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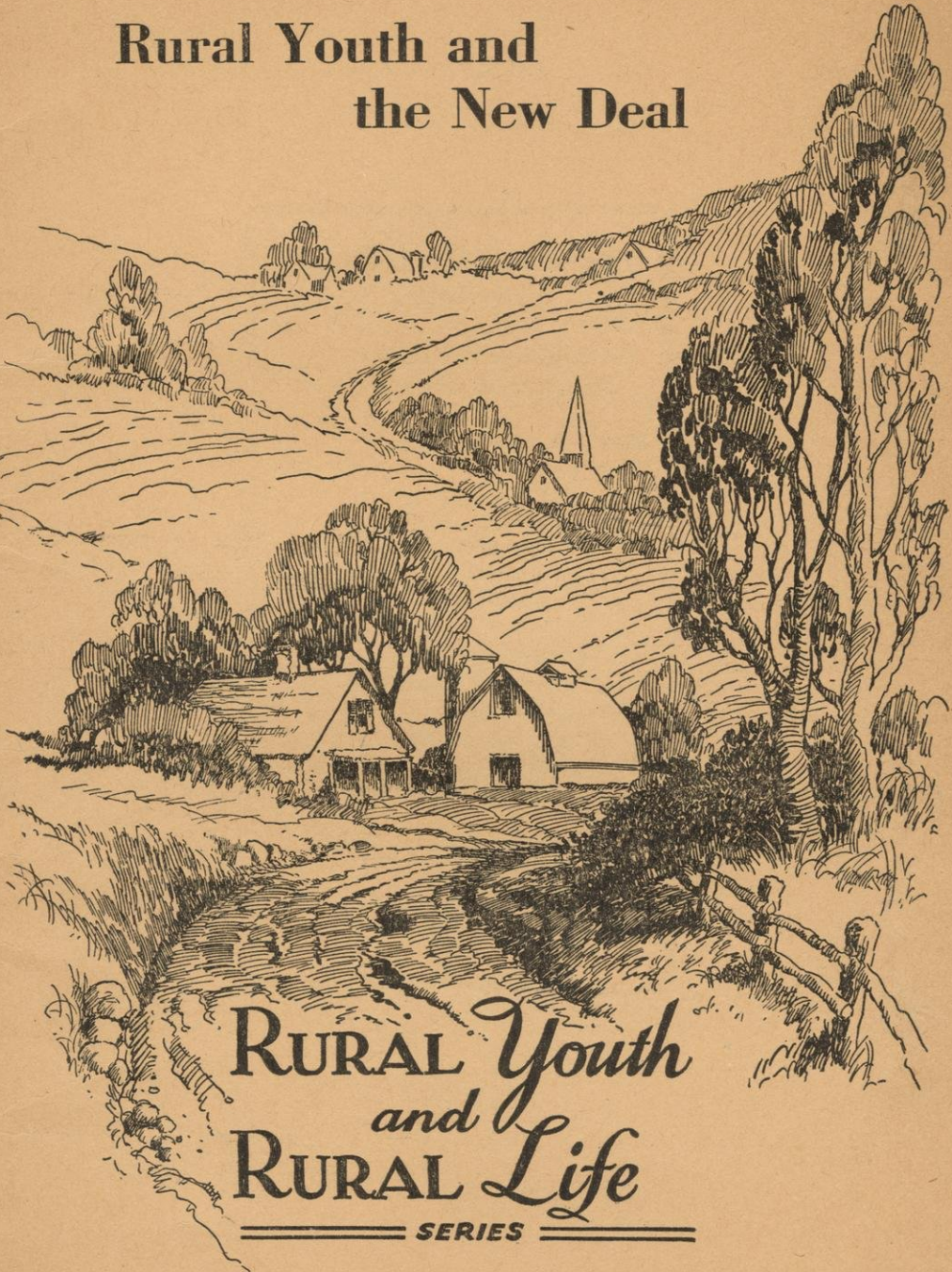
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Rural Youth and the New Deal



RURAL Youth
and
RURAL Life
SERIES

**Rural Youth and Rural
Life Series**

A Challenge to Youth
Discussion Summary

**Rural Youth and the
New Deal**

Carl C. Taylor
Division Land Planning
Agricultural Adjustment Ad-
ministration
Washington, D. C.

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**The Roosevelt Country
Life Commission**

Chris L. Christensen
Dean of College of Agriculture
University of Wisconsin

Education and Rural Youth

John H. Kolb
College of Agriculture
University of Wisconsin

RURAL YOUTH AND THE NEW DEAL

Carl C. Taylor

I AM GOING to talk about the New Deal and assume that you are just American citizens and as such you will be interested. As youth, you are not different from anyone else. I plan to talk as the good old fashioned darkey preacher who, when asked why he was such a successful preacher, said "I gets up and tells 'em what I'm going to say, then I says it, then I tells 'em what I said, then I sits down."

