NEW
OUTLOOK

DECEMBER, 1934 • P. 32

The Good Die Young

by George Andrews

To be, or not to be — civil service; to stand, or to desert; to fight or to accept the inevitable! Here is the quandary of 1,000 *young Junior Brain Trusters who do not want to wear alpaca coats.*

Is the children's crusade over?

2

The Junior Brain Trusters

THE triumph of youth along the Potomac is fading. The young men and the young women who went to Washington a year or more ago, afire with plans to save the world, the United States and the principles of social justice, are retreating from their first fine enthusiasm into defeat, some with resignation, some with bitterness, many with cynical despair. The world has not been saved. Social justice has not yet been established, and at present progress, seems likely not to be. The United States remains much the same old obdurate land of individualists, profit seekers and stubborn materialists that it was before the young salvationists began their work. The Administration has had a heavy hand in the process of disillusionment. The régime that was to lead us out of the economic, social and ethical wilderness has shaken off much of its earlier idealism and returned to the natural rôle of all Administrations—the pursuit of politics. The New Deal is shrinking back to normal proportions—to the limits of party maneuvering, the boundaries of ward, state and national power. The young men and women who had hopes to keep its ambitions on higher and purer lines have failed in their task. The children's crusade has been repulsed. The crusaders are a chastened and a sadder group.

Most people who suffer a severe disillusionment have only themselves to blame for having been deceived in the first place. Their own credulity is at fault, for no one asked them to put their faith in the man or in the institution which betrayed them. These young people are in a different class. They were asked to come to Washington in the most urgent terms, to put the promises of the New Deal into action. Their elders came to them and in effect said, we need you. A new social order is coming into being. It needs your specialized training, your ability, your capacity for work and more than anything else, your enthusiasm—to bring it to life. This, the elders said, is a new departure in the history of America. If you want a hand in the rebirth of society, come and work with us at Washington. Your reward will be in the knowledge of a good job well done, in the thrills and excitement of attending a social renascence, and in the generous taste of power such a job can offer. The young people responded willingly; but it should be remembered that while they were eager to come, they came at the insistence of their seniors. They did not volunteer so much as they were drafted, persuaded to enlist in the great offensive for a new and more civilized way of life.

The promises made to them in this persuasion were generous, exciting and (perhaps this contributed to the exciting quality), vague. Almost no conditions were attached. There were no strings, either on the conditions or the nature of the work expected. They were not to be ordinary civil servants, drudging their lives away in governmental bureaus, with only two prospects of release—retirement or death. They would not be required to punch time clocks, to wear alpaca coats, to write dismal columns of figures in ledgers or to compose endless reports on subjects of no conceivable interest or value. They were to be bolder, freer souls—to be people of affairs, not of routine tasks. And the job they were asked to do was the kind no young person has ever been able to resist—the job of remaking America. Had not one of their own leaders, Rexford Guy Tugwell, once written, "I have gathered my tools and my charts; . . . I shall roll up my sleeves—make America over!"

This was the motto to which the young folk began their work, nearly a thousand of them, which may be grouped for study purposes under the generic title, Junior Brain

3

The Junior Brain Trusters

Trusters. They were, for the most part, young men from the colleges and universities of the larger eastern cities. None of them was appointed for political reasons, because their Congressman demanded it, or because father or uncle held the key to votes or to a strategic political position. Many of them came in as protégés of the Senior Brain Trusters themselves, brought from the classrooms by Tugwell, Moley and Frankfurter—Professor Frankfurter being especially successful in drafting students and recent graduates from the Harvard Law School. Some were young instructors with brilliant records in the more progressive universities, others were graduate assistants with recently acquired Ph.D.'s. some even were simple Bachelors of the Arts who had done exceptionally good work under their patrons. And above all their immediate patrons, the men who brought them to Washington, stood the grand figure of Justice Brandeis, long known as sympathetic to youth and active in urging its advancement.

