EXPERIMENT IN RELIEF: THE CIVIL WORKS ADMINISTRATION IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1933-1934

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HISTORIANS have appraised the New Deal as an innovative period in American history, especially in the realm of federal-state relations. The first years of the Roosevelt Administration were marked by daring and controversial experiments in many areas, but one of the most critical was unemployment relief, traditionally a state responsibility. Under the pressure of growing lists of unemployed and the oncoming winter, the administration established the Civil Works Administration late in 1933. The purpose of this paper is to examine the traditional relief system in Pennsylvania and the modifications forced on it by the CWA, the role of the state in the operations of the federal agency, and the effects of the experiment.

As a leading industrial state, Pennsylvania was hit hard by the depression. As industrial activity decreased, wages fell and unemployment rose. Between 1929 and 1933, for example, annual wages in the metals industry fell from $807,900,000 to $260,000,000, but the number of workers fell only fifty percent. In the textile industry, employment decreased by only 43,000 from 275,000, but wages dropped from $326,300,000 to $178,000,000. The same trend was true in the other major industry, mining. By September of 1931, an estimated 90,000 people, or 26.2 percent of the working force of the state, were unemployed. With the rise in unemployment, the need for aid to workers and the destitute increased rapidly. The state was unprepared to meet the challenge. Traditionally, relief to the poor and un-

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2 Ibid., 68. This estimate was based on a poll of school children ordered by Governor Pinchot.
employed was a local matter, best handled by counties or private agencies.

The Pennsylvania system of relief was structured on a number of poor boards, dating back to colonial times, organized on a county, township or borough basis, and staffed by directors of the poor, who were charged with caring for the poor and incidentally providing jobs for those out of work. Their funds were provided by local taxes and were rarely sufficient to provide minimum support. Two classes of relief were provided: outdoor relief, in the form of orders for food, rent, clothing and fuel; and indoor relief, or institutions such as almshouses. In 1931, there were 425 poor boards and 920 directors of the poor.3

Lack of funds, no planning and inadequate leadership undermined local efforts to cope with the unemployment crisis. Counties raised taxes more than fifty percent from 1928 to 1932, but the number of relief applicants still increased. There were no standards, and terms of application and amounts granted for relief varied from place to place. Politics and favoritism hampered the effectiveness of the boards. Many members were hostile to the unemployed and held individuals responsible for being unable to find work. There was no real planning, and affairs were administered on a day-to-day basis. Officials lacked the necessary qualifications and often held other jobs, to which they devoted more time. By 1932, the system of local responsibility had almost collapsed.4

Private charity was no more effective. During the 1920's, the argument that only private agencies should provide assistance to the unemployed gained in popularity. In Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, this tendency resulted in a virtual abandonment of public responsibility and an almost total reliance on private groups. However, the pressures of the depression overwhelmed the charities as quickly as they did the local boards.5

With the system of relief faltering, demands mounted for state aid. The General Assembly responded only with reluctance and

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3 Sylvester K. Stevens and Donald Kent, editors, County Government and Archives in Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1947), 80-81.
4 Pennsylvania, Unemployment Relief in Pennsylvania, September 1, 1932-December 31, 1935 (Harrisburg, 1936), 3-4. (Hereafter cited as Relief in Pa., Third Annual Report.)
then in piecemeal fashion. This was no fault of Gifford Pinchot, governor since January, 1931. Even before his election, Pinchot appointed a committee to study ways of stimulating and coordinating local and private relief efforts. Little was accomplished because of lack of funds and the purely voluntary nature of the committees. Pinchot's solution to the problem of rising unemployment was federal aid, since he felt only the central government had the power to appropriate sufficient funds. As an old line progressive, Pinchot blamed the wealthy for the depression and urged that the graduated income tax be used to make them "carry at least half their fair share of the load." Speaking in Detroit in August, 1931, Pinchot declared that "the only power strong enough, and able to act in time, to meet the new problem of the coming winter is the Government of the United States." The Hoover Administration, however, had no intention of interfering in an area traditionally reserved to the states.

With the federal government unwilling to help, Pinchot called the legislature into special session in September, 1931. He proposed a State Commission on Unemployment to be funded by individual purchasing "prosperity bonds" at four percent interest, and a requisite constitutional amendment. The Republican legislative leaders felt unemployment was only temporary and that local communities should provide relief. Finally, after a bitter dispute, the assembly passed the first Talbot Act on December 28, allocating $10,000,000 to the local poor boards, but with no restriction on use. No new taxes were levied to raise the sum. Pinchot was disgusted with the legislature's action, but he allowed the bill to become law without his signature. The effects of the first Talbot Act were disappointing, since there was no control of the spending, no centralized planning, and some of the appropriation was used by counties for purposes other than relief.

