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THE ODYSSEY OF PITTSBURGH'S FATHER COX

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The pilgrimage... if it does nothing else, brought to the nation's attention the fact that Catholic priests are vitally interested in the social and economic welfare of the people of all faiths, and that the downtrodden and oppressed will continue to find as they have always found, a true friend and champion in the parish priest.

Pittsburgh Catholic, January 14, 1932

While there may be more Catholic priests today who are actively engaged in social protest than ever before, they are not the first to bring to the nation's attention patterns of social, economic, and political injustice. And, while ways and means of demanding justice may differ among men, most Americans still prefer that the means be peaceful, and the ends be truly just for as many as possible. For those contemporary men of the cloth who have used peaceful means for social protest and for those who have served well society's less fortunate, the past offers a significant example of their special breed in Father James R. Cox of Pittsburgh. Father Cox, a national figure during the 1930s, used a number of ways to reach the dispossessed, while drawing attention to their plight, raising their aspirations, and petitioning the government to bring them aid. And while the depression-ridden country may have sometimes resembled, as Cox once told the president of the United States, "a volcano that might erupt at any time," his methods were much more peaceful,

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though neither less committed nor dramatic, than many militants employ today.

Father Cox was born on March 7, 1886, to James R. and Julia A. Mason Cox, descendants of Irish immigrants who had settled in Western Pennsylvania around 1700. His grandfather, Captain John Cox, commanded one of the first steamboats to navigate the Monongahela River. According to Cox’s file in the Catholic Archives of Pittsburgh, his father’s occupation was “newspaper collector.” As a boy Cox learned of poverty, and while attending public and parochial schools in Pittsburgh he worked to support the family which eventually included a brother and a sister. Although he worked as a newsboy, department store clerk, millhand, railroad worker, and taxicab agent, Cox found time to earn a bachelor’s degree from Holy Ghost College (Duquesne University) before entering the seminary at St. Vincent’s in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. He was ordained by Archbishop Regis Canevin of Pittsburgh on July 11, 1911.

His first assignment was as assistant pastor at Epiphany Church in Pittsburgh, where he served for three years. While there, Father Cox revealed his enormous energy and varied interests in serving as superintendent of the Pittsburgh Lyceum where he helped to promote operas, plays, debates, and even offered boxing instructions to young men. Reportedly, Pittsburgh’s great Harry Greb, who became the light heavyweight champion when he defeated Gene Tunney in 1922, received some of his first pugilistic lessons from the young priest.

When America became involved in World War I, Father Cox enlisted and served from September 1917 to August 1919 with a Pittsburgh hospital group in France. Upon his return, he was named chaplain of Mercy Hospital and became very active in public service. At the same time, he continued his schooling and in 1923 received a master’s degree in education from the University of Pittsburgh, the first Catholic priest to receive a degree from that institution. In that same year Cox was named pastor at Old St. Patrick’s Church, becoming the youngest pastor of the city’s oldest Catholic parish where the first mass had been said in 1811. He served the people of this small parish until his death in 1951.

A few years after his appointment to St. Patrick’s, Father Cox began the relief work that thereafter made him well known throughout the city as one who never wavered in his commitment to aid the

1 Father James R. Cox File (Cox File), Catholic Archives of Pittsburgh, Diocesan Building.
2 St. Patrick’s Church File (Church File), Catholic Archives of Pittsburgh.
needy. He organized bread lines and soup kitchens in the parish and was feeding about a hundred people a day before the depression came. After hard times struck Cox's work increased, and by the spring of 1930 hundreds were appealing for help every day. Cox carried on alone until the fall, when a group of Pittsburgh merchants and business leaders came to his aid. Through the Father Cox Relief Fund, appeals for help were mailed to businessmen and others throughout the city; at the same time Cox asked for help over the radio, a medium he often used with great success. The fund employed a former middleweight boxer, Albert (Buck) Crouse, to supervise the soup kitchens which were providing up to a thousand meals a day by the end of the year. Through periodic reports to the press and to donors, the pastor claimed that his aid, dispensed at the lowest cost of any agency in the city, was even reaching people unable to come to the rectory on Seventeenth Street, or to the chapel at Fourteenth Street and Penn Avenue. During the winter the fund provided overcoats and fuel to the city's needy, and on at least one wintry occasion, a few hundred indigents were moved into the basement of the church where sleeping quarters were arranged.

As the depression refused to go away, Father Cox organized meetings to discuss ways of finding employment for the jobless men he was feeding every day. But the odds for improvement seemed overwhelming, and on one occasion, Cox said to his group: "It is only the turn of the wheel of fate which places me on the inside . . . giving out charity instead of on the outside receiving help as you good men are. The people give to us and I will give all they give to you." 3

But the people, themselves caught in the terrible financial crisis of the era, were not giving enough, and Father Cox lamented that of the over one million people of Allegheny County only about one hundred fifty were consistent contributors to his work. Nevertheless, Cox stayed with the job, and in a letter to his superior, Bishop Hugh B. Boyle of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, he pointed out that while "things have been bad . . . we have bent all our energies toward the task of doing things that we believe necessary" for the poor of Pittsburgh.

It was obvious to Father Cox and millions of other Americans that neither private charity nor state relief could feed the dispossessed or free the nation from the depression. Consequently, in January 1932 Cox decided to pay a dramatic visit to the nation's capital to call

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3 Catholic (Pittsburgh) Observer, Nov. 20, 1930.
upon the federal government to lead the people out of their economic distress. This was his “march on Washington” for which the Pittsburgh pastor gained national fame.