I want first to mention the big trends which caused the thing that we now call the New Deal; next, I want to call attention to some of the big issues with which we are involved and refer to some of the activities going on throughout the country in relation to those issues; finally, to raise the question of what kind of a world you are going to live in during the next fifty years if these issues are resolved into terms of our continuing the things that are now being tried out.

Three Great Trends

In the first place, I don't think the things commonly talked about as giving rise to the New Deal are the fundamental causes of it but only incidents or events which occasioned emergency activities. The fact that we had bank failures and bank holidays, and that we still have bankruptcies, accumulating farm mortgages, and things of that sort, with widespread unemployment--these are not the causes of the New Deal. Nor am I inclined to believe that the World War, the crash of the stock market in 1929 or the four years of the Hoover administration played a tremendous part in the situation. I do think, however, that each one of these things and many others that I might mention are outstanding in creating the sort of atmosphere which made people perfectly willing that somebody try for something better. They had their effect--factories were closing down and highly conservative business men didn't know what to do. Bankruptcies took place and bankers said, "I don't know what to do about it." Frank Page, brother of Walter Hines Page and a banker in my home town (Raleigh, North Carolina) exclaimed, "The only thing I can say is, if anybody else does let them do it." All of these things created a widespread public sentiment which made it possible to initiate an attack on the fundamental causes; to say, "Let's try something different."

I can't help but think that if we are on the verge of a new day, it must be because we have come to certain points in the curves of long-time trends. Certain things have been going on for a long time, and the juncture of two or three of these creates a situation in which the future will be vastly different. Let me name three of the great trends which we have experienced.

First, we have come to a slow recognition of the fact that pioneer days are past and that there is no longer an American frontier. By and large, we reached the end of that frontier about 1900 and probably began to recognize it as early as 1890. It took a long time for that fact to take effect in American life; but now we are face to face with the results.

Second, although starting much more slowly than in England, the industrial revolution came finally into the United States, reached its flood tide, and now has certain implications. The machine age is here.

I am not sure that all will agree with me on the third trend, that our exchange system, our price and market regime, has probably reached its maximum capacity to do the job in the exchange of goods on an economic basis. This trend is a little more difficult to grasp. But one illustration will help to make it plain; the milk situation in the city of Chicago, New York, or any city where there is a congestion of population in a great center. The cost of getting milk from the producer to the consumer is five times the cost of producing it. This makes one wonder whether our price and market system is meeting human needs. Isn't it failing to do the job?

The One Great Issue

The one great issue arising out of the juncture of these three trends, the end of the pioneer period, the flood tide of the industrial revolution, and the incapacity of the price and market system to operate in an economic regime, is this: How can we develop and utilize the nation's tremendous natural resources-- agricultural and industrial--by applying to them, for the benefit of all the people, everything that we know or can learn about science, trade, commerce, and finance? This is the job we have. Nobody is asking any other question; and no matter how radical he may be he would agree that this is the issue at stake. We, here and now, are not meeting the problem as long as we have ten million people unemployed and many others in poverty.

We know we can not do it with our present distributing system. We have the richest country on the face of the earth; more natural resources than any other country. The job before us is to take our giant piece of agricultural machinery, all of our science, all of our railroads, all our bank credit and exchange business, and make them bridge the gap between the producer and the consumer. How can we, as if we were one human being, take what is at hand and make a success of our own civilization?

I would have you as youth look at the whole situation as if it were illumined by flood lights. At present we are not seeing it that way; instead we are just shooting skyrockets. We say, let's try this and see what happens. Up goes a skyrocket; it dies down and up goes another. Behind the flares which appear in the sky, there must be a conception of the fundamental reason why, and a clearer picture of what can be done in the future.

The American Frontier

The westward movement of population was such a giant thing and lasted so long that it created a certain type of economic and social thinking which doesn't die easily. For 150 years, our forefathers lived along the Atlantic seaboard. Change began to take place about 1780; a little later came the opening of the Great West and the flood tide of people moved on. About 1828 Andrew Jackson is said to have said as he stood upon the Appalachian plateau and looked west, "Between here and the Mississippi river is land enough to take care of all the people who come to America for the next seven hundred years."

People moved. My own ancestors moved; starting from Virginia to West Virginia, then into Ohio and Indiana, across Iowa and on to Nebraska. During this

time the motto of the nation seemed to be taken from Horace Greeley's "Go west, young man, go west." People even came from Germany, Poland, Russia and southern Europe. The name of a state like Iowa became a shibboleth that went around the world. Many did not know where it was but they knew for what it stood.

