.

There is something refreshing in realizing that one is living in the midst of revolutionary change, that one is living at the birth of a new era, an era that marks on the one hand the end of necessary want and hunger and that marks on the other hand the dawn of what is possibly the most important epoch in the history of man. For as I said in an earlier paragraph, we have come to the end of a necessary fear, of necessary want, of/scarcity necessary of food, of clothes, and means to enrich ourselves. We need, if we are wise enough, no longer fear for these things. We are at the same time concerning ourselves with the harnessing of power, of machinery, of the political state, so that the wealth which springs from the brain and hand of man will reach out and distribute itself so that comfort and health and happiness shall be a common heritage of all of us, and a new age will be born in which each individual, be he rich or poor, be he high or low in birth, will be able to dedicate part of his time to the realization of that personality which God or Nature has given him for the attainment of his greatest individual and social perfection.