Prior to the scheduled date of departure, Father Cox and his associates did their planning in the basement of St. Patrick’s. The trek was publicized by area newspapers and by Cox through his radio broadcasts. Trucks, automobiles, and food were offered to those willing to participate in the venture. Thousands of young men in and surrounding Pittsburgh answered the summons because, as one participant later recalled, “many of us were out of jobs and had nothing to do” anyway.4

On January 5 an estimated throng of forty-five thousand people gathered to begin the march to Washington. To ensure as much order as possible during the trip, Father Cox instructed his marchers that “none would be permitted to accompany the cavalcade who carried a weapon of any kind or who had liquor on his person.” According to reports, there was to be “no grousing” either.

With a police escort, the march began on the morning of the fifth at Seventeenth Street and Liberty Avenue, then proceeded up the latter to Aiken Avenue, then to Fifth Avenue, over to Penn Avenue, meeting the William Penn Highway in Wilkinsburg. The group left with a great send-off; a New York Times reporter wrote that “the caravan moved through sidewalks that were often packed three and four deep.” The gathering was larger than expected, and by the time the men reached Johnstown an official of the march wired Father Cox that over twenty thousand expectant marchers had to remain behind because of a lack of transportation. Many went anyway, apparently willing to walk all the way. Those who remained behind began to raise money to send others to meet the marchers in Washington.

The men who made up the march (a few women asked to be included but were refused by Father Cox) ranged in age from seventeen to seventy and included Protestants as well as Catholics. Many wore ragged clothes and worn shoes and carried blankets to ward off the cold. One marcher later reminisced: “We looked like a lot of tramps.” But many wore clean overalls, a few had sheepskin coats, and others wore parts of old military uniforms. The last would be helpful in repudiating charges that a march of this sort usually was supported primarily by “unpatriotic forces.” The presence of white shirts and blue collars along with other apparel often suggested the type of job

4 Interview with Mr. Ralph Balzar, Beaver Falls, Pa., Apr. 16, 1969.
each man had held before the depression. Most of the marchers had about six days' ration of food, primarily sandwiches, which was to be supplemented by coffee and soup in stops along the way.

Reaching Johnstown in early afternoon, the army of Father Cox was greeted by Mayor Eddie McCloskey and Matthew Dunn, a blind legislator from Allegheny County. At the city's stadium the marchers ate sandwiches while Cox and McCloskey spoke of the ideals that had launched the march. Both expressed their faith in the democratic principles of the nation's political processes, and both demanded help in relieving the needy, Cox insisting that the basic request of the march was for jobs not handouts. One participant counted nine hundred seventy-eight trucks and cars at the stop in Johnstown; if each of these transported an average of ten persons, then a large percentage of the army walked to Washington.

With each vehicle bearing a standard reading, "The Father Cox March," the caravan reached Harrisburg where it was greeted enthusiastically by Gov. Gifford Pinchot. To the thunder of applause from the tired but dedicated marchers, the governor called Cox "a wonderful man" and remarked that "civilized government is a failure if men who are able and willing to work to support their families cannot get the chance." He assured them that they had every right to petition the government for help; indeed, they were "rendering a real service to the unemployed and to the workers generally throughout the nation." While one enthusiastic witness called the marchers "the strongest group of lobbyists that ever came to the capital of Pennsylvania," their goal was another capital, since only the federal government could relieve substantially their distress.

The first overnight stay was at Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, where the army stayed at the local fairgrounds. Mr. Ralph Balzar of Beaver Falls, who was a member of the march, later recalled being "served dinner under the bugle call. By eleven or twelve that night it poured rain. It was cold and we built bonfires until the rain put them out. . . . We played poker all night." Evidently, Father Cox had not banned successfully that masculine pastime. Balzar and his companions were "called to breakfast by the bugle" at six the following morning, and after the wreckers helped to free the vehicles reluctant to move on out of the mud, the marchers were on their way again.

Father Cox's army finally reached Washington with fifteen-to-twenty thousand survivors, many thoroughly drenched from the rains

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5 Pittsburgh Press, Jan. 6, 1932.
which had accompanied them most of the way. Escorted by capital police, they camped in an open field where they lived in tents and under shelters hastily constructed by drawing together their cars and trucks. A few thousand were taken by police to shelter in vacant buildings. Because of the orderliness of the group, only a few extra police were placed at strategic locations in the city, including the White House and the Capitol. In fact, a small number of police were released from duty to help feed the marchers, and the United States Army, in contrast to its official reaction to the “Bonus Army” when it descended upon the city a few months later, provided field stoves for the preparation of wiener and sauerkraut, a main staple for the hungry marchers.

On January 7, on the steps of the Capitol, Father Cox presented his marchers’ petition to Senator James J. Davis and Congressman Clyde Kelly of Pennsylvania. Cox was joined by a marcher dressed as Uncle Sam and about a hundred World War I veterans in uniform marching closely behind. Escorted by motorcycle policemen, the procession followed, headed by a band from Pittsburgh playing military music. While Cox was speaking with Davis and Kelly, his army gathered about singing patriotic songs. Balzar remembered that while this was taking place, he and a few others were wandering around Washington displaying their “Hoover Flags,” empty pants pockets turned inside out. Since this march followed by only a short time a march of Communists on the city, Cox did all he could to discredit any charges that his protest was un-American or Communist inspired.

