

Washington Digest

National Topics Interpreted
by William Bruckart
National Press Building Washington, D. C.

Washington.—President Roosevelt stated to the newspaper correspondents in his press conference the other day that crop control must be brought back. He said it with some emphasis. Within a few days before that, he had given his approval to a bill placing a minimum on wages and a maximum on hours in which labor could work in industries whose productions enter into interstate commerce.

The President was not specific as to details of the legislation in either case but it is important to note that he has reaffirmed his position on these two principles for it is to be remembered that both the NRA and the AAA were thrown out by the Supreme court a long time ago, and the President seeks now to restore them in another form.

This circumstance would seem to confirm assertions that have been made in various quarters lately that the President wants to maintain a "planned economy" for this country. It would seem that he is determined to go ahead along those lines and that his program for reorganizing the Supreme court was a part and parcel of the scheme. In other words, the President's new declaration about crop control and wages and hours and his support of the Wagner housing bill represent a return to the original theories which he held for "remaking" our nation.

After discussing these circumstances pro and con with proponents as well as opponents in the congress, the conclusion is inescapable that Mr. Roosevelt and his advisers are headed into new ground. They desire evidently to make the federal government the most important factor in our national life and to set aside little by little the functions of state and local governments by their course of action.

Undoubtedly there is strong argument for the policies they have adopted; certainly, there are many functions which the national government can perform more effectively and more efficiently than they can be performed by state governments, and equally, it is true that some phases of our national life should not be subjected to the influence of state lines. On the other hand, there surely is valid reason why Washington bureaucrats should not be allowed to interfere in the daily practices and convictions of individuals.

The reason I believe all of this is so important now is that always there has been a tendency of federal functions to expand. To say this in another way: Federal officials from the lowest to the highest seem to be equipped with a particular faculty for delegating to themselves additional authority as soon as they are accorded power. What the country should fear then, it seems to me, is the steady encroachment upon the rights of states and thereafter the rights of individuals. Perhaps I should have reversed the order and should have said, first, encroachment upon the rights of individuals and, second, thereafter encroachment upon the rights of states.

Now, there are those persons in considerable number who believe sincerely that the federal government is the agency through which all public functions should operate. I cannot agree. Rather, long experience in Washington convinces me that the old, old argument for state rights—so long one of the tenets of the Democratic party—has too much merit to be overthrown without consideration for the effects of the new theories. It may be that human nature has changed enough to accept new theories and live happily thereunder but I am quite convinced that human nature does not change so fast.

To get down to cases in application of the principles discussed above, let us consider the wages and hours bill. That measure shows how this encroachment takes place and gives a rather clear picture of the expansive nature of federal policies.

The wages and hours bill first creates a labor standards board. It is circumscribed by certain limitations which say that it cannot fix wages above forty cents per hour nor can it reduce the number of working hours per week below forty. Further, a great number of lines of work are exempted from jurisdiction of the board—work of a seasonal character, farm labor, labor in certain specified industries which obviously cannot be subject to regulation without destruction of the business itself. Besides these restrictions, there is an implied warning in the bill against sudden or abrupt changes in business practices that would dislocate industrial operation or curtail employment.

These delimitations would seem to leave the board without a great deal of authority. Such, however, is not the case. Among those industries remaining under jurisdiction of the board, there is yet as much power as obtained under NRA and its

codes which were so hidebound and so inelastic that thousands of firms were in open rebellion against the restrictions unless they were able to pass on the higher costs resulting from these restrictions, to the public. That is, unless they could make the consumer pay the added cost, they faced eventual bankruptcy.

I do not say that the labor standards board as now conceived will go as far as the NRA codes but experience with the present national labor relations board indicates that the public should expect the maximum exercise of power instead of any middle of the road policies. The labor relations board has become a festering sore on private initiative. Business interests everywhere, while being pounded on the back by the administration to employ more workers, are kept in a constant state of confusion by the bias of the board. This is the board which was designed by Senator Wagner, of New York, to maintain peace between labor and employers. If the labor standards board can use discretionary powers accorded it and can proceed in correcting abuses of labor as rapidly as is "economically feasible," it may be able to develop better conditions in industry. But such language as the words "economically feasible" are subject to all kinds of interpretation and if the membership of the labor standards board happens to include some radical labor leader, most anything will be economically feasible.

