

## Resource Sheet #8

### The Republican Opposition by THOMAS H. REED and DORIS D. REED *Survey Graphic*, May 1, 1940

If history is past politics, politics in these times is inextricably bound up in present day social history. Here the director and assistant director of Studies for the Republican program committee give us a cross-section of the party front on unemployment, health, international relations and other salients of human concern. They draw on the report of the program committee and the speeches of the announced candidates up to mid-April.

THERE ARE TWO MAJOR ROLES IN THE DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY. One is that of the party in power, the other that of the opposition. They are equally important. The party in power proposes a program of action. The opposition attacks the weak spots in that program and suggests alternatives. As a result, when election time comes the people have a clear choice between the "Ins" and their record and the "Outs" and their promises. There is no other practical way for fifty million voters to determine governmental policy. If the opposition is so weak that the party in power wins by default, our most effective protection against the abuse of political power is lost.

As partisans of democracy, therefore, and quite apart from our views on particular questions of national policy, Americans should be glad that in the coming campaign the Republican party will be a real contender. No one seriously expects a repetition of the walk-away of 1936, in view not only of the 1938 elections but of the recent opinion polls in the great pivotal states. Republican attitudes toward the social and economic innovations of the past seven years may have momentous consequences for the general welfare of the American people. It is important, therefore, that all socially minded citizens get a clear view of the policies which the Republican party will offer as an alternative to the New Deal.

#### Republican Attitudes on Specific Social Problems

##### Relief:

THE MOST ELEMENTARY OF PRESENT SOCIAL NECESSITIES is relief. Republicans recognize that federal responsibility for relief must continue. "State and local taxing resources," says Vandenberg, "are inadequate to carry such a load. It is a national problem and it must be treated as such." Republicans, however, are dissatisfied on three grounds with the way federal responsibility has been met. The first is discrimination. The program committee puts it forcibly: "By . . . making the unemployed employables a special concern of the federal government and leaving the unemployables as a special concern of state and local governments, New Deal relief has resulted in a gross disparity between the relief accorded these two groups." As

Vandenberg says, "A man may be just as hungry if he is not one of the New Deal's 'employables'." Most social workers would agree that there is much more that could be said of inequalities from state to state and those caused by the present administration of categorical relief. Very different conclusions may be drawn from the fact of discrimination, but that it exists on a large scale is indisputable.

The second ground of dissatisfaction with New Deal relief is that it "has proved incredibly costly." The program committee points out that from March 1933 to March 1939 the number of persons on all forms of relief increased little more than 50 percent while the cost of such relief increased 232 percent. It ascribes this result to the adoption of costly forms of work relief; questions if the morale of workers is preserved by WPA as now administered; states that WPA construction costs have been from 25 to 150 percent more than by private contract; and charges that many projects "have been badly conceived, overmanned, slackly administered and have not added to the country anything commensurate with their cost."

The third ground of dissatisfaction is political manipulation. The program committee accuses the administration of taking advantage of the absence of a formula determined by Congress for the apportionment of relief funds to further its partisan ends by the "astute timing, effective placing or punitive withholding of various relief grants." Dewey, using as evidence details from the report of the Sheppard Committee, indicts the Administration for abuses of power, "committed for the simple and ugly purpose of corrupting the electorate of the United States."

The Republican alternative is expressed succinctly by Vandenberg:

"The total problem of relief should be unified in every state, The state should receive an annual lump sum grant from Washington representing the federal government's contribution to the state's relief problem as a whole. Then except for certain generally controlling criteria to assure honest, equitable use of the money, state and local governments should be left to decide how best to meet their total relief problem in the light of their intimate knowledge of their own needs and total available resources. after they have matched the federal contribution on some appropriate basis."

The program committee goes into greater detail, suggesting a 'regularized formula of .apportionment, a bi-partisan federal commission to oversee, grants-in-aid and bi-partisan state and local bodies to actually administer relief.' Taft insists that the administration of relief be returned to the states, with the federal government providing perhaps two thirds of the money required. condition of federal aid should be,' he declared. 'that the state plan be administered by a board acting under civil service restrictions in order that state politics be not substituted for national politics."

The Care of the Aged:

CRITICISM OF THE OLD AGE Insurance articles of the Social Security Act is no

longer pay dirt for the opposition. The repeal of the 'full reserve' plan left the Republicans with little ground for objection. They seem to have acquiesced in the other changes in the law effected in 1939. The program committee merely suggests an eyes-open policy. It warns that questions have been raised concerning "the fairness and financial feasibility of the complicated provisions of the revised act. The operation of the act must be critically observed and whatever adjustments may be necessary to provide a fair and workable system of contributory old age insurance adopted." This attitude is further emphasized in its advocacy of extending the coverage of the act to "farm laborers, domestic servants and some other smaller groups of workers. . . . A scientific study of the present law should be made in order to develop administratively feasible methods, which are not now available, for its application to these other groups. The committee likewise favors continuance of old age assistance "based on need." It very definitely limited its support of pensions to those of a contributory character and those based on need.

On this point, however, the program committee report does not wholly represent Republican opinion. We can ignore the diehards who would repeal the Social Security Act, but we cannot ignore the fact that many Republicans favor outright pensions. On a test vote in the House of Representatives, June 1, 1939, against the opposition of Minority Leader Martin and the Republican organization, fifty-four Republicans favored the Townsend plan. Of much more significance is the fact that Taft and Vandenberg, who are thoroughly committed to economy as a general principle, have gone on record as favoring outright pensions without reference either to contributory character and those based on need. Vandenberg says:

"As regards old age pensions, the day will come when all the complicated and irritating perplexities [of the Social Security Act] will be swept aside for a general old age pension as a matter of right. Such is the demand of our senior citizens" and such is the undisguisable need introduced by a machine age which draws the deadline of employment under fifty years of age. If the size of the general pension is limited to the total resources now used in our various units of government to administer existing methods of old age aid. We should all be better off."

Taft follows his senior colleague by advocating "the payment of pensions under a non-contributory plan at the present rate."

Unemployment compensation:

Whatever party wins next November, unemployment compensation is here to stay. There is no hostility to the principle although there is a certain caution evident in holding out for a possible revision of details. Candidate Bridges takes "pride in the fact that some time before the passage of the federal Social Security Act my state of New Hampshire, while I was Governor, enacted an unemployment insurance law." He believes that unemployment insurance "is part of a permanent general system of social security for the American people," Vandenberg says "it will probably persist in

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something like its present form. Taft's endorsement of this and other humanitarian activities is accompanied by a demand for revision of administration to make it "intelligent, economical and fair." The program committee frankly envisages unemployment compensation as taking "the place of unemployment relief, except in major depressions, for those whose occupations are covered by the act. It even hints at increasing the scale of benefits, but not by increasing payroll taxes which it regards as a "business depressant." It particularly urges better and more adequately financed state employment offices. It would require all able-bodied persons on relief to register with one of these offices and would make refusal to accept a job "prima facie grounds for removal from the relief roll. . . . Gearing the machinery of relief to that of finding jobs for the unemployed. will, in its opinion, "save expense and simplify the transition from relief to employment."

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