The petition Father Cox presented to the Senate, the House of Representatives, and President Herbert Hoover — the “Resolution of the Jobless” — asked Congress for an appropriation of five billion dollars for public-works projects. It called for allocating monies to states and municipalities, “according to their need and number of unemployed.” The money was to be distributed “through agencies now functioning, for the purpose of providing food, clothing and shelter to the needy and hungry who are out of work.” It included a call for loans to farmers, all of which could be financed by new bond issues, increased taxes on incomes, and the levying of large gift taxes.

After presenting the petition, Father Cox and about a dozen other men including Henry Ellenbogen, later a congressman and prominent Pittsburgh judge, left the Capitol and went over to the White House where they were greeted cordially by President Hoover. Although Ellenbogen later recalled that Hoover had called the petition
“inappropriate,” the president did express “intense sympathy” for the marchers’ plight. However, he already had a program before Congress which he told the group was sufficient “to restore men to employment through their regular jobs.” Although Hoover’s reaction to other armies and marches was sometimes less than cordial, Cox left his meeting with the president very pleased by the reception he and his people had received both at the White House and on Capitol Hill — “They really went further than we expected, . . . everything was splendid.” 6 He waited until later to show his disgust with the president and Congress for their apparent lack of sympathy for the nation’s dispossessed.

Cox and his throng of men moved to the Arlington National Cemetery where the priest addressed the marchers in the cemetery’s amphitheater. In his last message to the men, Cox summed up his commitment to them and the meaning of their message to the federal government:

You will live to tell your grandchildren of this event, of the courteous treatment you have been accorded by everyone in the city. This is God’s country and under God we are going to keep it that way. Today you have asked only for your God-given right to work. So long as I live and have a tongue and can breathe, I will work for you and all the common people.

In closing he promised that “if our efforts do not succeed, we are ready for anything, even bloodshed.” 7

The army of the jobless then started for home. The marchers were not to return to Pittsburgh in any kind of procession but were instructed to get home on their own, although Father Cox insisted that they not become a wandering mob. On the way back, one small group stopped to eat at Hagerstown, Maryland, but policemen refused them permission to stop. Balzar recalled that “when we refused to move we were arrested but not charged if we [agreed to] move on. We moved on.” Within a few days, most of the marchers had made their way back to Western Pennsylvania.

As with most dramatic and well-known events, reaction to the march was varied. The Republican National Committee, realizing the political effects of the incident regardless of the marchers’ intent, wanted to know who had sponsored the group. Angered by the “embarrassment” the march caused the president, the committee’s inquiries appeared to be designed to undermine the nation’s confidence in the motives of Cox’s army. It was apparent that the Catholic

Diocese of Pittsburgh had not paid the marchers' way, and as for sponsorship from any political group, Father Cox remarked that the only thing "red" about the march was the ledger. It did seem, as the Pittsburgh Catholic stated, that "some stalwarts in Washington . . . scented some sort of papal plot, or at least a dirty democratic trick to discredit the Hoover administration."

The flurry by the Republicans did produce at least one bit of embarrassing news to them. It was disclosed that Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon of Pittsburgh had arranged train fare home for a number of stranded marchers and that Mellon's gasoline interests had furnished gas and oil for the caravan and presumably was still owed for these provisions. Ironically, Mellon had aided a movement which did not help the cause of his party. Less than a month later he left the cabinet and was appointed ambassador to England.

In Pittsburgh there was warm support for the march. The Pittsburgh Courier hoped it would help bring needed aid because "there is no telling what a man will do when he is hungry." And the Pittsburgh Catholic sympathized not with the Republicans but with "the millions of men who have been 'embarrassed' to the extent of no work for many months or years . . . and face want and hunger in their families." The editor regretted that "if an orderly, constitutional petition embarrasses politicians, things have come to a pretty pass in America."

Father Cox was not interested at the time in furthering the cause of either major political party. In fact, his "ready for anything" attitude led him to become for a brief period in 1932 a candidate for president of the United States. However, like his march for jobs, his fling at politics was not successful. But both moves perhaps added to the many forces which eventually produced a federal government more responsive to the people Cox represented.

A few days after their return from Washington, Father Cox and his men were welcomed by supporters at a rally held in the University of Pittsburgh stadium. An estimated crowd of fifty-five thousand people cheered enthusiastically at every opportunity, despite the damp and chilly day. Leaders of the throng insisted that had the weather been better the stadium could not have accommodated the thousands who wanted to greet the priest and his army.

While members of his group collected donations to help defray some of the costs of the march, Father Cox delivered the main address amidst the waving of flags and hats. "Ours is a battle against Wall Street and Smithfield Street," he thundered, and "our movement will
grow and expand throughout the nation." Denouncing the state legislature's seeming lack of concern for those affected by the depression, Cox demanded more help from the federal government. He blamed the country's economic ills on the concentration of the nation's wealth in the hands of a few and criticized the proposals to burn grain and plow up cotton, advocated by some as a means of increasing prices for farmers, as "unbelievable" when "eleven million families are without proper clothing," and "one-fourth of our entire population is without proper food." He demanded jobs and higher wages from corporate coffers, not more layoffs, and paid tribute to those "who stood shoulder to shoulder with me in the most gigantic demonstration in the history of our country. . . . This vast assemblage which is gathered here today has come to honor you . . . your courage and valor." 8

To those who continued to criticize the march as favoring one political party at the expense of another, Father Cox stated: "We wish to definitely inform the entire nation that we have no confidence in either party," since both "have had two years in which to act and have done nothing, while conditions grow steadily worse." Cox then announced his intention to form a new political party, one which would not represent the well-to-do, "but Main Street." "We hope this is sufficient answer to the politicians." 9 His plans were to run for president on the Jobless party ticket in the November election.

