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SOCIETY'S Stepchildren

Mildred Baldwin



• Our national income has soared to the greatest figure in history — but the white collar worker is getting a meager share of it.

I KEEP wondering what kind of a break my son's going to get when the war is over. You see, Harry was plumb discouraged before he enlisted in the Navy, right after Pearl Harbor. He had been doing clerical work and taking a course in accountancy at night. Then the company installed some new bookkeeping machinery. Well, they let Harry and several others out. He looked for a job for over a year. Then he began to mope around, discouraged like, wondering if he shouldn't learn a trade, as his dad did."

Harry is typical of that vast white collar crowd that stretches from the elm-shaded streets of America's midletowns to the canyons of Wall Street. Today there are 20,000,000 of his kind in the United States, as against 600,000 less than a century ago. Seemingly, he has no alternative to unemploy-

ment and final destitution unless an open-handed government literally puts him on the dole via a make-work program, or via taxation schemes that penalize his class, as well as all other classes in this land of fabled plenty.

While optimists speak of the streamlined manufacturing plants of the post-war period, of the greatest backlog of orders in the history of the world, and of the vast possibilities for greater expansion, there is actually little confidence in these quarters that prosperity can long be maintained or a devastating depression long avoided.

And so, as the publicity departments of great companies paint these landscapes of the future in the best techniques of four-color printing, the white collar worker has good reason to worry. He isn't a particularly happy man today, nor was he during the last World War. Living costs have risen more than 20 per cent in the last two

years but his wages have remained practically stationary or, for a large percentage, frozen. The white collar worker isn't regarded as indispensable in our wartime economy, like the welder and toolmaker, nor has he the support of powerful political pressure groups.

A GREAT DEAL of ballyhoo centers about the fact that our national income is nearly \$158,000,000,000, but the white collar man is getting the thinnest possible slice of this national melon. The National Industrial Board, in a survey of the wages of 35,611 white collar workers in 20 cities, says: "The mode or rate of pay occurring most frequently ranged from \$18 for file clerks to \$38 for senior dictating machine operators. Billing and bookkeeping machine operators ranged from \$22 to \$30, calculating machine operators from \$24 to \$32, key punch operators from \$23 to \$30."

Senator Claude Pepper, speaking before the recent election, stated that employers should be "required" to give raises to the limit of the 15 per cent Little Steel formula. Some few so-called radical periodicals then began to sponsor the cause of the underpaid white collar worker, but to date the results have been almost nil. Moreover, business men generally have not acted to give raises, even where certain relaxed controls in the War Stabilization program permitted increases.

The fact is that even the application of the Little Steel formula would

scarcely benefit these people, who, it is estimated, would require much more than a 15 per cent gain to bring their salaries up to the level of the cost of living.

Among those who are hardest hit are the 3,000,000 or more federal, state and local government workers, school teachers, librarians and clerks whose wages are completely outside the jurisdiction of the WLB. More than 250,000 school teachers have sought better jobs in industry, or have gone into the armed forces, thereby imperiling our educational standards.

During the last World War, the purchasing power of white collar workers declined 24 per cent. While figures on the present rate of decline are not considered reliable, it can be truthfully stated that millions of our white collar population are close to the subsistence level. They constitute our "new proletariat," and they are a force to be reckoned with.

This class has done more than any other to foster education and civic betterment, to patronize the arts and sciences, and to develop fine home standards. In wartime it has made sacrifices commensurate with those made by groups in the more favored industrial brackets. It has sent its sons to the battlefields of Europe, bought war bonds, and supported war charities. To do this, it has had to scrimp and save almost beyond endurance. And so, as Leo Cherne, prominent political economist, suggests, it constitutes fertile ground today for social unrest and bitterness; in its ranks may be found the political dy-

unit, it was found that over 70,000 acres of land were idle in this supposedly congested area. Allowing two acres to a family, at least 30,000 families—perhaps 120,000 people—could find opportunities for greater freedom and better living conditions in outlying territory.

Admittedly, two acres of almost any kind of land, if reasonably proper gardening methods were employed, would furnish a large portion of the family's food needs. And with intelligent application of agricultural knowledge, many such gardens would produce enough surplus to warrant regular marketing of crops to downtown homes and stores. Thus a substantial amount could be added to the family income, and there would be a minimum of suffering in times of business depression.

Assuming that, as far as land usage

is concerned, Cuyahoga County is typical of thousands of other counties scattered throughout the nation, it is apparent that there are opportunities for upwards of 5,000,000 people to move to suburban and rural areas where they can enjoy the security that land possession gives.

Recognition of these opportunities is particularly important now because the white collar worker is still in demand. While his city work wages are not what they should be, they may be steady for some time. This situation gives him the chance to establish himself in a homesteading area and to make the investment necessary for buildings and other improvements. He will be fortunate thus to secure his family on the land before unemployment of millions of his kind again threatens the very survival of the American way of life.



