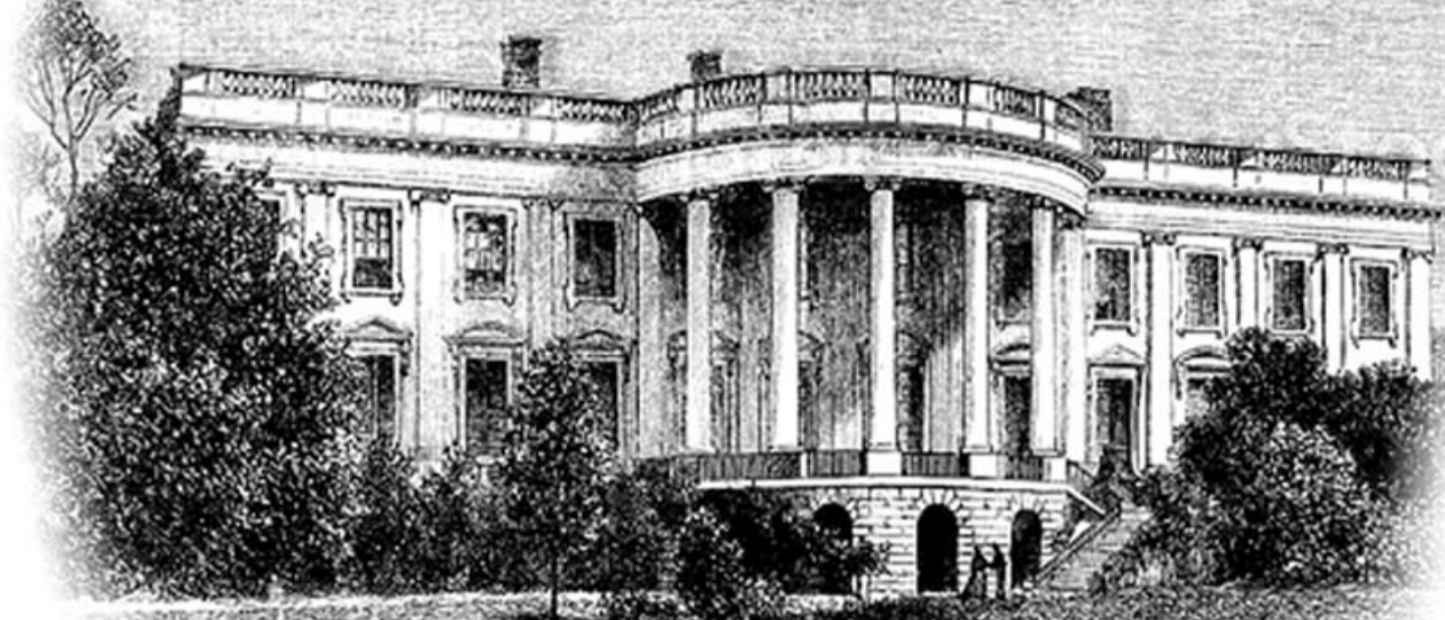


Collier's

April 13, 1935

The Vanishing Brain Trust



Where, oh, where are the gay young brain trusters? Safe now in their own back yards. Rexford Guy Tugwell lingers wanly on, but his dashing colleagues have retired. Washington is looking for administrators now