They took more than half the new positions in the alphabetical agencies, jobs that had been so hurriedly created that Congress was not yet able to get its hands upon them. The new places were, for the most part, free from both Civil Service requirements as well as from patronage. In those early days, before the Postmaster General had reached his present stride, the young men had nothing to fear either from bureaucracy or politics. The AAA, for example, was staffed fifty per cent with such appointments. and control of all the important places was in the hands of the new government intelligentsia; the typists, stenographers and filing clerks were all that was left to the old system. The NRA, the PWA and the FERA were filled with the new class of young public servants. The more liberal or left-wing places in these agencies were their special preserve—the Consumers' Advisory Board and the various Labor Boards of the NRA, for example. Almost all the legal work in the NRA and the AAA was in their hands. The chief exception to the rule of youth was, curiously, in perhaps the most frankly experimental of the New Deal's social laboratories, the Tennessee Valley Authority, where a conservative eccentricity of the Administrator kept it out. But the rest of the Administration's social experiments were filled with the intelligent, progressive, fast thinking youth of America.

These young men were not Reds. The inquiring Dr. Wirt to the contrary, there were no Bolsheviks among the young New Dealers, no incipient Lenins waiting for the signal to oust the Kerensky of the White House. They were not bent on shoving Russian methods or Five-Year Plans on a reluctant country. Most of them were not even sympathetic to the Soviet Union, and looked on Communists, Russian and otherwise, as people carried away from reason by their emotions. The young New Dealers were superior to all that. They were technicians, hard-headed if embryonic administrators, not believers in any political creed; they were above the *mêlée* of conflicting utopianisms.

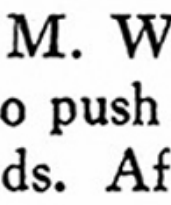
Those who came from the bigger and older universities—especially the Harvard and Yale contingents—were as firm in their belief in the capitalist-profit system as Mr. Roosevelt or even Dr. Wirt himself. They believed, however, that it should and could be made to work on more equitable lines. They believed that America, with its wealth and technical ability, could provide food, clothing and shelter for all, and

that no social upheaval, with all the discomforts and rigors of revolution that it implied was needed in the process. In this innocent belief they were again following the precepts of their elders. President Roosevelt, Miss Perkins, Secretary Wallace, Mr. Ickes, had all made scores of speeches and had written dozens of articles, pamphlets and books to prove the point, had declared that America was due for a new era, that it was time "to treat ourselves to a little civilization."

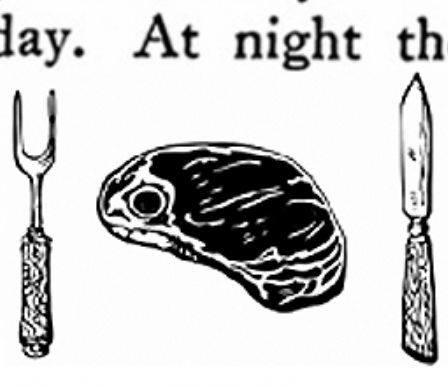
The young folk had taken another belief from above too; the belief that America's rebirth was only waiting for the removal of certain highly individualized, highly personalized obstacles. These were the bankers, the reactionary business men (good business men were, of course, the ones who supported the New Deal) and the individualists. Once they were hoisted out of the way, the social renascence would come almost of its own accord. Here again the higher powers were leading the way. The inaugural address and several subsequent speeches on bankers and banking methods seemed to establish the line. General Johnson's early lashings against the dinosaurs and the Neanderthals of industry were music to young and progressive ears. Brain Truster Tugwell, it was remembered, was not only powerful in White House councils—he had also been a contributing editor of the *New Republic,* organ of the more sophisticated pinks. He was also known at Columbia for his defense of advanced ideas. Miss Perkins was, to the young people, a person with notorious sympathies for labor. Had she not begun her labor career as far back as 1910, before most of the junior intelligentsia were out of kindergarten? Secretary Ickes, they had vaguely heard, was an old time Progressive from the Middle West, where plenty of good men had appeared to do battle with predatory, vested interests. Wallace of Agriculture had been for years a crusading editor. Hull was simply an old-fashioned liberal gentleman, but it was felt that Moley would be able to keep the State Department awake.

These then were the ones who would be their superiors, their guides, leaders and friends. If the young people thought of conservative elements in the official family, of men with an economical turn of mind like Lewis Douglas, or of bankers like James M. Warburg, or politicians like Mr. Farley, they tended to push the disquieting knowledge into the back of their minds. After all Mr. Roosevelt had to be something of a politician, and if occasionally he selected a Tory adviser that was largely for appearance sake. They, the young folk, knew that he was planning a new birth for America as eagerly as themselves. They would not be bothered by the occasional gesture to the conservative benches.