In 1932, as the depression deepened, wages fell even more,
with some industries paying as little as five cents an hour. Property taxes were unpaid, and the poor boards struggled to provide even a pittance of relief. In over half the counties, only three dollars or less per week per family was provided for food, and this was in kind, not cash. Discontent grew steadily, and hungry people demonstrated in the streets of Uniontown and New Kensington. Governor Pinchot again appealed for federal aid, arguing before a Senate committee in January that it was indispensable. The final outcome of this and other pleas was the Emergency Relief and Construction Act, passed by Congress in July, 1932, which authorized loans to the states for unemployment relief. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation was permitted to advance $300,000,000 for relief purposes to the states. Since the RFC was unwilling to lend Pennsylvania money unless it had some central agency to distribute it, Pinchot called another special session of the legislature to meet on June 27, 1932.

This session was more productive than the first. The governor in his message said that more than 1,150,000 were unemployed and warned of the bitterness that might result if they were not assuaged. To carry the state through March, 1933, he asked for $40,000,000 to be applied to direct relief, since it would go further than work relief. After nearly two months of debate, the General Assembly passed three acts which became the cornerstone of Pennsylvania's relief system. The Woodward Act provided for the establishment of a State Emergency Relief Board, which was charged with the duty of planning and adopting a comprehensive program for the expenditure of federal and state funds. The second Talbot Act appropriated $12,000,000 for the period September 1, 1932-March 31, 1933, for the Emergency Relief Board. The money was to be spent where most needed and could be used for either direct relief or work relief. An Emergency Relief Sales Tax Act levied a sales tax of one percent on gross income from sales for the period September 1, 1932-February 28, 1933. Regular appropriations were cut to balance the budget. Pinchot asked the RFC for a loan of

$45,000,000, but the state received only $11,000,000 and was told it was not doing enough to relieve its own problems.\textsuperscript{15}

The State Emergency Relief Board organized and took action immediately. During August, 1932, the state board appointed boards in each county, usually consisting of seven unpaid citizens. The county boards could administer their funds either through the existing poor boards and private agencies, or directly. On September 1, 1932, the statewide system of unemployment relief went into effect. William B. Rodgers took office as Executive Director and Eric H. Biddle as Assistant Director. Biddle succeeded Rodgers on May 1, 1933.\textsuperscript{16}

Although the state had now assumed responsibility for the unemployed, only limited improvements took place. The county boards in most cases simply funneled the money to the existing agencies, continuing the short-sighted and unbalanced programs of these groups. Standards and policies varied widely. Investigations of need were poorly done and the case load increased rapidly. Personnel were inadequate and inexperienced.\textsuperscript{17} The belief persisted that local communities should make the basic contribution toward relief as soon as the emergency ended.\textsuperscript{18} Conversely, the state had taken concrete steps. A basic commitment to unemployment relief had been made. An agency which could provide centralized direction had been established. The types of relief granted were gradually expanded to include milk, fuel, shoes, clothing, shelter, utilities and medical care by the end of 1934.\textsuperscript{19}

In its early months, the state board encouraged the spread of work relief, which it believed would maintain the morals and self-respect of the unemployed person and preserve self-reliance. The traditional attitude was that a person should work for his bread. As a result, many counties developed “made-work” projects, on which relief applicants were compelled to work. The jobs were often menial and unimportant and one relief administrator described them as “raking leaves back and forth

\textsuperscript{15}Keller, “Pennsylvania’s Little New Deal,” 86.
\textsuperscript{16}Relief in Pa., First Annual Report, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{17}Relief in Pa., Third Annual Report, 15.
\textsuperscript{18}In its first report, the State Emergency Relief Board recommended that local control be restored as soon as possible. Relief in Pa., First Annual Report, 55-56.
\textsuperscript{19}Relief in Pa., Third Annual Report, 16.
in the yard until the leaves are worn out."\textsuperscript{20} Instead of improving morals and self-respect, they undermined these qualities. Many social workers felt such a system was not far removed from slavery. They argued that jobs should be meaningful, pay real wages, and be offered on the basis of ability, not need.

The major work relief in Pennsylvania was on highway construction. Between October, 1932, and November, 1933, a total of $7,676,548 was spent on this type of relief, mostly with federal funds. These funds were placed in a special account and were used to pay persons certified as unemployed by the local boards.\textsuperscript{21} Many critics, especially of Pinchot, saw political motivation in the highway program. Pinchot had long advocated "getting the farmers out of the mud" and it was no secret that he was anxious for a Senate seat when his second term as governor would expire early in 1935. One observer noted, "Gifford will pave his way to the Senate yet, even if he has to put macadam on every cowpath in the State to do it."\textsuperscript{22} Despite its political overtones, the highway program did reduce the relief roles, aid industry and provide better roads for the public.