This tide of migration rolled on for one hundred solid years, steadily in one direction. It jumped the limits of marginal land and flowed into the sub-marginal; asking the government to spend millions of dollars to turn the streams out of their channels into the desert sands.

Everybody went west. That was the way America was made. We built a certain type of economic thinking, a set of convictions about America and what Americans are like, and we still cling to these convictions. The biggest thing that must happen now is to appreciate that that day is gone forever and that the economic theories built then are no longer practical.

One of these theories was a land speculation complex. It became impossible to pay the dividends on capitalization. When the westward tide of population turned, about 1920, I told the boys at the University of Missouri, to urge their dads to sell the land and buy bonds. They replied, "This is the first time land is selling for what it is really worth." It is American to believe that the economic equation of the value of anything rests upon the difference between what is paid and what it sells for later. That day is gone. We are in the turn of the tide, with the second great movement in population. There is no longer a frontier. Since 1890 millions of people left their farms to go to the cities. The problems growing out of this make clear the need for stabilizing our national population to prevent another great movement.

Industrial Revolution

I don't think the technocrats were all crazy. Wild as they were, they had their finger on a sore spot. With increasing mechanization, industry will never again need as large a proportion of the population to engage in mass production. The technocrats had hold of a reality. Talking with a railroad man recently I asked when he started in the business. "Thirty-seven years ago," was his answer. I asked what per cent of the jobs in terms of men to be employed have gone out of existence since then. He replied, "Seventy per cent, with the probability of their never coming back." The old idea that we are solving the farm problem by shoving the extra population into the city to engage in industry and commerce is a false theory. I told the American Economic Association in 1926 that sometime the tide would flow back to the land, the great cities spew their population back to the farm. This is just what is happening.

Exchange System

Starting back when human beings bartered, there grew up the necessity of a medium of exchange. We have always been taught that money has two great functions, (1) a go-between in a barter arrangement, and (2) in order to be a medium of exchange, a standard value. The only function of making money a standard of value is that it serve as a medium of exchange. But, as so often happens, the means becomes the end in social usage and soon we hear, "How much do you get a day? How much dividends does it pay?" until finally comes the point where the two functions of money are detached. Thus, there has developed in the country a type of mercenary-ism which has left us on the rocks.

I read an article in a magazine recently in which the question was put: Will you please tell me what business the government has in monkeying in these things? I think we have come to the point where when we pile up two-thirds of the gold in the world and then find that the thing doesn't work it is time for the government to do something.

These three trends created the one great issue: movements of the population, the flood tide of the industrial revolution, and this problem of exchange. The issue is not how to shoot the people who have been criminals, but how to put our social machine into full gear, and guarantee that it will serve human needs.

A Changing Society

Let me call your attention to some things that are changing in society. With respect to population, some people are sure that we are in another great movement--out of the cities. I don't think that. But, a movement is on, and the study of social trends has definitely showed that there is a tendency for population to coagulate about urban centers. An old doctor from North Carolina said that the greatest problem is how to cooperate with the inevitable. He was right, and since we can't stop movements of population let's put intelligence back of this one to guide it. Land planning and subsistence homesteads are aimed toward greater security.

Going again to the flood tide of industrial revolution, people are saying that although industry does pick up there will be millions out of work. "What are we going to do with that segment of the population?" We must have some sort of social insurance against unemployment and old age dependency. And we will have to divide the work to be done between the people to do it and shorten work hours, to keep all busy. The present plan is directed toward that end.

What are we going to do on the third great issue--the devaluation of the dollar and the attempt to stabilize it? What happens when we have a rigid dollar? Farm prices go down and dollar value up. With respect to finance and exchange relationship, just a word about the stock market bill and securities law. People are saying that we will never get recovery until industry picks up. I am thoroughly convinced that the security market completely offshot its mark, but I am not so sure that we want to stimulate people to again turn money into industrial investments. The question is what should it go into? What industry do we want to stimulate? It is essential that we do not take money we need to live on for speculative purposes. I believe that the big function of the securities bill and the stock market bill is to put hurdles in the way of speculation, unfair financial profits, and human exploitation.

Leadership

Our present day leaders have many of the characteristics of youth. When a student at Drake University, I took a trip West. I had the spirit of youth "Try anything once; if it doesn't work, try something else." Father used to tell me, "Well, son, you think you're brave. You're not, you're just foolhardy." But I was eager to try anything once; perfectly willing to give it up if it did not work. I haven't gotten over it yet. This is also the spirit of the New Deal.

Youth believe that there is always a better way of doing things. They build on the past, live in the present, and look to the future. Fairchild in the

Journal of Sociology says, "Society can't live half in the past and half in the present." Society cannot live any other way. The very technique of social progress and social change is that we keep one foot in the past, the other in the present, and one hand and one eye out for the future.