From the first day the excitement was all that had been promised. Washington, after years of somnolence under the older Civil Service tradition, was taken by storm. The enthusiastic young people swarmed into government buildings, took over space, shoved desks around and generally set up a commotion worthy of the heralds of the new dawn. The older brood of government servants were horrified, but they had to endure. These young people were the inheritors of the new earth, and they were not in the least shy about showing it. Veteran employees, used to the quiet routine of government business before the days when government was considered to matter very much, were heard to murmur among themselves, but no one listened.



Among other things the young people did, they upset the age-old custom of dawdling through the civil service day with one eye on the clock and the other on the promotion lists. They actually worked, long hours, at top speed —with reckless disregard for the proprieties of public employment. Ten, twelve, and, when things were really humming, eighteen hours made a normal day. At night the young New Dealers crept exhausted to makeshift lodgings (living quarters were at a premium) or, more often, to a favorite speakeasy or restaurant,



there to continue the work of remaking America till dawn. Nobody slept very much during that first period of New Deal activity. There was too much going on, the air was too electric with change, high pitched planning, and optimism.

One of the pleasantest features of the new life was the relationship between the young people and their superiors. It was anything but official, in the usual deadening style of the civil service hierarchy. The spirit of the college seminar—which both had so recently left—was maintained. The young men were not automata carrying out orders from department heads they never saw. They were partners in a gigantic enterprise, just as they had been partners in the pursuit of knowledge in college discussion groups. As such, their comments and their advice on momentous problems were not only listened to, they were insistently requested. Often enough their advice was also followed in matters of considerable importance, if not in the actual formation of policies (seniority must keep some of its privileges), certainly in the ways and means employed in carrying them out. The young people were made to believe that they were wanted in the business of running the country, that their thought was valuable and necessary to the work of governing 126,000,000 people.

The informal relationship continued out of office hours as well as in. Some of the Junior Brainsmen not only worked with their former professors, but shared apartments with them too. It is small wonder that most of the young people were stimulated to the point of worship for their patrons. In the colleges they had admired their professors as good students always do. Now that they were sharing grips with reality with the same men, the admiration was naturally magnified. The intellectual leader who had shown them the way to truth and light in the classroom was showing the nation the same path in practical affairs. For the young people assisting in the mission it was a build-up seldom experienced.

It was impossible in this gay and fast moving world to worry about the future—the individual future, that is. The national future was, of course, the object of everyone's thought and work. If the notion occasionally struck home that the work they were doing was after all an emergency program, they dismissed it as quickly as it came to them. The official titles of most of the bureaus and agencies under which they worked contained definite provisions for their termination. The NIRA, for example, was designed for no more than two years of life—at least according to the Congressional bill setting it up. The AAA had a definite job to do, which the framers of the act had optimistically hoped would one day be accomplished and therefore ended. This emergency nature, with its limitations on time of accomplishment, was a large part of the persuasion that the Administration thought necessary to use in presenting its case for drastic action to the country. It was also an excellent excuse for the galloping tempo of the work under way.

But the young people had two ways of thinking about this question. While they knew the first exciting pace could hardly be kept up forever—if only because exhaustion and nervous breakdown would intervene—they did not seriously contemplate that the program would come to a final end. Even with the return of prosperity and the resumption of "normal" conditions, the economy of America would still have need of their services. Had not the old

The Junior Brain Trusters

untrammeled individualism of the past, encouraged by a do-nothing school of government, put the nation into its present mess? Once out of that mess, the grateful nation could not hand itself back to the wreckers who had ravished it before. Surely, they felt, Mr. Roosevelt knew this. In using the word "emergency" then he was simply making another political play—not in very good taste, perhaps, but unavoidable in a democracy such as ours. The good work they were beginning would continue, if only because it was so good and so necessary that the nation could not live a healthy life again without it.