In April, Father Cox announced that the national convention of the Jobless party would be held in August in St. Louis, where a platform would be written and candidates selected. He planned at that time to join forces with the new Liberty party and assumed that the combined strength of both groups would result in a stronger showing in the fall. It did not turn out that way.

Meanwhile, Father Cox busied himself in other ways. He organized the "Blue Shirts," a group of workingmen which soon claimed two hundred thousand members at posts in Pittsburgh, Chicago, New York, Cleveland, and other cities. The blue shirt served as the insignia of the new party, and the organization was divided into small sections with captains and lieutenants in charge of different units.

While Father Cox was drawing together his troops in the summer, another march, much more publicized and remembered than his, descended on Washington. In late May, about one thousand World War I veterans arrived petitioning Congress to pay them then the

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9 New York Sun, Jan. 16, 1932.
bonuses that Congress had agreed earlier to provide in 1945. This initial group was joined in June by veterans from all over the country bringing the total number of the “Bonus Expeditionary Force” to an estimated twenty thousand at its height. Singing old war songs and displaying placards that read, “Cheered in ’17, Jeered in ’32,” most of the veterans camped out in Anacostia Flats, while others found shelter in shacks and unused government buildings near the Capitol.

After Congress failed to pass legislation to pay the veterans, the government provided funds for the marchers to return to their homes. Most left, but a few thousand refused to disband. An attempt by Washington police to evict the Bonus Army resulted in the death of two marchers. President Hoover then called out federal troops who used infantry, cavalry, and tanks to rout the hapless veterans.10

By the time of this pathetic climax to the veterans’ protest, Father Cox was in Europe on one of his many trips abroad. But he had participated in the early days of the Bonus March. From the first, Cox later wrote, veterans from Erie, Pennsylvania, and other cities had urged him to join the march, some insisting that he act as a “mouthpiece” for the group. But he waited, he claimed, until an “emissary” came and asked him to “head the B.E.F.” Thus, on June 9 he flew to Washington to join the veterans. Clad in a chaplain’s uniform, Cox was greeted at the airport by cameras and newspaper correspondents and a delegation of veterans. After pictures were taken and statements offered, he was taken to the Anacostia camp under a complimentary police escort.

Arriving to what he recalled as “a great salute” and a fierce noonday sun, Father Cox climbed up to the roof of a temporary shack and addressed the marchers. In fighting fit, he claimed that government officials “don’t want to give you your bonus,” because they think such a payment “will hurt the country.” Yet during the past ten years, he insisted, the Treasury had “given back in refunds to the steel companies and to the multi-millionaires . . . an equal amount to what you are demanding.”11

For perhaps one of the few times in his public life, Father Cox appeared to misread the mood of his listeners. Cautioning the veterans that the protest might go unheeded, as was the case with his own earlier march, he reminded them of “a legitimate way out” of their

11 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, June 10, 1932.
plight: "It is through the ballot. If Congress rejects your demands, go home as orderly soldiers and through the November ballot (conceivably they might vote for him) turn out of office all who have refused your demands." 12

When he heard shouts of, "We won't go home until we get the bonus," Father Cox agreed that perhaps that was the best way. However, he left them with the advice that since they were "Americans and not radicals," they must behave in an orderly manner. Later he told a Pittsburgh reporter that the veterans intended to stay "until their demands are met." Before leaving, Cox offered a prayer, recalling later that since "Communists do not pray," the marchers must have been good Americans with a legitimate gripe against their government.

Authorized by the veterans to deliver their petition, Father Cox led a small group to the Capitol where they presented their demands to Vice-President Charles Curtis, who remarked to the priest, "Father I had no idea back in 1925 [sic] when I helped to pass this Bonus Bill over the President's veto that it would stir up all this fuss." After discovering that John Nance Garner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, was unavailable, the group went to the White House where, according to Cox, "I was cordially received by police and secretaries. They remembered me from January 7." But the president was in conference, and although Cox later wrote that the secretaries were willing to interrupt the haggard Hoover, Cox declined, asking only that the president be presented with the veterans' demands. After hurriedly munching "a hotdog and three mugs of rootbeer," the busy pastor flew back to Pittsburgh, "tired, hungry and weary, but feeling that a good job had been done." Later, when Hoover ordered the troops to disperse the remaining veterans, Cox wired him: "Told you last January there would be riots and probably revolution because of your attitude toward the unemployed . . . , you are treading on dangerous grounds."

In July, while in Rome, Father Cox launched his campaign for the presidency. In an interview with the editor of Tevere, he outlined the party's platform and said he expected to receive seventeen million votes. An American reporter cabled that the priest "was so sure of being elected that he would invite the Roman editor to lunch at the White House sometime after November." Cox said he would campaign on the slogan "either my party or Communism."

Shortly after his return in early August to the United States, Father Cox led another army out of Pittsburgh. With two hundred

12 Ibid.
automobiles and trucks providing transportation for about five hundred people, Cox and the Blue Shirts left for St. Louis where the first national convention of the Jobless party was to be held. Additional delegates followed later, and supporters planned to join the caravan in certain cities along the way. Cox insisted that the motorcade was to be self-supporting, with no panhandling allowed, and expected thousands to join his group making its way to the convention city.