By George Creel

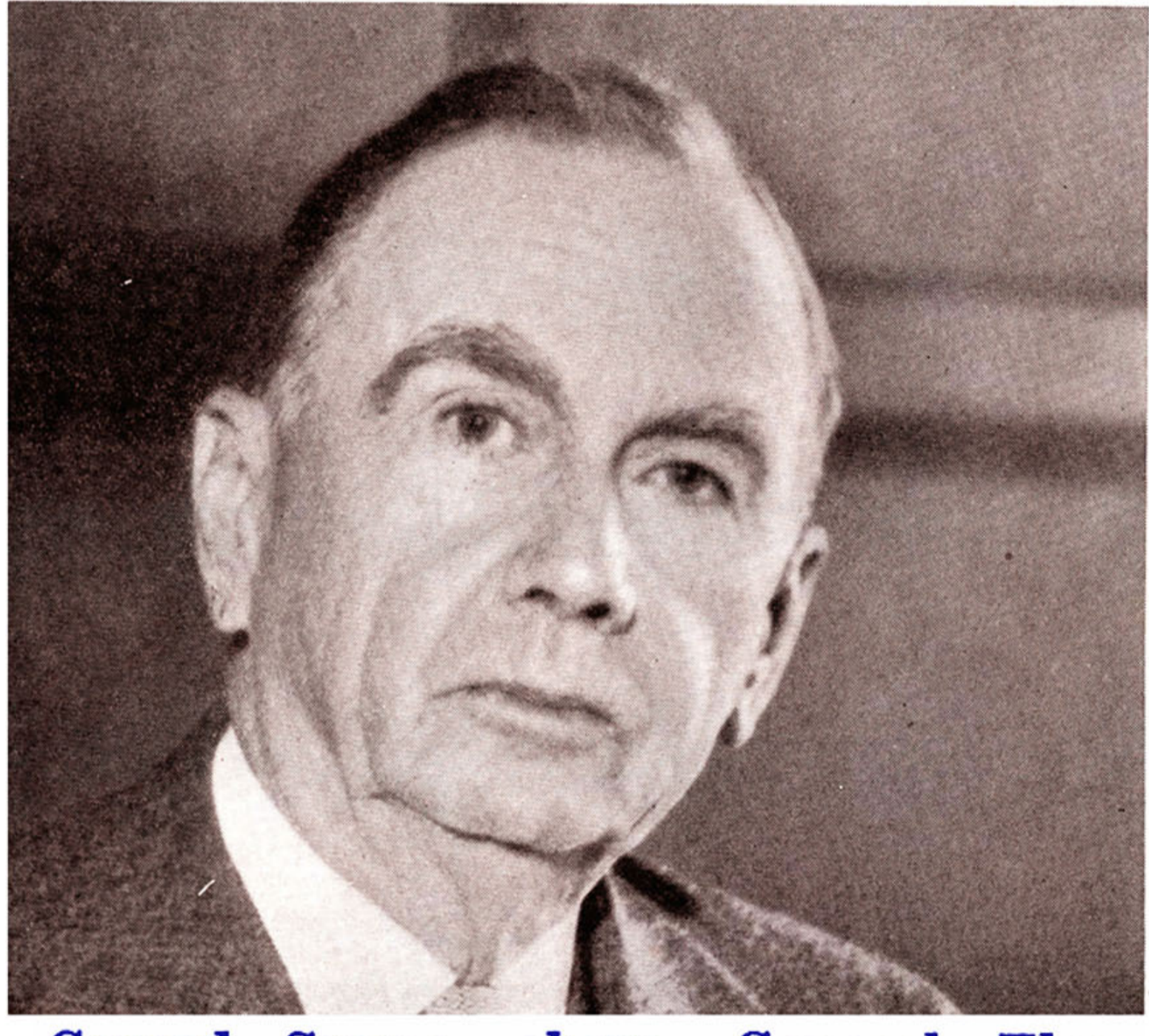
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S famous Brain Trust has been dissolved. Not by any court decree, to be sure, but just as completely and finally. Already it occupies small place in the public consciousness, and another month or two will find it remembered only by those toothless old gaffers who keep the radiators warm in Washington's bureaus and departments. A change, indeed, for it was scarce more than a year ago that each Brain Truster was a Moses in his own right, a Daniel come to judgment. The nation looked to them for guidance, and as they raced here and there, often in all directions at once, it was a poor editor who did not regard their activities as first-page news.

Consider the case of Professor Raymond Moley, First Brain Cell during the Pennant and Sweatshirt period of the New Deal. He sat at the President's right hand, and whether it was finance, industry, the tariff, transportation or which fork to use, no decision was reached until his opinion had been delivered. The statement of any premier, banker or captain of commerce was invariably followed by the question, "Well, Ray, what do you think of it?"

Professor Moley is now an inmate of New York, where he edits *Today*, a forceful magazine made possible by the savings of thrifty Vincent Astor. While still a frequent and welcome visitor at the White House, he now knocks at the front door and is announced by the butler. No longer does he hold the Roosevelt eardrums in fee simple.

"Jimmie" Warburg, who burgeoned for a space as the Administration's financial authority, has returned to his Wall Street haunts, and between banking deals and the composition of lilting lyrics, finds time to issue tart attacks on such Roosevelt money policies as happen to be in vogue at the moment. Good Old Doctor Warren, inventor of the collapsible dollar, who succeeded Mr. Warburg as Chief Monetary Expert, has also hit the sunset trail, and is back again in the agricultural atmosphere of Cornell, busy with eggs and the love life of the hen.

The Vanishing Brain Trust



Gerard Swope, above, General Electric's president, is close to the White House nowadays. Secretary of Commerce Roper, below, is no stranger either

A. A. Berle, Jr., one of the few "infant prodigies" who ever delivered in adult life, holds the important post of City Chamberlain in New York, and distills his wisdom for the sole benefit of swart Mayor LaGuardia. With respect to Charles Taussig, once the Brain Trust's Industrial Economist, or something like that, he is likely to go down into history along with Charlie Ross as one of America's mysterious disappearances.