It is from such quirks of law that bureaucrats expand their powers.

But there is yet another phase of this policy that demands consideration. While the United States is one unit under the federal government, it is made up of a number of sectional units and each sectional unit comprises a number of states and even each state in some cases embraces subdivisions where practices in business and living traditions are as different as day and night. A regulation as to the fairness of hours or wages in New England may be, and probably would be, wholly inapplicable in Alabama or Georgia. A regulation that would operate satisfactorily in Pennsylvania may be, and probably would be, completely sour in the Pacific coast states. Yet this board cannot administer its regulations on a piece-meal basis; they must apply to the whole country and it is only fair to assume from the existing facts that whereas rulings may be advantageous to some sections of labor, they might completely destroy other sections of labor. The same results can be expected from the effects of these rulings on the employers, except that where the effect is adverse on employers businesses can be driven into bankruptcy—and the jobs they provided disappear.

I think there can be no denying that no law will be successful unless it has the co-operation, the active support, of a very large majority of the people. If proof be needed, it is only necessary to recall how the prohibition laws were not enforced in those areas where public sympathy with them was lacking. It does not require very much time to determine whether a law is popular. During the life of the NRA, those who opposed such impossible regulations as General Hugh Johnson dictated were branded by President Roosevelt at first as "chiselers." It was a biting criticism. Yet, within a few months there were more chiselers than there were those who believed that the law could possibly be made to work. I am very much afraid that there will be more chiselers under the wages and hours law than there are those who believe in its efficacy.

The initial operations of the board and the law probably will not create a great deal of dissension. But there will be disgruntled groups of workers and there will be dissatisfied employers who will seek exemption or changes or special consideration by regulation. In some cases, obviously, the board will issue new rules. As likely as not those new rules will upset some other group or region or section and they will demand consideration. Just here, it might be recalled how under the AAA crop control law, wheat, cotton and corn were originally considered but tobacco had to have protection and rice and potatoes and peanuts, and every other farm product had its champions battling for consideration before the Supreme court held that the law with its processing taxes was an invalid delegation of power by congress. Therefore, while I may be "seeing things" concerning the labor standards board and the new proposal for crop control, the records surely support my statement that anytime the federal government starts a new policy it begins at the same time to enable expansion of federal power far beyond the original concept of a program.

Both Sides Will Buck

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what Irvin S. Cobb thinks about:

Advertising's Value.

VERNALIS, CALIF.—On the train a charming young woman said: "I always read the advertisements whether I want to buy anything or not. Do you think I'm crazy?"

I told her she was the smartest young woman I knew. If I were asked to describe the race in any bygone period since printer's ink came into common use, I'd turn to the advertising in the papers and periodicals of that particular age. For then I'd know what people wore and what they ate and what their sports were and their follies and their tastes and their habits; know what they did when they were healthy and what they took when they were sick and of what they died and how they were buried and where they expected to go after they left here—in short, I'd get a picture of humanity as it was and not as some prejudiced historian, writing then or later, would have me believe it conceivably might have been.



Irvin S. Cobb

I'd rather be able to decipher the want ad on the back side of a Chaldean brick than the king's edict on the front—that is, if I craved to get an authentic glimpse at ancient Chaldaea.

Running a Hotel.

I'VE just been a guest at one of the best small-town hotels in America. I should know about good hotels because, in bygone days, I stopped at all the bad ones.

The worst was one back East—built over a jungle of side tracks. I wrote a piece about that hotel. It had hot and cold running cockroaches on every floor and all-night switch-engine service; the room towels only needed buttons on them to be peekaboo waists, but the roller towel in the public washroom had, through the years, so solidified that if the house burned down it surely would have been left standing. The cook labored under the delusion that a fly was something to cook with.

Everybody who'd ever registered there recognized the establishment. So the citizens raised funds and tore down their old hotel, thereby making homeless wanderers of half a million resident bedbugs; and they put up a fine new hotel which paid a profit, whereas the old one had been losing money ever since the fall of Richmond.

A good hotel is the best advertisement any town can have, but a bad one is just the same as an extra pesthouse where the patients have to pay.

Poor Lo's Knowledge.

