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Managing Editor of the Brooklyn Tablet

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HERE is hardly a question before the people of this country of greater moment than that of relief. It affects directly or indirectly every man, woman and child; it affects this and future generations; it affects us through Washington, our State capitol and the municipality or township in which we live. As long as billions of dollars are being expended to support millions of people and with little or no diminishing in sight, it indicates that national bankruptcy or inflation is apt to come. You cannot continue to spend more than you have.

No one would be human who did not favor the giving of proper and steady assistance to the deserving poor. These men and women are our brothers and sisters. They have become ship-wrecked in the economic sea and it is the duty of all to render assistance. For the great majority this means generous relief. The person who denounces the waste in relief renders a service not only to morality and his country but particularly to the deserving poor.

Evils of Relief

The Relief System as operated today leaves much to be desired. Millions of dollars have been and are being wasted; deserving ones are not getting the assistance needed; undeserving ones, chiselers, are robbing the country; thousands are losing their self-respect, becoming demoralized and would rather be on relief than take a job; the common people are needlessly given almost unbearable tax burdens and a system is being built up which it will be difficult to dismantle without a struggle.

The relief to which we refer is not the A.A.A. or the one hundred or more Federal agencies, but work relief and home relief. Work relief aims to enable the unemployed to do something useful in order to secure an income upon which to subsist. Home relief might properly be called the giving of a dole to people who have not, and cannot, find employment.

Work relief while it has achieved some excellent results and been responsible for some useful and permanent projects, has paid out millions of dollars beyond all proportion to the work done. General Johnson, Raymond Moley and a number of loyal friends of the present Washington Administration have denounced the scandalous waste unsparingly and convincingly. It would be possible to draw a strong indictment from such colossal ventures as the Florida Canal; Passamaquoddy

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and Fort Peck Montana, where \$100,000,000 is being spent to erect a dam far from cities and towns and apparently without any justification; the thousands of unnecessary projects whose waste in the enacting and whose bills in upkeep, will be felt for many days; the demoralization of working people who endeavor to obtain their dole doing little or nothing. It would also be possible to draw some vivid pictures of the way the northern States are greatly taxed to provide for a most extraordinary situation encountered in distant parts. For instance, in 1930 Kentucky had 43,000 unemployed, yet in 1936 Kentucky has 88,000 unemployed on U. S. Work Relief! That State—and many others could be mentioned—has twice as many unemployed despite the \$300,000,000 given the State by the National Administration. As a matter of fact in January 1935, we had 3,500,000 in the relief army and spent billions to give them work. In March 1936, after spending billions to purchase our way out of the depression, we had 3,800,000—an increase of 300,000—in the relief army with several millions more trying to join.

Work Relief Solution

It seems revolutionary and lays one open to the charge of having a capitalist philosophy but about the best way to solve the Work Relief problem is to liquidate it. The

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men and women employed get but a small wage; many of the projects are worthless; the expenditures are out of all proportion to the expenses; future generations will be taxed severely to keep up these features; people are actually becoming demoralized by many relief tasks, from insane boondoggling to building monkey houses; Communist elements use the set-up as a means and method to loot the Government and sow revolutionary propaganda; and politics plays its part in the entire program.

Recently Joseph S. Byrne, Brooklyn lawyer, in resigning as Chairman of the WPA Counsel of the plumbing and heating industry, gave a statement which is worth thinking about. It follows:

“In my opinion the ‘project’ work of the PWA and WPA is a national calamity. The waste of man-power and money are beyond comprehension. Men who once were active and energetic are losing their grip and their morale. Regular employers fear to employ those who have worked on PWA or WPA work for any length of time.

“Unless some drastic and effective means are taken to get these millions of unemployed who are willing to work back into their normal channels of industry, our nation will find a new situation which will be difficult to cope with.

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“This condition is fostering unrest and class hatred. Some influence, most potent and insidious, appears to be able to keep us from removing this condition. The experiences of other countries in the successful overthrow of established government appear as guides to this undercover influence.”

It would be beter to encourage private business to expand and local governments to engage in needed improvements for which a fair wage would be paid. The people, the States and cities and towns will have to pay the bills anyhow and they might as well get something for their money. When the government or municipalities turn over improvements to private contractors usually a decent wage is paid, good work is done and value is given to the community.

Home Relief Problems

The other arm of the relief problem is home relief. It is unnecessary to assert that many States, cities and towns have performed a magnificent task in assisting the poor. In many instances the leadership, the relief workers and the taxpayers have been generous and genuine in assisting the downtrodden.