As the state board was attempting to impose some order on the troubled relief scene, the legislature convened in January, 1933, for its regular biennial session. Once more, the lawmakers were forced to struggle with the problem of unemployment, by now above the 1,100,000 mark. Pinchot warned of rioting and bloodshed if relief appropriations were not forthcoming. The state board estimated relief costs for the calendar year of 1933 at $125,000,000, with only $20,000,000 on hand to meet it. At the same time, in his budget message, Pinchot commented proudly on the financial soundness of the state:

The Commonwealth stands like a rock in the swishing currents of the depression. We may well be proud of the financial soundness and solidity of the Keystone State. . . . Whatever else may totter, Pennsylvania is firm. Whatever else may default, Pennsylvania is solvent. Whatever else may tremble, Pennsylvania is unafraid.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Relief in Pa., First Annual Report, 59.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 40, and Pennsylvania, Unemployment Relief in Pennsylvania, September 1, 1932-August 31, 1934 (Harrisburg, 1935), 40. (Hereafter cited as Relief in Pa., Second Annual Report.)
\textsuperscript{22} Keller, "Pennsylvania's Little New Deal," 85.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 90.
Since the state had not exceeded its resources, the statement was true. But such sentiments could only increase pressure from Washington for Pennsylvania to do more. Pinchot recognized this when two months later he admitted that two of every three dollars spent for relief came from the federal government. "Federal aid saved us when we could not save ourselves."  

Pinchot attempted to insure the state contribution. He criticized the Republican legislative leaders for being concerned with beer and Sunday baseball instead of relief. Ultimately, the legislature appropriated $25,000,000 and authorized a $20,000,000 bond issue. This, along with the $45,000,000 hoped for from the RFC, and with the $20,000,000 from the previous year would total $110,000,000, still short of the needed $125,000,000.

In March, 1933, the Roosevelt Administration took office and a basic change in federal attitude followed. No longer was the central government fearful of moving into spheres where the states traditionally had been supreme. Congress responded to the critical employment situation in May, 1933, by passing the Federal Emergency Relief Act. This law established the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and gave it $500,000,000 to distribute to the states; $250,000,000 was for matching grants, with the states contributing three dollars for every dollar of federal funds. The remaining $25,000,000 was to be granted directly to the states, Roosevelt appointed Harry Hopkins, a New York social worker, to head the agency. The FERA stressed work relief rather than direct relief and was anxious to discard the "dole" as quickly as possible. By August, the FERA was well established, had imposed standards and was underwriting work relief programs in the states.

Although the FERA was envisaged as a partnership between the federal government and the states, the powers given Hopkins to set standards, to insure adequate administrative supervision, and to approve grants gave him extensive powers and resulted in a tendency toward centralization. Consequently, one of the most important rulings of the FERA, effective August 1, 1933, was that federal aid be dispensed only by public agencies. This caused a drastic shift in many Pennsylvania localities, where

24 Ibid., 91.
25 Ibid., 92.
private agencies were still in use. It also resulted in drawing many private organization officials into public service, thus providing more experienced administrators. It established a clean-cut principle and a broad philosophy of governmental responsibility for relief. The State Emergency Relief Board also began to provide more efficient administration. By August, 1934, there were fourteen areas comprising forty-four counties and the use of the poor boards was discontinued.

Records and reports were placed on a uniform basis and a standard classification of accounts was adopted. Gradually, order and stability were being brought to the relief administration.

The FERA standards and conditions stirred considerable criticism. Some was justified; some was essentially political. At the core of the controversy was the fact that jobs were at stake and that influential politicians looked upon these jobs as potential patronage plums.

Lorena Hickok, one of Hopkins' top field representatives, and an able observer, investigated conditions in Pennsylvania in August, 1933. Some of her findings foreshadowed the establishment of the Civil Works Administration three months later. Miss Hickok reported there was little dissatisfaction with the personnel who were administering relief, but that there was strong resentment against the use of direct relief. In Northampton County, the secretary of the Unemployed League, a radical group, complained that food orders "make us feel like charity cases." He wanted "made-work." "There are lots of things we could do around here. We could fix up the river front. We could plant trees. We could repair buildings . . . give us a little cash for it, instead of food orders." The Northampton County Republican chairman agreed. He advocated more "made-work" and blamed the lack of it on "local politicians who haven't any imaginations." Miss Hickok concluded: "The feeling seems to be that every American should have the right to earn the money he gets for relief, receive it in cash and spend it as he sees fit."

Relief in Pa., Third Annual Report, 6.
Relief in Pa., First Annual Report, 18, and Second Annual Report, 15.
Relief in Pa., Third Annual Report, 15.
Lorena A. Hickok to Harry L. Hopkins, August 6, 1933, Box 61. Harry L. Hopkins Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. (Hereafter cited as FDRL.)
In a report written the following week, Miss Hickok revealed a number of problems in Pennsylvania. One of these was politics.