SOMETIMES I wonder whether we, the perfected flower of civilization—and if you don't believe we are, just ask us—can really be as smart as we let on.

Lately, out on the high seas, I met an educated Hopi, who said to me:

"White people get wrong and stay wrong when right before their eyes is proof to show how wrong they are. For instance, take your delusion that there are only four direction points—an error which you've persisted in ever since you invented the compass, a thing our people never needed. Every Indian knows better than that."

"Well then," I said, "how many are there, since you know so much?"

"Seven," he said, "seven in all." "Name 'em," I demanded. "With pleasure," he said. "Here they are: north, east, south, west, up, down and here."

Of course, there's a catch in it somewhere, but, to date, I haven't figured it out.

The Russian Puzzle.

UNDER the present beneficent regime, no prominent figure in Russia's government, whether military or civil, is pestered by the cankering fear which besets an official in some less favored land, namely, that he'll wear out in harness and wither in obscurity.

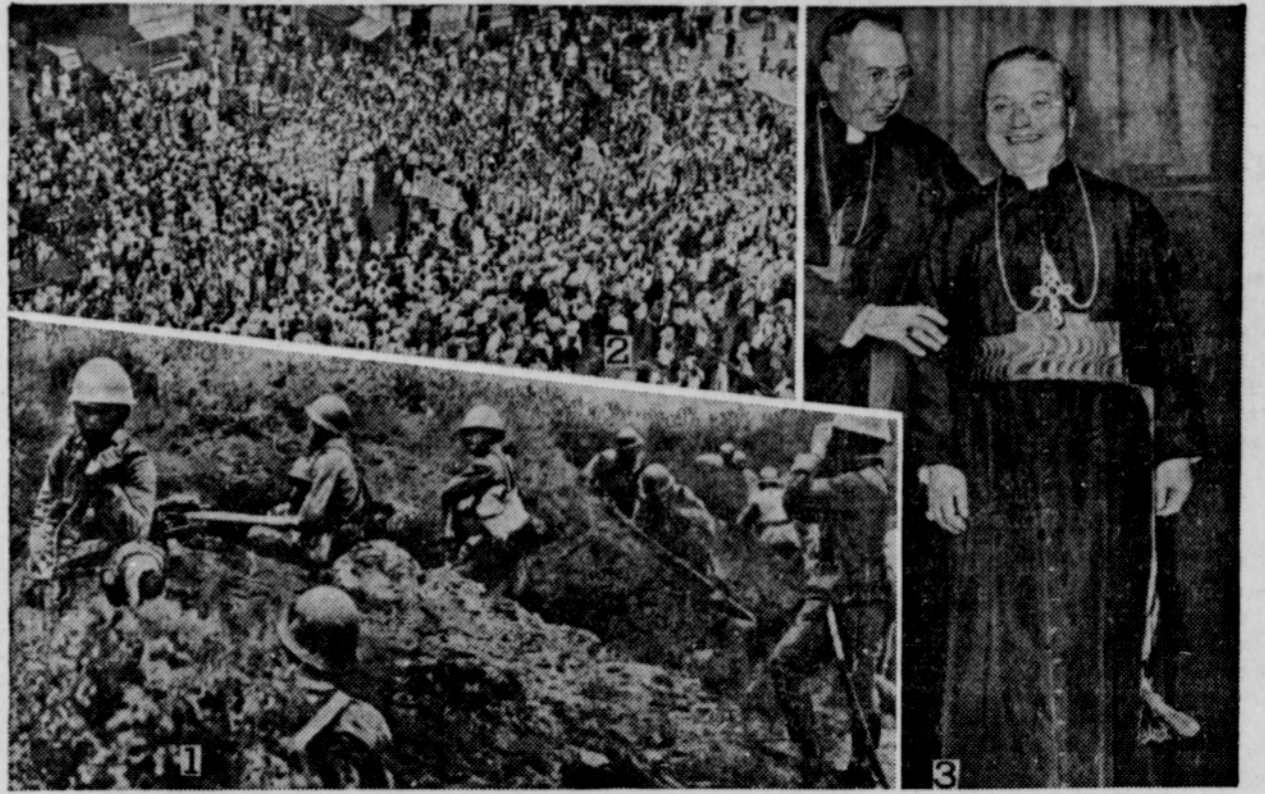
All General So-and-Soski or Commissar Whatyoumaycallovich has to do is let suspicion get about that he's not in entire accord with administration policies and promptly he commits suicide—by request; or is invited out to be shot at sunrise.