A Whiff's Enough

¶ The distinguished editor, the late George Horace Lorimer, was obliged, as are all editors, to reject by far the greater number of stories sent to him.

In the early days of his career, when a great burden of editorial reading fell to him, he received a letter from an indignant woman, who said: "Last week you rejected my story. I know that you did not read it for, as a test, I pasted together pages 15, 16 and 17, and the manuscript came back with the pages still pasted. You are a fraud and you turn down stories without even reading them."

Mr. Lorimer replied: "Madam, at breakfast when I open an egg, I don't have to eat the whole egg to discover it is bad."

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namite that may threaten our democratic institutions.

This class will not come out of the war as solvent as many others. If, and when, a real crash comes, it will be less able to withstand it, as past experience has shown. At the worst of the great depression that began in 1929, one-third of all clerical workers were unemployed. In New York City in 1933, 40 per cent of those seeking relief were white collar workers, and one-fifth of all the charity patients in the hospitals were of this class.

It has been suggested that white collar workers forswear their seeming attitude of hostility to labor unions and organize more strongly. Many representative groups have been organized for 50 years, for example, the retail clerks. Teachers organized in 1916, federal employees formed a union the following year, and the actors' union was organized in 1919. Many office workers belong to the Bookkeeper's, Stenographer's and Accountant's union, affiliated with the AFL, with representation in more than 20 cities. The CIO has many strong office workers' unions, connected with the powerful Trade Union Unity League.

But of what avail are unions when a real depression starts? When businesses fail, clerical workers are just as vulnerable to layoff as machinists — and if businesses continue to operate, they draw their help from a cheap and glutted labor market.

As for social security, this may not afford the protection one might expect. As presently framed, social security

laws specify that an employee must have earned a minimum of \$50 per quarter for at least half of the calendar months from the time the law became active (January 1, 1937) until retirement, to receive its benefits. Thus any older person who was unemployed prior to the war years, or is unemployed for any considerable time thereafter, may find himself excluded from these benefits.

Analysis of all these measures — unionization, government subsidy, make-work programs, social security and the like — leads to the conclusion that none actually begins to scratch the surface of the problem. Most Americans prefer self-respect to subsidy, the kind of security that is earned by sweat rather than the kind that is proffered gratis through political channels. All government assistance is based on further and more iniquitous taxation, a mode of relief which, far from correcting the problem, eventually intensifies it. The numerous taxation programs whose aim is to spare the corporation and spank the middle class are in this category.

STATISTICS show that, since the very earliest days of our country, *depressions have come at ever closer intervals and with increasing magnitude, and that they have coincided with the removal of our population from the land.* In fact, every authority in the social sciences has regarded the separation of people from the land as the beginning of social decay, of class cleavages, poverty and unrest.

It becomes apparent that if indus-

try cannot continuously absorb a possible surplus of workers—and experience has shown that it cannot—in this age of improved technology, then the *land must absorb the people*. There is no alternative. Unless there is a greater movement to the land, a larger proportion of our population will suffer from inadequate diets, a substandard of living, physical breakdowns, and finally various forms of insanity. The family of the low income white collar worker is especially the victim of these conditions.

The federal government has made endless surveys on the possibilities inherent in land use for large numbers of our underprivileged. A report from the American Society of Planning Officials, headed by Mr. Walter Blucher, is illuminating: "The federal government now owns 395,000,000 acres of land—or more than 20 per cent of the total area of the country. In addition, millions of acres have reverted to ownership by the states, counties and municipalities through tax delinquency and foreclosure."

There is land aplenty for every conceivable human requirement, but it is beyond the reach of the millions of people who have dire need of it. Tax delinquent and tax abandoned lands—whether state, county or municipal properties—are usually not available except on prohibitive terms. True, these lands are offered for sale to anyone who wants them, provided the accumulation of back taxes is paid. But the idea is not that of satisfying the need of our people for land—it is rather a step in securing all possible income

for government treasuries. Both the speculative evaluation of the land and the excessive taxes are the stumbling blocks—the taxes often exceeding the actual worth of the land.

Breaking this bottleneck in the processes of acquiring land will not, as many believe, require special legislation. There already exist, in all states, legal procedures whereby title to tax delinquent lands can be made to revert to the government. Authorities, therefore, have every right to take title and rent the lands—either city lots or country acreage—at the going rate and for short or long time lease. The advantages both to the governmental bodies and to the renter are obvious. The governments concerned supplement their income in a manner and to the extent justified by fundamental economic law. And the renter gets access to the land without prohibitive investment, at a figure commensurate with the possible productivity of the property.

Short-term tenants should have the privilege of transfer to long-term contracts at the end of the original contract, so they may properly secure their interest in whatever improvements they make on the land. And it should be specifically stated in every such lease that title to the property can never again pass from the government to any private party.

THAT THERE is need for some such "colonization" of suburban and rural lands is indicated by a survey made by the business interests of Cleveland, Ohio. Taking Cuyahoga County as a