St. Louis officials were less than pleased with the prospect of this unemployed army invading their city. The visitors could add little to the local economy, and if many decided to stay on, the city’s hard-pressed relief program would probably prove inadequate to care for them. At first, city officials planned to obtain an injunction to halt the convention on the grounds that inadequate sanitation facilities existed at the Creve Coeur race track, site of the convention. However, when far fewer than the expected thousands finally appeared officials did not push for cancellation.

At St. Louis, Father Cox’s Blue Shirts were to join the Liberty party, whose candidate was William H. “Coin” Harvey, longtime advocate of free silver. But, on the eve of the convention, Harvey’s group objected to Cox’s candidacy because of the religious issue that would probably result from it. There was also the question of which one of the two personalities would step aside for the other. So, there were two parties, two conventions, and two more presidential candidates.

At the convention, Father Cox announced the party’s platform which included most of the things he had been demanding from the federal government during the previous two-and-a-half years, and a few things that the New Deal would later enact. The platform called for billions of dollars for public-works projects, unemployment insurance and old age pensions, and significant aid for farmers. For those still able to hold jobs, the party wanted a thirty-hour work week and the abolition of unjust injunctions and yellow-dog contracts. Among other planks were those advocating government control of banking and public utilities, the immediate cash payment of the soldiers’ bonus, and modification of the Volstead Act, along with a call for reconsideration of the Eighteenth Amendment. After first declining, Dr. Victor C. Tisdall of Elk City, Oklahoma, agreed to be Cox’s running mate.13

Two weeks after the convention, which never drew the attention

and support Father Cox hoped it would, the priest and nine others left Pittsburgh in a trailer bound for San Francisco. This was to be the first campaign trip for the Jobless candidate. In the Archives of the Industrial Society, a collection in the Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh, there is a copy of a diary written by Andrew J. Krupnick, who referred to himself as secretary and treasurer of the Cox campaign. The diary is an interesting account of this trip, six weeks and 7,795 miles of success and disappointment, friendship and rejection, internal bickering among the candidate’s supporters, hard times, and “going broke” in the West.

According to Krupnick, the trip started well. At almost every stop during the first few weeks, the trailer was greeted by enthusiastic crowds; the campaigners received help from local police, and supporters offered meals and lodging. Newspaper reporters interviewed Father Cox and his entourage, often giving them friendly accounts in local papers. Also during this period, adequate donations to the cause eased the travelers’ way across the countryside. While some of the troop occasionally stayed at local hotels, especially when there were ample funds, they were also welcomed at church rectories. It would have been convenient for Cox to stay at priests’ homes along the way, but he had promised to sleep in the trailer, where, according to Krupnick, the gregarious pastor even “talked in his sleep.”

Although the travelers were political amateurs, they attempted to make the right political moves. Usually an advance man stayed well enough in front of them to alert the local citizenry, but this stopped when funds were exhausted in the West. In a few towns they were embraced by Communists, but the group quickly disavowed them. At Massillon, Ohio, they were welcomed by Major Jacob Coxey, who had made his famous march on Washington in 1894, and who was also a presidential candidate in 1932. The two marchers flattered each other in their remarks before a small gathering. While in Ohio, Father Cox’s stalwarts distributed petitions to get the priest on that state’s ballot, passed out copies of the Blue Shirt News, and provided applications for membership in the Blue Shirts.

Throughout the journey, Father Cox made periodic trips back to Pittsburgh to attend to his pastoral duties. Whenever Cox was not with the group, the crowds were smaller and the donations less than usually collected when he was present. Internal friction among the troop, especially when their leader was absent, dissipated spirits and energies that might have been expended otherwise; and the problems
of raising money surely exacerbated the situation. On at least two occasions in the West, Krupnick complained that the campaigners were completely without funds. All this made the trip similar to other political campaigns.

West of the Mississippi, reaction to the campaign varied. At Davenport, Iowa, city officials refused permission for Father Cox to speak, despite the protests of his group and a number of townspeople. At Elk City, Oklahoma, Cox visited his running mate, Dr. Tisdall, and spoke before a large and enthusiastic crowd. While there he baptized into Catholicism a seventy-six-year-old man, and opined that Secretary of War Patrick Hurley, an Oklahoman who had been party to the rout of the Bonus March, "should be run out of town." At Albuquerque, Cox met the mayor, who had served with him in France during the war.

Without Father Cox among it, the party finally arrived in San Francisco, where he joined them on September 30. After fighting with local officials over meeting sites, parking, and other matters, the party headed back east to Pittsburgh. The trip back was even less fruitful than the one on the way, and the group, according to Krupnick, rejoiced when the journey ended.

In early October, a few days after the party returned, Father Cox abandoned his drive for votes, claiming that financial problems and his exhausted physical condition precluded any earnest campaign. After his withdrawal, the Blue Shirts disbanded, and Cox asked his followers to support Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate for president.

Throughout the depression decade, Father Cox tried in many ways to help the poor. Besides his soup lines and relief stations, the pastor established communities for the homeless. In the early days of the depression, he set up a shantytown between Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets on Liberty Avenue near St. Patrick's Church. Constructed of packing cases, the settlement resembled other "Hoovervilles" that were erected over the country; Cox served as its "mayor." At times, perhaps as many as three hundred residents were citizens of Cox's shantytown. Proclaiming it a "health hazard," the city burned the settlement in 1934. Cox then moved his people to the Ralston School at the corner of Penn Avenue and Fifteenth Street, where many homeless remained until the school was abandoned in 1935. 14

A much more ambitious settlement, which became known as

14 Church File.
“Coxtown,” grew from a report Father Cox submitted to Governor Pinchot’s State Unemployment Committee. Claiming that his plan would eliminate the unemployment conditions then prevailing in Pennsylvania, Cox called for the establishment of “self-supporting farm communities” which would be under the supervision of the state, with help and advice coming from agricultural experts at State College.