The present administration has many young people in major places and hundreds of them in minor executive and counselling positions. When I go into conferences with them I look askance. But they come through--have good sense, shoulder responsibility.

At the recent Subsistence Homesteads conference President Roosevelt said, "The New Deal is not revolution; it is evolution." The first step in evolution is to change to something different, reform, not merely recovery. Change in economic and social machinery is needed to cope with new situations and above all, the new deal must be far better for the new day than the old deal was for the old day. The next step is that it be experimental. We are trying experiments. Some will fail; many we hope will succeed.

Our present leadership exemplifies the spirit of youth. It will try anything that sounds reasonable; abandon things that don't work; believe in the other person; and more than anything else it has courage.

Challenge of Youth

Now, suppose the profit system is being taken for a ride and that we shall no longer be willing to allow profits to be placed above the personalities of human beings. The first consideration shall be the man in the factory, whether he be manager or common laborer; and the second the profits. You say, we will never get people to accept that. We will, provided it is made part of the regime. The welfare of the people and standards of living must be primary.

Suppose we are stabilizing our population with a larger proportion of people on the land than previously contemplated. What kind of a society should we have? Not having to work the long hours which our fathers and grandfathers did, what will we do with our time? The usual answer is--"Don't worry about that. Give people their leisure and they will build culture and personality out of it." I don't believe it. The use of time is more important than investing money.

Out of pioneering we've built certain standards extolling arduous labor and thrift. That was the way to get to Heaven. When a man died it was said, "Carl was a hard working fellow, wasn't he, and he saved his money." Those are not the sole virtues today, but the love of play, creation of individual living, and the incentive to build a good society will have to rank at least equally with the old cardinal virtues of arduous labor and thrift.

Leisure isn't being idle; rather it is making play just as important as work; making art and music and recreation and participation in the lives of other people as essential as money making. This is the problem we are up against. If we distribute the work of the world among the people who want to work, we will still have the social job of building a decent society. This is the greatest challenge to the youth of today; to the men and women of tomorrow.

The picture of American farming will be different in the future. Agriculture will necessitate something like an American peasantry. It will attain

something so far above some of the things that are now happening in rural civilization that we will be thankful. Peasantry where the farmer will love and nurture the soil he tills, live under his own vine and fig tree as a certain type of personality because of the part he plays on the land; my father was a peasant of this type.

He owned 160 acres of land. He wasn't a money maker. He made his farm an experimental one, not because a college of agriculture induced him to do it, but because he loved to do it; he left the soil richer than it was when he took it. He had a fine herd of purebred Shorthorn cattle. My father was a peasant of this type even though his farm carried an \$800 mortgage until the day it was sold.

Although I have my Ph. D. degree, he was a wiser man than I am. He loved the soil. He was an artist with flowers, pictures on the walls, and landscape setting of the place. American peasantry need not be like France, or Holland, or even Denmark, but instead built with the highest knowledge of technical production and science. I believe that in our day this will come to pass.

The Way Out

I haven't said that the New Deal is a youth movement or that a youth movement should be organized to support it. There is no way of dictating that the youth of today will accept the heroic role of leading the way in the drastic changes which are inevitable. There is, however, one safe prophecy, that the leaders of the older generation and of the old economic and social order will, most of them, strive in due time to turn back to old blue prints and that the advances toward new values and a new order must come largely at the hands of youth or not at all.

I am bothered however about the complacency of American youth. No sadder commentary than the observation when things were caving out from under us that we took it lying down and were willing to accept gold from the U. S. government rather than get up and raise hell about what was happening. I believe we will have communism unless we get widespread concern of people who demand that our problems be worked out by joining hands. Cooperation is the only way out. I have faith that some day in our economic machinery we will learn to practice the same technique that we practice in our family life when we join hands with our eyes wide open and with a common task to be done. Only by doing that can the country be saved. Democracy means a cooperative commonwealth, in which we may have differences of opinion but have sense enough to join hands in a common cause.

What's Ahead?

.....the job before us is to take our giant piece of agricultural machinery, all of our science, all of our railroads, all of our bank credit and exchange business, and make them bridge the gap between the producer and the consumer.

.....the very technique of social progress and social change is that we keep one foot in the past, the other in the present and one hand and one eye out for the future.

.....the virtues of play, creative individual living, and helping to build a good society will have to rank at least equally with the old cardinal virtue of arduous labor and thrift.

.....the picture of farming will be different in the future. Agriculture will, of necessity, be built upon the highest knowledge of technical production and science.

.....I believe we will have communism unless we get widespread concern of people who demand that our problems be worked out by joining hands. Cooperation is the only way out.

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