General Hugh Samuel Johnson, great herd bull of the Brain Trust, is another who has sought refuge in the wilds of New York, making occasional forays into Washington. When not engaged in exciting the ants of conscience in Mr. Richberg's pants, he pens magazine articles on the NRA or else infests department stores, pensively autographing adventure books that he wrote as a young man. Various offers are open to him, but like many another, he finds it difficult to quit the public arena for the humdrum of private life.

Only Rexford Guy Tugwell remains of the gay group that used to give official Washington all the color and charm of a college dormitory. He is still Undersecretary for Agriculture, but very, very still. No more does he dash down from Sinai each morning with crisp authoritative voice that dealt decisively with every problem vexing poor humanity, there is a vast and enduring silence that no pick could dent.

Even the solace of cellmates is denied him, for the "Tugwell group" in the department, headed by the scintillant Jerome Frank and militant Dr. Frederic C. Howe, were rudely deprived of their mandarin buttons and peacock feathers without a word of warning; and one Chester Davis, a milk-on-the-boots man from Montana, now tans his back in the hot but variable sunshine of royal favor. Disregarding the courte-

The Vanishing Brain Trust

sies usual in such matters, Secretary Wallace did not even ask if they had anything to say before sentence was passed on them.

True, the New Deal is still given a cheeping note of evangelical appeal by the continued presence of the Harvard coterie, more or less affectionately known as "Frankfurter's Hot Dogs." Young Charles Wyzanski persists as Solicitor for the Department of Labor, with "Tommy" Eliot, another ancient of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, as his assistant; James M. Landis is a member of the Securities and Exchange Commission; Thomas J. Corcoran fills the post of Assistant Counsel for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation; Nathan Margold is Solicitor for the Department of the Interior, and Ben Cohen holds down the job of Assistant Counsel for the Public Works Administration.

A Swing from Radicalism?

No more, however, is it the case that these young mustangs roam the range at will, comrades to the antelope and exciting faithful old workhorses by their curvets and nickerings. Just as the Stock Exchange Bill of Mr. Landis and Mr. Cohen was drastically amended to meet the realities of the situation, so is it certain that the bill to regulate public utility holding companies, prepared by Mr. Corcoran and Mr. Cohen, will have a good many teeth drawn by the expert dentists in the House and Senate. In plain words, the "Hot Dogs" are being slowly but surely broken to the plow, and taught to know the meaning of "Whoa" as well as "Giddap."

There is a widespread disposition to regard these changes as a distinct turn to the right, an evidence of the President's swing away from "radicalism," but the inference is without base in fact. For one thing, there is no Right any more. Where it used to be is now a large, gaping space only marked by the small bunch of immortelles that faithful Henry P. Fletcher leaves daily. Mr. Roosevelt has no thought of even looking in the direction of that dreary void, for better than anyone else he knows that while people may be a wee bit apprehensive as to where the New Deal may be leading, they are adamant in their determination to keep a good, safe distance from the Old Order.

Fairly analyzed, the various shake-ups, involving decapitations, demotions and sudden disappearances from the court circle, would seem to be more a matter of reorganization than any change in fundamental policy. The need for a larger degree of departmental discipline may be set down as one reason. Divided authority never makes for efficiency, and it does not promote harmony when a Cabinet member is called on to sit idly and amiably by while subordinates run a show of their own. Just as Cordell Hull, the long-suffering Secretary of State, waxed strong enough to compel the elimination of Professor Moley, so is it undoubtedly the case that other department heads have come to be sufficiently sure of themselves to grasp the reins and demand full possession of the driver's seat.

The real cause, however, goes deeper than that. Now that the second stage of the New Deal has been reached, the need is for the practical experience,



Rexford Guy Tugwell, Undersecretary for Agriculture, alone remains of the gay, confident "Tugwell group" that could fix everything. Below, Vice President John Garner, whose forty years of practical politics make him a valued adviser

thorough training and administrative genius that will bring ideas and ideals down to solid ground and put them in harness. After two years in the laboratory, people are a trifle surfeited with experimentation, and there is no question that Mr. Roosevelt's present search is for men who can take the plans that have been decided upon and make them *work*.