Our chief trouble in Pennsylvania is due to politics. From the township to Harrisburg, the state is honeycombed with politicians all fighting for the privilege of distributing patronage, and the professional relief staffs who have gone in to reorganize the distribution have put up a superb fight against terrific odds.\[31\]

The poor directors' lobby at Harrisburg, angry at being deprived of their patronage, was agitating against the federal agency. But, Miss Hickok reported, "The Federal Emergency Relief Administration is not in a position to dictate . . . because the state of Pennsylvania is putting up the money. Federal policies cannot be enforced."\[32\]

Miss Hickok found uneven standards among the various counties and noted "The tendency among the unemployed is to hold the Federal Government responsible for the administration and the adequacy—or inadequacy—of relief." She stressed the tremendous personal popularity of the President and how his prestige was at stake. Taxpayers complained of not enough "made-work." "They say 'Those fellows ought to be made to work for what they're getting.'"\[33\]

General conditions among the unemployed were desperate. Little provision was made for shelter, and many were living in small and filthy rooms in run-down neighborhoods. Clothing, shoes, and other necessities were in short supply, and rising food prices were causing additional hardship. Where state-administered programs did exist, they were poorly conceived and unpopular; both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh abandoned their programs because of lack of ideas and money for supplies and supervision. Mining towns were the most difficult in which to launch "made-work" programs, since the companies owned all the property and the residents lacked incentive to improve things. These conditions had strengthened the Communists, who openly said they wanted bloodshed. Unemployed organizations were

\[31\] Report of Lorena A. Hickok, Pennsylvania, August 7-12, 1933, Box 61, Hopkins Papers, FDRL.
\[32\] Ibid.
\[33\] Ibid.
growing and were "right on the edge" of becoming communistic in some cases. . . . One of the bright spots was the thrift garden program. But as an Italian in Scranton who won the pennant for the best garden remarked, "I'd rather have my job back in the mines than be doing this."\textsuperscript{34}

In addition to the field reports, President Roosevelt was receiving bleak news from Governor Pinchot. The governor, in asking for more money, argued that:

\begin{quote}
Politically it is of prime importance that this money should be made available. The money should go for roads and public works. If it is not done, it will be water on the wheel of the Republican Old Guard, and they will take full advantage of it.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Taking the offensive in September, Pinchot publicly attacked those who demanded that "the whole cost of relief should fall on the state and local taxpayers and none of it on the money kings who pay Federal Income taxes." The governor noted that over $46,000,000 had come into the state from the federal treasury and implied there should be more.\textsuperscript{36}

It is difficult to appraise the impact of these and similar reports on the Administration, but they must have had an effect. With conditions so bad in a large industrial state, some new and more daring experiment was needed to forestall more serious difficulties.\textsuperscript{37} This new plan was the Civil Works Administration.

On November 9, 1933, President Roosevelt issued an executive order under authority of Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act establishing the Civil Works Administration, with the immediate aim of providing work for 4,000,000 unemployed in the coming winter. To provide funds, $400,000,000 was transferred from the Public Works Administration. In its brief lifetime, from November, 1933, to March 31, 1934, the CWA employed up to 4,284,000 persons, operated over 180,000 projects,

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{35} Gifford Pinchot to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 25, 1933, President's Personal File 259, FDRL.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{New York Times}, September 5, 1933, 19.
\textsuperscript{37} Although it is not clear whether Roosevelt personally saw the Hickok report on Pennsylvania, he did see enough of them to comment on them in December, 1933, as being "perfectly grand." Lester G. Seligman and Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., \textit{New Deal Mosaic: Roosevelt Confers with His National Emergency Council}, 1933-36 (Eugene, Oregon, 1965), 17-18.
and spent over $933,000,000, ninety percent of which was supplied by the federal government.38

A number of factors led to the creation of this emergency agency. The general feeling of discontent and hostility showed the mood of the country was becoming desperate. Some governors had even been reluctant to apply for loans from the RFC, on grounds of principle, while their people suffered.39 The poor quality of local work relief projects handled by the states, the coming winter, the desire to "prime the pump" of recovery and get more money into circulation, the slowness of the Public Works Administration, and the desire to demonstrate to the states the possibilities of conducting more meaningful programs were all reasons which justified the creation of the new agency.40

No single person was responsible for originating the CWA idea. John Carmody, later chief engineer of the CWA, credited New Yorkers such as Jacob Baker and Arthur Goldschmidt. Aubrey Williams claimed that he originated the idea and that when he informed Hopkins, he was enthusiastic. Hopkins presented the plan to Roosevelt, who gave his support. Half the 4,000,000 men would be transferred from state relief projects and half could be hired from the ranks of the unemployed.41