At the same time it can also be asserted that this branch of assisting the needy has been filled with iniquities and waste. This is particularly apparent when an

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unbiased investigation is made or a re-enrollment of those getting aid is ordered. Thus in the State of New Jersey when recently relief was turned over to local communities, it was discovered that many chisellers were on the rolls and that unnecessary overhead existed with a result that a twenty-five per cent reduction in outlay was possible. On Long Island recently a number of towns ordered everyone on relief to come before the local committee and justify their claims to being kept on the rolls. In some towns from 30 per cent to 40 per cent of those on the rolls did not show up. Either they could not justify themselves or they did not require relief; in either case they did not belong on the rolls.

It is the writer's opinion that many people getting relief are not entitled to it. A minimum of waste of this description would be twenty per cent. Other ways to cut down the cost of relief, which particularly milks the meagre wage earner and the small home-owner follows:

1. Put an end to the social service racket. A depression is duck soup for the social service schools—in New York they have increased their tuition—and the social service organizations. It is to their advantage not only to keep relief but to increase it, to perpetuate it. For this reason they, and some rubber-stamp politicians, have introduced qualifications for relief workers which aim to

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make it a profession and one with a permanent field. Just now when business has greatly improved in New York, the relief rolls are continuing high and if the prosperity of 1928 returned they would be almost as large. In spite of more jobs, more electric energy consumed, more people riding in the subways, more deposits in savings banks, more purchases in stores, large receipts at amusement centers, New York City's relief bill is millions higher now than a year ago. To be exact, the cost of all relief in New York City for the twelve months ended last July 31st went up \$100,000,000 over the previous twelve months. \$297,017,900 was spent for the year ending July 31st last, an equivalent to an outlay of \$172 for every family in New York, including all families on relief. Relief, too often, tends to become a business with the professional social workers on the receiving end who throw about it an aroma of mystery not unlike that of the traveling medicine men of years ago with their bags of tricks.

The low-down, so to speak, on these self-important personages is usually revealed when one mentions decreasing, instead of increasing, relief. From Harry Hopkins down an uproar commences that is bitter and violent, always winding up with the charge that one demanding honesty or economy, favors starving the poor. If the professional social service set-up, with all its

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tricks, which so frequently rules relief were to be starved, large savings would result and the poor would get more relief and less cross-examinations.

2. Place relief, generally speaking, in non-professional hands, preferably business people. Let the positions be given to the needy, many of whom are intelligent and have had experience, and with the understanding that relief is no permanent business but a temporary condition—at least in extent—which would be eliminated as soon as possible. The salaries and the whole set-up would have this viewpoint, so that people would be encouraged to look for and accept positions in private business. Such a system would save money by providing income for those who would otherwise be on relief; it would reverse the objective of the professionals—whose aim is permanent jobs; and it would infinitely please the poor who are getting tired of being treated as guinea pigs. The writer has seen this system in action and knows it gives satisfaction, saves untold sums and reduces chisellers to a minimum.

Eliminate Politics

3. Eliminate politics. Home relief, like work relief, abounds with politics. When the present Welfare Commissioner of New York City assumed authority, he acted against the politicians. Those interested in the Democratic or Republican parties, he put in their place,

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which was outside the breastworks. But, apparently, he made no regulation against the Communist Party. The result is that today the Communist Party and its members play a very prominent part in relief. As a matter of fact they have actually made the existing relief organizations part of their party, using it to obtain recruits, to make demands, to place their members and to enlarge the relief rolls. It has been said that the relief staff in the Greater City is between twenty-five and thirty-five per cent Communist; moreover, they hold a large percentage of key positions in the supervisory places.

4. Restore control of relief to local hands. The idea of Federal and State bodies coming in and telling the City how to run its affairs is abhorrent. For every dollar the City gets from Washington and Albany it gives from three to four dollars in return. Carpet-baggers have been the cause of waste, injustice and distant rule which is bureaucratic.

5. Give Americans the preference in relief. No foreign country feeds and clothes aliens while its own deserving citizens suffer. If the relatives of aliens cannot support them, why not return them to their native hearth? And as for those who while seeking and receiving the bounty of our Government, bellow the ideals of some foreign Government, usually Russia, why not return them to this land of enchantment?

As Religious Citizens

As American citizens we have an obligation to be interested in the problem of relief. As Catholics we have a deeper obligation. The founder of our religion led a life of poverty. He lived and worked and preached among the poor. Throughout His entire life the needy were the first objects of His solicitude. The Church He established immediately drew to its portals people from every avenue of distress. Frequently has it been said that the Catholic Church is the Church of the poor. And where it has flourished it has done so particularly because it championed those who needed aid. By the doctrine of Christian Charity, by tradition, by common sense itself we Catholics must at all times be interested in those who need our assistance.