Only an ivy-covered reactionary, piously hopeful for the second coming of Herbert Hoover, will attempt to deny the high values of the Brain Trust and its disciples during the formative stages of the New Deal. All beaten paths led to quicksands, and fresh trails had to be blazed. It was a task that called for imagination, idealism and courage, and particularly for youth. Age is prone to regard a thing or an institution as good merely because it is old. Moreover, it is too considerate of junk, filling the living-room with rubbish that ought to be in the attic.

The Brain Trust's very lack of practical experience was its chief asset. Unhampered by tradition and fairly drunk with the opportunity of translating college dreams into realities, they leaped forward to the battle, careless of obstacles and without fear of frustration. Their ardors and enthusiasms fitted the necessities of the time as skin fits the hand.

If one idea proved a bust, what of it? Another could be produced instantly, for they sweated plans and programs at every pore. It may be true enough that they fell short of many objectives, and never found the pot of gold at the rainbow's end, but there was one tremendous achievement to their credit: they *did* break up crystallizations of thought, smash off the leg irons of tradition, and send a clean, reviving wind through the closed, stuffy chambers of

The Vanishing Brain Trust

America's mind.

Even so, it must be admitted that the Brain Trusters never sat very well on the stomach of the country. Farmers and industrialists love to look on themselves as intensely practical, although they would have a hard time proving it, and entertain a deep-rooted distrust of "theorists." What can a man possibly know about farming who has never gotten up at three o'clock in the morning to wait around for daylight? What can a man possibly know about business unless he has three or four failures to his credit?

Another thing to be remembered in this connection is that the great mass of Americans look with dark suspicion on "book learnin'." We foam over the Little Red Schoolhouse, and spend like drunken sailors on junior highs and state universities, but our applause is reserved for those rugged souls who never saw a college, getting their education by the light of pine knots. About the only reason why the Brain Trust was endured for so long a time was that the Best Minds, the Captains of Industry and the Financial Geniuses, lacking the effrontery to come forward after the ruin wrought by their ignorances and stupidities, left the field open for men who were not afraid to think, and whose thought, at least, was not handcuffed by habit.

The Brain Trust passed because its job was done. With new trails blazed, solid building became the order of the day, and naturally President Roosevelt's need was trained administrators. It is still his need, for certainly no palms can be awarded the record of Mr. Donald Richberg, selected to remedy the New Deal's administrative deficiencies, and particularly to provide the coördinative genius that would transform the creaking car of government into a smooth-running machine.

The Tactless Mr. Richberg

Admitting his abilities and undoubted public spirit, the fact remains that his blunders have excited irritations instead of stilling them, and that there is even more confusion today than when he proudly took over the oil can. Had he been shrewd, poised and farseeing, he would have let out a bellow of enraged protest the very first moment that the newspapers began to allude to him as the "Assistant President," for it was a savage cut right at his hamstrings.

His activities in bringing about an extension of the automobile code were a marvel of maladroitness. Just as he failed to hold the preliminary parleys that might have won the support of William Green and the American Federation of Labor, so did he ignore the report of his own NRA board, and omit the consultations with Secretary Perkins that were her right and proper expectation. A wise man never arouses enmities when it is possible to win accord and friendship.

The same elephantine touch marked his intervention in the affairs of the National Labor Relations Board. A Hearst reporter, Dean S. Jennings, filed complaint that his discharge was due to affiliation with the Newspaper Guild. The San Francisco Regional Board refused to render judgment, and passed the testimony on to the National Board, which, after due deliberation, ordered

The Vanishing Brain Trust

Jennings' reinstatement. The publishers then insisted that the case be transferred immediately and wholly to the Newspaper Industrial Board, set up under their code for the handling of labor complaints. Mr. Richberg vigorously seconded this demand.

Aside from the fact that the National Labor Relations Board had rendered a decision, there was a distinct question as to whether the Newspaper Industrial Board had functioned, or was able to function, in such manner as to meet the requirements of the law. Nothing was more obvious than the need for friendly conferences that would have reached an orderly agreement, enabling all parties to "save face." Instead of that, the President's letter, prepared by Mr. Richberg, put Mr. Francis Biddle and his associates in the position of having "butted in" on something that was never their concern, inflicting a humiliation as unnecessary as undeserved.

There is only speculation as to Mr. Richberg's successor, or perhaps successors is the better word, for few believe it likely that the President will make the mistake of setting up another Grand Vizier. The sudden appearance on the White House stage of General Robert Wood led to the excited surmise that he was the first of a group of trained administrators to be drafted. President of Sears, Roebuck and Company, and with a fine record as Acting Quartermaster-General during the war, the aggressive Chicagoan seemed to be an answer to prayer, but it soon developed that his connection with any public works and relief program was to be advisory.