The plan was announced to the public on November 8, 1933, and the CWA offices were flooded with requests for jobs. On November 10, telegrams were sent to all state, city and county relief administrators, designating them as CWA officials. Five days later, a conference was held in the Mayflower Hotel for the state and local officials and the plan was explained. President Roosevelt spoke and promised no political interference in giving jobs and asked for the same consideration from the local officers. Hopkins said that funds would be sent for approval projects and paid through the Veterans Administration. Each state would

39 Two such governors were Shafter of North Dakota and Ferguson of Texas. Aubrey Williams, "The New Deal: A Dead Battery" (chapter of an unpublished manuscript), Box 44, Aubrey Williams Papers, FDRL.
40 Corrington Gill, Wasted Manpower (New York, 1939), 162-163.
receive a quota based on a combination of its population and relief load. No one voiced fears that the federal government might infringe on state rights. Rarely has a project of such magnitude and complexity been approved so rapidly.\(^4\)

The CWA was a centralized federal operation, but it made extensive use of state and local officials. There were many similarities between the former FERA projects and the newer CWA ones. All projects were on public property and were to have social and economic value. The projects were not to be ones which states or localities might normally undertake nor were they to overlap with PWA projects. In practice, these distinctions were difficult to maintain. PWA rates and hours regulations were observed, which in Pennsylvania called for $1.20 per hour for skilled labor and fifty cents per hour for unskilled labor. The projects were sponsored by localities, states, and the federal government itself, with the former providing the bulk of the program. Projects were submitted to the local CWA’s and sent to the state office for final approval. The sponsoring body provided the tools, supervision and part of the materials.\(^4\)

The Pennsylvania Civil Works Administration was officially formed on November 15, 1933, when Hopkins appointed Eric H. Biddle, executive director of the State Emergency Relief Board, as State Civil Works Administrator. Some of the key officials in the State Emergency Relief Administration were appointed to similar positions in the state CWA. The relief and CWA agencies were housed in separate buildings in Harrisburg. All referrals for jobs were handled through the state or federal employment services.\(^4\)

The organization of the state CWA followed that of the relief system. The chief administrative officers in each county were the local administrators. Local relief boards and CWA boards were maintained independently of each other. The state office

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\(^{45}\) Gill, “Civil Works Administration,” 420-424, and Hopkins, Spending to Save, 120-123.

\(^{46}\) U. S. Federal Civil Works Administration, The Civil Works Administration in Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1934), 55.
was divided into several departments, such as Engineering, Comptroller, Research and Statistics, and Personnel, on the same pattern as the federal headquarters in Washington. Quotas were assigned to the counties on the basis of population, unemployment and relief case load. Small communities usually found it easier to get projects underway because planning was simpler and the political structure more adaptable. The unfortunate effect of this situation was that rural counties exceeded their quotas, while cities, where unemployment was most severe, lagged. Pressure from Washington to get men working was partially responsible for this. When the CWA demobilized, a much higher percentage of uncompleted projects were left in rural areas.45

There were other problems. The demand for speed resulted in a lowering of the rigid standards which had been established in Pennsylvania. "Probably the greatest loss was the inevitable tendency to rush into operation projects which . . . had no relation to the unemployment factors of the community and . . . had little economic benefit." Some projects displaced regular employment which would normally have done the task, especially on roads. The premium for immediate submission of projects resulted in approval for some lessor works while more desirable tasks were not submitted at all or started with insufficient planning.46

The nature of the projects varied considerably, but the largest were construction and repair of highways, waterways, and government-owned utilities. Improvements were made to government buildings, institutions and schools. There were research and statistical studies and planning surveys. A project at the University of Pennsylvania provided for the construction of a three-ton calculating machine, known as a "Differential Analyzer." It was reportedly the largest in the world.47 Philadelphia and Pittsburgh benefited from exhaustive real estate surveys, which studied every house and neighborhood in each city. A census of workers lasted over two years, employed over 22,000 persons, and was the largest non-manual project under-

45 Ibid., 56-60.
46 Ibid., 61-62.
47 Ibid., 94.
taken in the state. Among the smallest projects were those at Bucknell University where eighty-five students were given jobs and in Philadelphia where eighty-two men were assigned to work with the Crime Prevention Unit of the Philadelphia Police. One of the most successful of the federally sponsored projects was the sealing of abandoned coal mines in the western part of the state, where run-offs were polluting streams. Since the mines were private property, the work was justified on the assumption that the owners had abandoned their property and the health of the communities was endangered. The work had the additional benefit of employing men in isolated areas who had not worked for years.