In his report, Father Cox outlined the features to be included in the communities. Each would have individual homes with small plots apportioned to each family for gardens. Provisions for irrigation and the use of farm implements would be on a communal basis; an industrial building or a community power plant was necessary, as was a communal workshop where residents could repair farm tools. Road development was an essential part of the program, not only for getting products to market, but also to “lessen the effect produced on families changing from urban to rural living methods.”

Father Cox claimed that his plan would not interfere with farm or manufacturing interests “under present circumstances.” Men out of work had very little money to purchase the products of farm or industry. Cox further insisted that since “leaders in industry, finance and invention have not prevented this serious situation” from developing, members of these new farm communities had to “create their own living or become public charges.” 15 Thus, Father Cox again called on the “common people” to solve their economic problems by “a recreation of the pioneering communities” that had been a source of strength in the past. Receiving little aid from the politicians, Father Cox decided to try his own communal experiment. In May of 1932, he started Coxtown, a thirty-six acre plot in O’Hara Township which he had purchased. Elaborate plans called for housing more than fifty families, each having a quarter-acre lot to cultivate besides a home- stead. The wooded countryside was cleared to build two-room bungalows, the building to be done by the unemployed who would be the first occupants. Before the expected proceeds from the sale of foodstuffs, the community’s residents were clothed and fed by the Father Cox Relief Fund.

Residents were issued script, honored at St. Patrick’s relief sta- tion, to be used for purchasing necessities. Since “they can’t find jobs to get real American money,” Father Cox explained, “we’re paying them in ‘Coxtown Currency,’” the idea being “to give them self- respect” in making their purchases.

15 Catholic Observer, Jan. 15, 1931.
Construction of Coxtown began in May with forty men working daily to clear the area and build the first bungalows. Eventually a community hall and swimming pool were built and maintained for the community's residents. Although Father Cox's friend, Attorney Henry Ellenbogen, characterized Coxtown as "a national symbol for the necessity of establishing similar communities" throughout the country, Coxtown failed to develop as its founder had hoped. Limited finances plagued the operation, and while a quarter-acre of land might support a small family it hardly yielded much else to sell. Yet, resettlement projects subsequently became a feature of the New Deal, though perhaps not one of its major achievements.

After a year's operation, the project became another victim of hard times. Taxes and sanitation laws helped to kill it. Originally purchased for $75,000, the area was sold in 1939 to satisfy a $13,000 mortgage. By that time, relief checks and works projects had eliminated much of the necessity for similar projects, limiting as well the enthusiasm of people to participate in them.

All these attempts to relieve the distress created by the depression made Father Cox a well-known and popular figure in Pittsburgh, especially during the early thirties. His honors were many and came from varied sources. In 1930, he was voted one of Western Pennsylvania's ten outstanding citizens in a poll conducted by the Pittsburgh Advertising Club and the Pittsburgh Press. That same year his artistry over the airwaves gained him first honors as the most popular local radio artist in a contest held by the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph. In 1931, a group of Pittsburgh's leading Negro citizens honored him as one who championed the city's poor regardless of creed or color.

A number of other commitments intruded upon Father Cox's parish duties, marches, and his many trips abroad. An active Old Newsboy campaigner, he served as chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Mercy Hospital; he served on the Commission of Charity of the Diocese of Pittsburgh; and he wrote a column for the Catholic Observer, "Father Cox Says," which often discussed contemporary economic and political conditions. Governor Pinchot appointed him to the State Commission for the Unemployed, and President Roosevelt named him to the State Recovery Board of the National Recovery Administration. Mayor William McNair of Pittsburgh twice nominated Cox for important positions in the city, but political objections, especially from the city council, abort-

ed these.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite what appeared to be a number of defeats, locally and nationally, Father Cox continued to speak out on political issues and to demand reform. Politically naive, he switched party allegiance back and forth during the thirties. He changed from Democrat to Republican in 1935 primarily because of local politics and charged that the rise of the Democratic party was based on "economic heresies." But, he supported Roosevelt the next year. Although he always seemed proud to be a "union man," Cox denounced "union racketeers" and those leaders who used "dictatorial methods" to gain ends, just at the time labor was beginning to show its muscle in the turbulent decade.

Father Cox attacked the Supreme Court long before Roosevelt's attempt to "pack" the Court which had struck down crucial New Deal measures. Characterizing the justices as "a bunch of petrified fossils," Cox insisted that no one should serve on the Court after age sixty. He deplored the fact that "nine old men" could overrule the will of 125 million Americans by their sweeping judicial decisions.

Yet, in the same year that he attacked the justices for assuming autocratic power, Father Cox advocated an American dictatorship, drawing widespread attention to his new political blunderbuss. In a sense, his disgust with the political system which led him to propose a dictatorship reflected feelings shared by many Americans then and later: the enormous waste of money by the multiplication of federal, state, and municipal employees; a "horse and buggy" concept of government which tended more to maintain a bureaucracy than provide services; a Congress more interested in protecting the rich, and itself, than in saving money for the less fortunate; and a government by political party, rather than one of elected public officials, where the waste of public funds was justified by the necessity of party reelection. Although congressmen "were paid for doing nothing," the waste was even greater in the forty-eight "unnecessary states" where "puerile governors" did "nothing that a $150-a-week clerk couldn't do." To Cox, all these things bogged down the ability of government to effectuate solutions for the people's real problems.