St. Vincent de Paul Society

The present depression in the United States has aroused many Catholics. In diocese after diocese the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the proper channel for relieving distress, has been re-born, re-established and extended. The one charity organization indulged by the Holy Father, it confers a blessing on its members, on the parish in which it operates and on those whom it so self-sacrificingly and humbly assists. This

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organization, spending millions of dollars a year, does so without hardly a cent of overhead. What is given to the Society reaches the poor intact, and in reaching the poor its proudest boast is that the relationship of baptism is maintained. The Society has no publicity agents; it issues no meaningless, boastful or padded reports; the common jargon of the professional do-gooder is totally absent. The St. Vincent de Paul Society aims to help the needy; not to create a budget, not to develop a business, not to find ways and means of annoying people, not to experiment on or give lectures to our temporarily unfortunate brethren, and not to obtain advertising.

The Catholic program for relief was recently competently and effectively presented by most Rev. Aloysius Muench, Bishop of Fargo, North Dakota, and a leading champion of social justice, in a telling speech delivered at the Conference of Catholic Charities in Seattle, Washington. Just as Bishop Schlarman of Peoria, Illinois, electrified the Catholic world at the 1935 convention when he said the poor wanted relief and not a cross-examination, so Bishop Muench's address in 1936 has drawn widespread and favorable comment. His views are so solidly Catholic and so particularly pertinent now, that we are happy to briefly summarize them:

Local Charity

Firstly, the parish is the natural center of Catholic activity and all religious ministrations and works are centered there. The poor in a special way belong to the parish. "Hardly more than a decade ago an unfortunate trend in Catholic Charities was observed which has happily been reversed in our day", says the Bishop. The trend was the setting up of large central bureaus, which overlooked the parishes and their organizations and administered aid to the poor, giving the latter the impression that they were "unwanted in the parish". The spirit of Christian charity must abound in the parish.

Secondly, His Excellency says the trend was changed by two things: (a) the economic crisis "showed up the inefficiency and costliness of centralized charities", and (b) the phenomenal development of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul made Christ's poor once more the "priceless treasures of the parish instead of burdensome charges of some centralized office of charity".

Thirdly, the Bishop issued a two-fold warning against (a) the shifting of the responsibility for the care of the poor to public relief agencies, which are being perpetuated, thereby indicating a Socialist tendency and (b) the giving up, even by Catholics, of the beautiful Christian term of "charity" and the supplanting of it

with "social service", a mark of "the new paganism of our day". "We have", says the Bishop, "allowed ourselves to be duped and we use it, too."

A Constructive Program

His Excellency set forth a splendid constructive program. Parish responsibility, the duty of people of means to help the poor, and the formation of Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and Ladies Auxiliaries as the proper units to assist the needy. It was a remarkable address because it went back to real Catholic principles. And it was couched in scholarly, yet simple language, for the Bishop used the expression "the poor",—not "clients" or "patients",—and "charity", and other Christian expressions which are foreign to the professional jargon and the mysteries of "social-service" we hear so often.

After all we have a definite program, a program based upon the supernatural and once we depart from it and go over to secularism we are lost. The following quotation from Fr. Paul Furfey's "Fire On The Earth" is very appropriate:

"Thorough-going social Christianity must be an opposition movement. It must expect the antagonism of the most respected classes. . . . Some Catholics there are who are foolish enough to dream of compromise.

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. . . They say: Let us not overemphasize the supernatural. Let us develop and exploit the natural elements which exist in our system of social thought. Let us meet the opposition halfway. Let us adopt their phraseology and their methods. Let us make our universities and our social agencies as much like theirs as we can. Then, perhaps, the world may soften its opposition . . . and finally may be won over. What a foolish dream!"

A Relief From Relief

We want a relief from relief—that is, a surcease from the wasteful, costly, demeaning and demoralizing system which is strongly and widely denounced everywhere. All good citizens should be foes of the "relief racket" or the growth of a program which makes such a racket inevitable. At the same time we must look upon the results and victims of a depression not as something to be avoided, but as a pleasing opportunity to show our practical religion, our real love of our fellow-men and women whom God made with us into one huge family and upon whom we must look as His children, as our brothers and sisters, as, with us, destined for peace—not misery—in this world and happiness in the next.

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