In summary, 9,783 projects and 3,713 supplements were approved by the CWA. County organizations sponsored 8,773 of the original requests and 3,390 of the supplements. State departments sponsored 945 of the original and 305 of the supplements. The small remainder were federal or state CWA projects.

Although the state CWA attempted to hire fifty percent of the workers from the relief rolls, less than thirty-five percent of the employes were from that source. Haste, as well as location requirements, were responsible for this. Most of the workers were obtained in the counties where the projects were undertaken. Supervisors made every effort to maintain health standards and safety regulations. The number of workers increased rapidly from 5,828 on November 23, 1933, to 319,387 on January 18, 1934. In the following weeks, the number declined, although not steadily, until by March 31, the last official day of CWA in Pennsylvania, 98,998 persons were employed. The workers received a total of $41,253,619 in wages, most of which passed rapidly into the economy.

During its short existence, the CWA provoked much criticism

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50 Memo of John M. Carmody, Box 73, Carmody Papers, FDRL, and E. A. Holbrook to John Carmody, December 28, 1933, Box 73, Carmody Papers, FDRL.
51 CWA in Pa., 91.
52 Ibid., 74.
and controversy. Workers complained about discharge without due cause, opposition to efforts to form protective unions, double-job holding, discrimination in selection by CWA bosses, and dissatisfaction with pay. A typical complaint was one received by Congressman J. Buell Snyder who forwarded it to the President. The writer complained of a pay cut for highway workers while others were not affected. He criticized the office force of the CWA, with "young girls sitting where it's warm and receiving good money." As a result of such letters, grievance committees were established in each county, and workers were informed of their right to appeal to the state CWA. The CWA formed Wage Rate Advisory Committees in each county and a Technical Advisory Board in Harrisburg to deal with rate questions.

Occasional disputes over personnel marred the CWA image. One involved David W. Charles, who was appointed acting assistant comptroller by Eric Biddle, despite the fact that he had been convicted of misapplication of bank funds in an earlier position. The matter became serious when Biddle defended Charles, calling him "one of the most capable men in my organization," and when Hopkins requested his resignation. When Biddle did not act, Hopkins ordered him to fire Charles. Governor Pinchot criticized Biddle for the appointment but said that he had no power over CWA, which was entirely under federal control. Biddle threatened to resign, but thought better of it, and the affair ended with Charles' resignation. Another incident involved Colonel Clarence E. Mayers, Chief Engineer for Pennsylvania, who was removed by Biddle because of charges that he had accepted a fee for approving a public project. Hopkins approved, but when later investigation revealed the charges were false, the CWA chief did little to salvage the Colonel's reputation except release a letter withdrawing the charge.

55 Minutes of Joint Meeting, January, 1934, Box 73, Carmody Papers, FDRL.
56 Freeman K. Aultz to J. Buell Snyder, December 31, 1933, Box 54, Hopkins Papers, FDRL.
57 Minutes of Joint Meeting, January, 1934, Box 73, Carmody Papers, FDRL, and CWA in Pa., 64.
The most serious charges against the Pennsylvania CWA involved political interference, graft and corruption. This was partly because the state administration was Republican and Pinchot was a controversial governor, even among men of his own party. He supported the New Deal from its beginnings and fought tenaciously against the conservative Republicans. After the Democratic victory in the state elections of 1933, Mrs. Pinchot wrote Roosevelt, "... we are rejoicing ... at the slaughter of many of the worst elements in the Republican Party." But Democrats did not trust the governor either, since they felt he was self-serving and seeking the senatorial nomination. A Wilkes-Barre citizen complained to James A. Farley that the Republicans "have drummed up an organization with the money that was to feed the hungry ... and gave the unemployed one or two days work so they could pay their pole [sic] taxes and had them register Republican so they could vote."

Joseph Guffey, Democratic leader in Pennsylvania, and after 1934 Senator, later wrote that Pinchot Republicans were hindering and making political capital from the CWA. "We didn't want a half-hearted New Deal in Pennsylvania, obstructed by a political clique that was embracing it only for political gain." Of course Guffey did not hesitate to use political influence himself. In October, 1933, he complained to the head of the Pennsylvania Employment Service that Democrats of the state were not being given positions. He said he had a tradition that gratitude was important in political matters. The CWA annoyed Guffey because he felt Republicans controlled it and gained advantages from it, despite the fact that the Democrats conceived it.