Father Cox had a remedy which would preclude those undesirable features. Claiming that the people in Italy and Germany seemed satisfied with their totalitarian systems and that "the best committee in the world is a committee of one," he advocated that President Roosevelt become a dictator for "twelve to fifteen" years. Freed from the

\textsuperscript{17} Cox File.
traditional political restraints and endowed with qualities which would make him "a great benevolent dictator," Roosevelt as supreme ruler could "bring sense out of chaos." From this experience, Cox insisted, "there should develop a socialistic state without the socialistic fallacies. Then we could have a real democracy." At one point, the outspoken clergyman was willing himself to become dictator if unnamed "Philadelphia Fascists" would assure him twenty-five years of "final and absolute authority." Neither he nor Roosevelt would have survived the years he deemed necessary for his experiment to operate successfully.

The rejection of his proffered panaceas never seemed to discourage Father Cox from speaking out on many contemporary issues. He was a firm supporter of the Townsend Old Age Revolving Pension scheme and led another "march" to Washington urging its adoption. His argument that "poor houses and old people's homes cost more than any Townsend Plan could" attracted some people to this cause. Despite the pleas of the plan's advocates not to march, Cox and about twenty-eight followers rode a bus to the capital but upon arrival immediately went to a hotel without the fanfare that had accompanied his previous visits.

Among his many sorties against the modern capitalist structure, Father Cox carried on an extensive though short-lived crusade against the chain stores. In a series of radio addresses under the auspices of the Retail Merchants' Association of Allegheny County, Cox attacked the chains as "un-American," and "community wreckers," while applauding independent merchants as "community builders." Generally anticorporation, always fearful of the "slavery of moneyed monopolies," Cox blamed the corporations for the depression and asked his listeners to pledge that "with the help of God," they would not enter a chain "for one year, for six months, for ninety days or thirty days" and "would rather go to the workhouse than do it." 18 Presumably thousands listened to Cox's attack; but, with economic conditions as they were, and the New Deal serving to help the large business units, this plea like many others, went unheeded. 19

As a priest and provider for the poor, Father Cox always faced the necessity of finding funds for his many ventures. To raise money, Cox solicited aid from business and civic leaders, sold religious arti-

18 Catholic Observer, Nov. 12, 1931.
19 For help in driving out the chains, Father Cox promised to bring to Pittsburgh a prominent United States senator from the West, "where real men live, real men who wear those ten-gallon hats and if necessary, will carry a gun to keep things right," and he will "tell the effete East what they [sic] ought to do in the way of curbing monopolies."
cles, maintained the Father Cox Relief Fund, and once permitted the Pittsburgh Stock Company to present his Jobless March on stage before a paying audience.

On at least one occasion his fund-raising activities found Father Cox in serious trouble with federal officials. In early 1938, federal agents arrested him, charging him with fraudulent use of the mails in promoting a lottery in which the priest and a group of "professional promoters" had organized the "Garden Stakes" through which participants paid a dollar for a religious medal and the privilege of suggesting a name for the monastery garden erected in 1937 at St. Patrick's. The garden included a large grotto erected in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, with a well beside the grotto, and an altar stone inside for use in the summer months.

The government charged that the men were operating a lottery with twenty-five thousand dollars in prizes and were using the mails to defraud. Under a three thousand dollar bond, Father Cox roared that the government would need "troops to stop me"; in bellicose terms he insisted that if "this bumbling administration wants to stop this charitable contest, it will have to use force." After federal agents and the Better Business Bureau explained certain irregularities which included charges that prize winners did not always receive their winnings, that prizes were awarded to friends and relatives, that some winners were also contest salesmen, and others, the priest repented—"If these promoters have done the things alleged . . . , they certainly have used me for a tool and a fool." 20

Claiming that he "would under no circumstances have defrauded anybody," that he was only trying "to do something for the poor," Cox, along with thirteen others, was indicted for conspiracy to use the mails in the furtherance of a lottery and a conspiracy to defraud, among sundry charges. In May, a federal jury deliberated twenty-five hours before acquitting Cox on the charge of conspiracy to defraud by use of the mails; the jury could not agree on the other charges against the priest. Others were convicted of fraud and conspiracy but acquitted on other charges. Later in the year, Cox was freed of the mail fraud and lottery charges. 21

If this incident did not concern Father Cox's spiritual superiors, his short-lived but heated battle with Father Charles E. Coughlin did. Coughlin's radio talks, strong organization, and militant pronounce-

20 Newsweek, Jan. 24, 1938.
ments on many issues made him much better known than his Pittsburgh counterpart. Beginning his radio appearances over a Detroit station in 1926, within six years Coughlin's talks over a national network were drawing over thirty million listeners a week. A persuasive speaker with tremendous radio appeal, Coughlin denounced bankers, internationalists, labor unions, Socialists, Communists, the New Deal, and finally Jews as the villains who had caused the depression. At first a supporter of Roosevelt, he broke with the president and in 1936 was a leading figure in a third-party movement to defeat him.22

Father Cox appeared akin to Father Coughlin in many ways: both wore the same collar, issued manifestoes on varied economic and political topics, used the radio as a powerful weapon in promoting their interests, and promoted many schemes designed to free the people from the depression. Although Cox supported Roosevelt in 1936, he praised Coughlin for a "good job" in trying "to help other men to think." Admitting that he and Coughlin disagreed on some matters, Cox believed that Coughlin's talks helped "to develop discussion" from which "things calculated to help the common good" would emerge. Cox particularly admired, perhaps envied, Coughlin's "remarkable organization" and "patronage."23

However, Father Coughlin's rampant anti-Semitism in the late thirties led Father Cox to publicly denounce his fellow priest. In a long and intemperate speech before the Dormont Rotary Club, delivered in a Methodist church, Cox condemned Coughlin for being in the "vanguard of the Bigot Brigade." The speech was printed and distributed under the title "Hitler's Hatchet Man" and spread to areas beyond the confines of Pittsburgh.