Wanted—Practical Men

The name of Gerard Swope suggests itself inevitably, for he is close to the White House these days, probably closer than any other of the "practical" men. It is much to be doubted, however, if Mr. Swope could be induced to quit his own affairs and devote full time to some New Deal agency, especially as his own undoubted liberalism would not protect him from attack on account of his General Electric affiliations.

Another gentleman who carries a large amount of water with the President today is none other than John Nance Garner. Back in the time of Calvin Coolidge and "Charlie" Curtis, a Vice President could not be distinguished from the furniture unless the furniture moved, but "Cactus Jack" sits in at every Cabinet meeting, even more voluble than Madam Secretary Perkins. Aside from these meetings, he has access to the presidential ear every moment that he feels moved to speech.

An exceedingly shrewd person, Mr. Vice President Garner, and one so close to the soil that when he looks up he sees the grass roots above him. He knows what the Home Folks are thinking, and what the Average Man likes and does not like, and some forty years of office-holding have given him the agility of a chamois when it comes to leaping away from trouble. Here again, however, the President is merely getting advice as to policies, and no matter how sound that advice, it cannot take the place of men fitted to administer those policies.

Roper in the Ascendant

Signs are not wanting to show that

The Vanishing Brain Trust

the star of "Dan" Roper, Secretary of Commerce, is in the ascendant. A safe, sound man, trained both in political and industrial administration, and with the equable temperament that fits him admirably for coördinative tasks, at the time of his appointment to the Cabinet it was thought that he would figure prominently in the New Deal set-up. Instead of that, however, he was permitted to languish in the shadows, his pale face emerging only occasionally, while "Honest Harold" Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, walked swaybacked under his load of extra duties and high-sounding titles.

Granted that Mr. Roper is brought completely into the picture and made an Administration truck horse along with Mr. Ickes, it is difficult to see how any improvement may be expected. Overloading stands as the cause of the New Deal's failure in so many important particulars. The executive direction of a great department is job enough in itself, and to pile additional and tremendous responsibilities on a Cabinet member is to invite confusion and delay, if not actually to court disaster.

The President's economic security bill, before Congress at this writing, furnishes a striking illustration of the overloading policy that has been and is still being pursued. The compulsory old-age annuity system and the unemployment compensation system are to be administered by a Social Insurance Board in the Department of Labor. Voluntary annuities, however, together with the investment of unemployment insurance funds, are to be under the control of the Treasury.

One After Another

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration will have charge of the grants-in-aid toward meeting the costs allowed under state laws to old people in need, and also aid to states for the costs of "mothers' pensions." The Children's Bureau is given control of all grants-in-aid to states toward welfare services for the protection and care of homeless, dependent and neglected youngsters; of the appropriations for strengthening state and local health services to mothers and children, extending maternity and nursing services in rural counties, and conducting special demonstrations and research in maternal care; and to cap it all, is made responsible for the medical care of crippled children.

The Secretary of the Treasury is to be given \$10,000,000 a year for the extension of public health services, eight tenths of the amount to be allotted to the states for the betterment of health services and for assistance to the counties and towns in maintaining adequate public health programs. As will be seen, the Geodetic Survey and the Bureau of Mines are about the only government agencies that do not figure in the plan.

If Congress approves the hodgepodge, doubtless an attempt will be made to bring about cohesion, some unity of purpose, by the creation of interdepartmental committees. This has been tried from the very first, and from the very first has failed. Today there is no more pathetic spectacle in all Washington than that of secretaries and assistant secretaries bounding like kangaroos

The Vanishing Brain Trust

from committee room to committee room, happy if they are only able to remember just what the next meeting is about.

Cross pulls and confusions result inevitably, and as a result an unbelievable load is thrown on the shoulders of the President. Virtually every major activity of the New Deal, and not a few minor ones, wait on his decision or, at least, his approval. Every day sees the executive offices of the White House besieged by a line of principals and supernumeraries that takes hours to pass a given point or, rather, to reach it.

Granted that Mr. Roosevelt has the strength of a Norman percheron, an equability of disposition that makes him a stranger to worry and nerve fag, and a sanguine temperament that nothing daunts or depresses, the fact remains that even if he does continue to stand up under the staggering burden, the very concentration of authority is bound to create bottle necks, log jams and all sorts of traffic blocks.

Capable administrators! That is the crying need of the New Deal. And with full opportunity to *administer*. An end to the futile business of setting up boards and bureaus in departments already overweighted, and to government by haphazard committees!

Only chaos may be expected until vital and distinctive New Deal agencies are established as separated and independent units, each under a one-man control, and that man given power to do the job.

Collier's