By the end of 1933, more serious complaints appeared. The Bucks County Democratic chairman asked on December 12 what one could expect when the President's policies were administered by "hard-boiled Republicans like State Administrator Eric H. Biddle, a creation of the Grundy-Pinchot machine." He

58 Cornelia Bryce Pinchot to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 15, 1933, President's Personal File 289, FDRL.
59 James A. Farley to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 3, 1933, President's Personal File 289, FDRL.
60 Joseph E. Guffey, Seventy Years on the Red Fire Wagon (privately printed, 1952), 79.
charged the Republicans wanted the CWA to fail so they could tell the voters next fall that “Roosevelt’s policies were unworkable and collapsed of their own weight.” Biddle himself was unhappy with the Bucks County CWA. In explaining the situation to Hopkins, he wrote that Bucks County was “a fief and Grundy is lord of the manor.” He admitted he was not pleased with his appointments there, but he justified his position by stating, “I take it that you, like myself, want results and at times are willing to compromise a bit to achieve them.”

By January, 1934, Democrats were charging that the Republicans were seizing control of the CWA to strengthen their political machine. One complaint was that political influence determined who got jobs; another was that labor leaders were demanding that men agree to pay their back union dues before they could be signed up for CWA jobs. The Pittsburgh Press charged that most CWA jobs went to former city workers and members of certain political factions. Another grievance was that politicians of both parties were dunning CWA officials with letters recommending men for jobs. The New York Times described the Pennsylvania CWA as a “politician’s paradise” where it was rumored that favoritism was the rule. Some claimed that Pinchot was secretly determining who should get jobs, while others criticized Democratic leaders for the same thing.

Joseph Guffey demanded a “thorough housecleaning.” He charged Pinchot was using jobs to reward his henchmen and was building a “political machine out of human suffering and misery.” The CWA in Pennsylvania, said Guffey, was “a rotten mess and it smells to high heaven.” The governor responded by calling Guffey ignorant and unaware of the facts, since the CWA was a federal operation.

Naturally, officials denied these allegations of corruption. Frank Connor, director of the Philadelphia Employment office, said an investigation of the CWA would find it “as clean as a hound’s tooth.” He did admit receiving hundreds of letters from

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62 Walker, CWA—Experiment, 166-167.
63 Ibid., 167-168.
65 Philadelphia Inquirer, January 19, 1934.
politicians but claimed they were piled, unread, in empty drawers. When Eric Biddle ordered that all letters from politicians be published, the number received fell from about 100 to a dozen daily. John B. Kelly, Democratic Independent Chairman, admitted that he had tried to get CWA jobs but that he had failed and he now urged that politics be kept out.66

In Washington, Hopkins deplored “the thought that any of our organization could be guilty of such breach of trust.” He promised an investigation and said the Justice Department would prosecute any persons involved in graft. Roosevelt declared at a news conference that he had received letters from the inception of CWA alleging that municipal governments were trying to use the jobs for political advantage and that the letters came from both Democrats and Republicans. The Republican National Committee hastened to publish a pamphlet entitled “CWA Scandals, What Could You Expect?”67

The Pennsylvania CWA later said that some local politicians tried to use their influence to secure jobs and that “in a few instances they were successful.” But it concluded that political interference or personal favoritism played only a small part in the referrals of persons to CWA jobs. The state office also said that some unscrupulous politicians took credit for getting jobs when the individual had really won it on his own merits. The publication of these letters generally stopped this practice.68

The Federal CWA assigned Arch Mandel to investigate the charges in Pennsylvania. Mandel interviewed political leaders, CWA, relief, and welfare officials, and “the man in the street.” The Democratic leaders in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh said they felt politics played a part in placements on the CWA but they could not prove it. All others discounted such reports. All agreed that Eric Biddle was independent and free from political domination. Mandel concluded:

If there is any political domination by any particular faction at this time, I was unable to discover it. Certainly I did not come away with the feeling that there was any political play in the relief and CWA admin-

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67 New York Times, January 23, 1934, 1; January 24, 1934, 1; January 25, 1934, 1; and February 9, 1934, 8.
68 Civil Works Administration in Pa., 64-66.
istrations themselves. If there is any suspicion of politics, it is in connection with the placement of men through the Employment Service, and even at this point I could not unearth anything that could be proved. . . .\textsuperscript{68}

In February, 1934, the Administration decided to terminate most CWA activities by March 31. Telegrams were sent to all the state offices informing them that the CWA “will be suspended and Work Divisions will be organized by the Emergency Relief Administration. . . . All projects . . . may be transferred to the Work Division.”\textsuperscript{70}

