

As Expected: WPA In Politics

By David Hyder

"I hope very much that people on relief will not contribute any money for the purpose of aiding any political party."

Thus, piously, the president met the definite entrance of the WPA into the political arena. For WPA workers are being enrolled in the Workers Alliance (ten cents to a half dollar a month), which, according to President David Lasser, has a membership of one million unemployed. About 400,000, it is claimed, are workers on government projects.

The immediate occasion for Mr. Roosevelt's plea was the announcement that this organization would raise a \$50,000 campaign fund for the fall elections. This step was over-due; it was long expected by students of political affairs. Whenever a group acquires vested interest in government largesse the tendency is for this group to solidify its forces so as to perpetuate this interest. The fact that politicians have attempted to sway the WPA vote for their own advantage is pertinent only in that the workers thus learned of their power sooner than if they had been left to realize it by the urge of self-interest. When Harry Hopkins,

their super-boss, said how he would vote if he were voting in a given election he gave an instructive hint. When deputy administrator Aubrey Williams told relief clients to "keep their friends in power" the invitation to enter politics was more than implied. The use of government jobs by minor politicians as bribes for WPA and other "relief" votes must have suggested to the recipients the promise of permanent employment in an unemployment world which their rights of suffrage contained.

But these merely hastened the evil day. Any group faced with starvation "outside" will eventually hit upon the political method of keeping well-fed "inside." Their action in formally organizing and raising funds for political enterprises is reprehensible, but not more so than the political machinations of other groups seeking advantages from government

—such as the powerful Manufacturers Association, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion. "Relief" jobs are grants from society. So are the emoluments given to the tariff protected industries, and the hand-outs to the legionnaires. When it shall be made a criminal act for lobbies to appeal to legislators for favors, when candidates for office shall be prohibited at pain of imprisonment from soliciting or accepting contributions to their campaign funds, then and then only would the act of raising a fund for political purposes be unethical.

Men do not sell their right to vote until they are deprived of an opportunity to work. When denied that opportunity any demagogue can own not only their consciences but also their bodies. Will the right to vote satisfy an empty stomach? Who cares who is elected when the wife and children get food? What good is "good government" to the wretch who has tramped the streets for months looking for work, whose self-respect has dwindled with every new hole in his clothes? The WPA men know what dire poverty is. They have not forgotten. They will fight the monster with every means at their command—and the best means they know of is the power of their combined vote.

Work-relief, according to our political "economists" is an established and permanent factor in our civilization. In a world so filled with plenty that government is worried about its very abundance we have and shall continue to have, a class of workers forced to engage in non-productive, make-work projects—virtually dole receivers. The incongruity of the situation is not nearly as disturbing as the complacency with which officials and "intellectuals" accept it. Their smug ignorance is appalling.

It is reasonable to expect that this permanent group within our social order shall remain politically impotent? Hardly. No matter what political party is in power, the employed will be ready to protect their jobs with their votes. Aiding them will

be the merchants and professional men whose living is also largely affected by the dole system. The vortex will absorb many economic elements not ordinarily included in the "unemployed" class, and who knows but what an Association of Unemployed will not some day have their own candidate for President of the United States. Their membership is constantly on the increase.