Father Coughlin complained to the apostolic delegate in Washington and wrote to Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh protesting the "tremendous damage which is resultant from Father Cox's untruthful" broadside. Claiming that some followers had deserted him because of Cox's speech, Coughlin submitted to Boyle written evidence that Cox had been rewarded "for the work the Jew wanted him to do on Father Coughlin." Explaining that he "did not want a scandal," Coughlin requested of Boyle that he stop Cox's onslaught, and Cox withdrew. Within a few years, Coughlin was finally pressured to withdraw from public controversy, and Cox, too, settled into relative obscurity.

22 Charles J. Tull, Father Charles Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse, N.Y., 1965).
23 Syracuse (N.Y.) Herald, June 8, 1936.
Most of the deep-rooted divisions in American life wrought by the turbulent thirties of which Father Cox was an important part were put to rest when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in late 1941. Proud of his service in World War I, Cox asked permission to enlist in the army. Realizing that his age and an old knee injury sustained during the last war were obstacles, Cox wanted to serve as a transport chaplain aboard ships taking men into combat. Refused here, he became chaplain of the Pennsylvania State Guard. While occasionally camping with the guard at Indiantown Gap, Cox attended to his regular pastoral duties throughout the war.

While Father Cox’s political loyalties fluctuated, and his work among the poor gradually lessened during the late thirties and throughout the prosperous war years, his attachment to the holy shrine of Bernadette at Lourdes, France, never wavered throughout his life; indeed, it seemed his most sustained lifelong commitment. As a youth, Cox experienced difficulties in seeing; for three years, he later recalled, the best doctors at Mercy Hospital treated his condition, finding little they were able to do to help him. Believing that eventually he would become blind, Cox’s childhood dream of becoming a priest seemed impossible. But he learned of the miraculous cure from Lourdes, and after treatment with the holy waters he was cured of his mysterious malady and vowed perpetual adoration for the rest of his life.24

His commitment to Lourdes was reflected in many ways during his priestly life. He distributed water from Lourdes at St. Patrick’s, conducted novenas in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, erected a shrine by the church, and for awhile even distributed a paper, Annals of Our Lady of Lourdes, depicting miracles and activities of the saintly place. He was named a chaplain at Lourdes the year before his death and became an honorary canon of the Cathedral of Anger, located near the shrine of Bernadette. Most of all, Father Cox led groups to Lourdes throughout his life, making perhaps twenty trips there in less than thirty years. He also led pilgrimages to the Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré in Quebec and to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. In contrast to the militant scenes he shared at home, he found Lourdes “a little bit of heaven. An atmosphere of religion and piety pervades everybody and everything.” 25

Old St. Patrick’s was destroyed by fire in 1935. In rebuilding it two years later, Father Cox installed in the walls a piece of sandstone

24 Cox File.
25 Church File.
from the White House, a gift from President Roosevelt, and a piece of the Blarney Stone which he had picked up on a visit to Ireland in the twenties. When the church was rebuilt, Cox saw little future in the parish since “warehouses had elbowed out the old homes,” so the new church was built to accommodate only one hundred fifty-eight people.

But it had excellent acoustics for the radio, which Father Cox put to good use. While his was among the smallest parishes, masses there may have been followed by more people than in any other Catholic church in America. Reportedly he was the only priest permitted to broadcast masses regularly over a major radio station, and every Sunday the home-bound could attend St. Patrick’s whether they were of the parish or not. From November 1945 until his death, he offered a daily radio sermon and was preparing one of his broadcasts when he suffered a stroke and died in 1951.

Ruddy-faced, stocky, a bit pugnacious, Father Cox led a stormy life, one matched by few Catholic priests of his generation. While some argued that his life was primarily “boun[cing] into headlines with one publicity-breeding stunt after another,” it is difficult to deny that this was often necessary to draw sufficient attention to the conditions of those people not represented by rich and powerful interests. He once was included in the *Who Is Who in Radicalism*, the publication that also listed persons like Eleanor Roosevelt, hardly an unreasonable champion of the underdog by mid-twentieth-century standards. Even Catholics resented his “sensationalism”; however, there is no record that he was publicly censured by his superiors. His espousal of communal projects and his demand for a more active federal government may suggest radical inclinations, yet his commitment to the small businessman reflected his strong belief in the capitalist tradition.

His decision to become a priest revealed his interest in people and causes, although his ubiquitous political behavior may have at times, like Father Coughlin’s, confused his followers. Apparently his numerous and various activities did not damage his priestly vocation. He continued in the good graces of his church, leading small pilgrimages, preaching and celebrating mass for his small parish and radio audience, and working as a pastor until his death. The white collar was attached to the blue shirt, and there it remained throughout his life.

26 Cox File.