There were several factors which led to this decision. Basically, the CWA was an emergency program designed to provide relief and recovery during the winter of 1933-34. The Administration expected that both the PWA and private industry would increase their activities in the spring and reduce the need for the CWA. The program was expensive, more so than had been anticipated. In its life, CWA expended more than the combined FERA, state and local relief during the entire year 1933. Budget Director Lewis Douglas and other economic advisors argued that if larger numbers of people got settled in government jobs, with guarantees of security, they might permanently clog the public payroll. There was every indication that cost of living would rise, and unless CWA wages were increased, there would be discontent. Farmers and especially Southerners felt the current wages were too high and were unfair competition by the government. If continued, CWA might impede the farm recovery program. Conservative Democrats and many Republicans opposed the CWA on grounds of principle. The charges of graft and corruption had damaged its image. Pierce Williams feared that pressure from politicians “would of itself be sufficient to wreck CWA were the program to be continued through the summer months.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Arch Mandel to Aubrey Williams, March 19, 1934, Box 54, Hopkins Papers, FDRL.
\textsuperscript{71} Searles F. Charles, \textit{Minister of Relief: Harry Hopkins and the Depression} (Syracuse, 1963), 61; Gill, “Civil Works Administration,” 431; Sherwood, \textit{Roosevelt and Hopkins}, 56; and Pierce Williams to Harry Hopkins, February 6, 1934, Box 73, Carmody Papers, FDRL.
The termination was carried out amid a storm of protest and complaint. In one week, over 50,000 letters and 7,000 telegrams were received by Hopkins' office and the White House, nearly all of them opposed to ending the program. The 26,000 CWA workers in Allegheny County supported a petition asking for continuance. Other groups and individuals, including Pennsylvania congressmen, made similar appeals.72

Nonetheless, the demolibilization was orderly. Arch Mandel reported from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh one week after the termination that the change to work relief programs had been carried out smoothly, with no disturbances. The last payrolls under the CWA program ended on July 14, 1934. The remaining obligations were taken over by the state relief administration.73

The federal government forced major changes in Pennsylvania's traditional relief system. The state had followed the local responsibility concept, with near disastrous consequences by 1932. The prospect of federal loans forced the state to create a central agency, the State Emergency Relief Board, which began a slow process of standardization. Not until the New Deal and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was real centralization accomplished and the old system of poor boards and private charities abandoned for good. However, worsening economic conditions late in 1933 forced even more drastic federal action. Although the Civil Works Administration was conceived as a federal agency, it relied heavily on state organizations and officials. Local interests paid part of the cost of supplies and exerted considerable influence on project selection and actual operations. In some ways, the CWA was more a paper organization than a centralized federal agency reaching into the most remote area. From the point of view of creating jobs rapidly, which was the major aim, the CWA succeeded very well. When it was terminated in the spring of 1934, many of its projects were continued by other organizations.

There were problems in administering CWA but none that could be described as critical. Eric Biddle believed the faults

72 Charles, *Minister of Relief*, 61; and Petition by CWA Workers in Allegheny County to President Roosevelt, April 14, 1934, Box 9, Official File 444-B, FDRL.

73 Arch Mandel to Aubrey Williams, April 9, 1934, Box 54, Hopkins Papers, FDRL, and FERA, *Monthly Reports*, July, 1934, 12.
of CWA, such as poor planning and poor selection of jobs, were
due to speed. Some projects could not get underway because of a lack of simple hand tools. The rapid demobilization resulted in 4,000 unfinished jobs in Pennsylvania alone. While many of these were later completed by the work division, others were not, and such activity struck critics as wasteful. Procedures and methods were often cumbersome and unquestionably expensive. Some work was of little practical value. Wage scales were occasionally unrealistic and sometimes caused hardship to others. Political interference, mostly on the local level, impeded the CWA and helped to bring about its end. The swift termination of the program had a demoralizing effect on the workers; many felt worse than they had before the program began.

The federal relief programs, and especially the Civil Works Administration, were successful. They were popular with the public; they temporarily relieved the strain of unemployment. They showed the value of working, rather than receiving a "dole." They improved the quality of the state programs. The basic question of how to fit what many regarded as an essentially socialistic concept into a free enterprise system was never resolved, and the place of work relief remains a controversial issue to this day. The development of political interference was inevitable, but it was never so serious a problem as the critics contended.

The programs were a step toward the concept of federal responsibility for public welfare. Few complained about the central government assuming a role that had traditionally been a local or private one. The fact that Pennsylvania had only recently assumed any responsibility for unemployment relief may partially explain why there was so little concern over the loss of another of the state's "rights" in this area. In reality, unemployment relief was a burden that neither the legislature nor the people of the Commonwealth wished to carry in the midst of a severe depression. Federal aid was most welcome.

The CWA was an experiment in the true sense of the word. It foreshadowed later programs, such as the Works Progress Administration. It reached into new areas of federal-state rela-

tions and it managed to maintain a reasonable balance between federal power and state and local control. The Pennsylvania Civil Works Administration did a commendable job, under trying circumstances. It deserves more favorable recognition than it has received to date.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{75} This article (like the one cited in footnote 74) was originally developed as a research paper in a seminar at the University of Pennsylvania. The author would like to express his appreciation to Dr. John L. Shover for his aid and encouragement in preparing this article for publication.