To be sure, the notion isn't new. The late Emperor Nero had numerous well-wishers, including family relatives, that he felt he could spare and he just up and spared them. And, in our own time, Al Capone built quite an organization for taking care of such associates as seemed lacking in the faith. 'Twas a great boon to the floral design business, too, while it lasted.

But in Russia where they really do things—there no job-holder need ever worry about old age. Brer Stalin's boys will attend to all necessary details, except the one, formerly so popular in Chicago, of sending flowers to the funeral.

IRVIN S. COBB.
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Scenes and Persons in the Current News



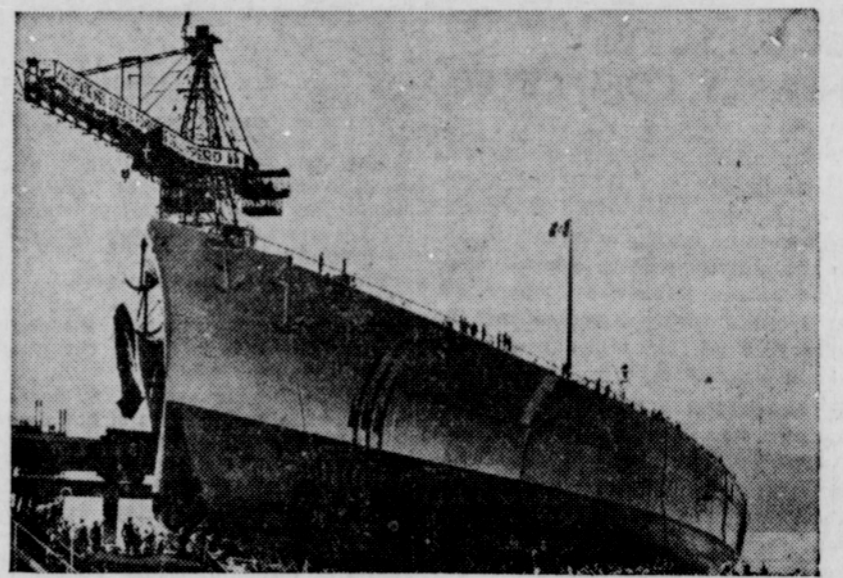
1—A Japanese outpost in the front line as the Nipponese engage the Chinese in undeclared war in North China. 2—View of mass meeting of 20,000 people which followed the annual parade in New York city of the American League Against War and Fascism. 3—Archbishop Edward Mooney (left), recently installed in the Catholic diocese of Detroit, confers with Archbishop Giovanni Cicognani, papal delegate to the United States, who consecrated him.

SPECKLED KING



"King Freckles" was the title conferred on Jackie Martin II of Philadelphia, winner of a freckle contest in Philadelphia. Jackie was chosen from among hundreds of runners-up as the kid most abundantly freckled.

Italy Launches Biggest Battleship



Thousands shouted and waved their hats as this sleek monster slid down the ways at Trieste, marking a red-letter day in Italian naval history. The battleship is the Vittorio-Veneto (35,000 tons), the largest of Italy's sea-warriors and one of the largest in the world.

Cleveland Decides to Extend Its Exposition

Throngs such as these shown crowding its amusement area caused the Great Lakes exposition in Cleveland to extend its closing date from September 6 to September 26, according to Lincoln G. Dickey, general manager of the fair. Dickey, shown in the inset, stated that the September 26 date was final and by that time more than 8,000,000 people would have seen the 1936 and 1937 editions of Cleveland's celebration of its centennial. Visitors from every state have seen the Fair.



TO SUPREME COURT



Senator Hugo LaFayette Black of Alabama, whose nomination to fill the Supreme court vacancy created by the retirement of Associate Justice Willis Van Devanter, was presented to the senate by President Roosevelt. Black, a vigorous New Deal Democrat, is fifty-one.

King in Shorts Forgets State Cares



Garbed in shorts and stockings and sweater to enjoy a day of fun, King George VI is shown on a recent visit to the duke of York's camp for underprivileged boys at Southwold, England.