The first blows came in the handling of the industrial codes under the NRA. In the beginning, when the industrialists themselves came to Washington begging to be regulated, things looked not only rosy for the cause of national planning, but simple as well. All that was required was to draw up brief and clear regulations, have them signed by a forward-looking President, and put in force. Procedure would be on three simple bases—worker and consumer welfare as the first two, and a fair but scrupulously small profit for the manufacturer, a backward third. The NIRA legislation had written workers' interests into the main body of the act itself, to be applied to every code. Section 7-a, guaranteeing the right of collective bargaining, was all that the most sympathetic to labor could desire. Any difficulties that might rise about enforcement could be handled later. Consumers' interests would be seen to by the Consumers' Advisory Board, set up at the same time as the NRA machinery. This Board, it was true, did not have much authority actually written down, but it was felt that it carried something almost as good—moral force. And since the new powers in government represented just those liberal elements that had long stood for a better deal to the poor, the humble and the previously outcast consumer, his welfare seemed assured. As for the manufacturer, he could look after himself. And even if he were a little neglected in the general outpouring of blessings, the young people at least would not mourn.

But the young folk left a number of adversaries out of their reckoning, or underestimated those they did count in. They forgot, for one thing, that lobbying had not quite been abolished in the landslide of 1932. For a while, intimidated by the apparent rout of everything they held good, the vested interests hung back. Several codes involving distinct invasions of the old right to profit by labor's sweat and consumers' pocketbook were allowed to pass. Then the interests gathered strength again. Small codes were one thing. The idealists and the liberals could practise on them to their hearts' content. But when it came to something real, to some code dealing with a first rank industry, quick and powerful opposition developed. Lobbies appeared, seeming to spring almost out of the ground. What is more, they had remarkably little trouble in getting their message to high-ranking official ears. They were not indignantly ordered out of the New Deal temple; as a matter of fact, some of the prominent guardians actually seemed glad to see them.

Section 7-a began to undergo several new and remarkable interpretations. The automobile industry was among the first to suffer doubts about the original purity of meaning. It came forward with an alternative interpretation embodied in the famous "merit clause" in the matter of employee dismissal. To the young New Dealers, this meant only one thing—that the industry had found a way to preserve its ancient custom of crippling unions by boycott of organizers and members. At first hearing they were able to assure themselves that it would never pass the official watch dogs. Surely anyone could see how it contradicted the whole purpose of the Labor Charter, so widely proclaimed by Miss Perkins, the American Federation of Labor, and acknowledged by the President himself. Yet the code containing this iniquitous provision was prepared, passed and signed. And the bosses' defiance did not end with this. Henry Ford carried recalcitrance a

step further in refusing to have anything to do with any kind of code. For a while the roaring General fumed and blustered, but acute ears soon detected a diminishing pitch in his cries. The $500 a day fine and the six months' imprisonment promised for just such violations did not materialize. And after a few weeks of sham battle, Mr. Ford was even able to secure government contracts, in spite of the fact that he had defied government laws.

The steel code was another step in the lesson of disillusionment. Here monopoly, price fixing and the maintenance of the company union were permitted in the face of announced policy to the contrary. The Weirton Company even blocked the efforts of government investigators to study company dominated elections, and escaped destruction from on high. The Budd Company, another leader in the industry, was more vigorously rebuked, but within a few weeks visitors to its plants could see an "Employees' Representation Plan" in full swing.

The Consumers' Advisory Board which had been hailed as the first line of protection for the man in the street was also allowed to lapse for lack of official support. Here the sabotage, while not so quickly executed, was even more painful. The Board that had promised so much to the meek and down-trodden was strangled, not only by indifference, but by open refusal even to grant it financial support for the work it was supposed to carry out. A similar slighting of the ultimate buyer was shown in the drawing of the food codes, when the industry's refusal to accept standard rules for grading was accepted with no official protest. The new Food and Drug Bill, backed by no less a personage than Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Tugwell, and designed to give long overdue protection against adulteration, medicinal lying and downright poisoning, was completely emasculated in a Democratic controlled Senate Committee, with one of Roosevelt's most vocal supporters as leading assassin. A word from the President would have saved it, but, in spite of Professor Tugwell's White House intimacy, the word was not spoken. Consumers, in truth, were the victims of much of the most flagrant New Deal betrayal of the liberal cause.

The New Deal record in the matter of strikes supplied the sharpest blow to the faith of those who had been most responsive to its liberal protestations. The faith of labor supporters, and of labor itself, that the Administration was wholly sympathetic to labor's effort at improvement of wage and hour conditions was shattered. The White House intervention in the proposed automobile strike was an outstanding example. The settlement of the cotton textile dispute, made on the basis of a Presidential report that promised nothing whatever to the workers, was another. In between the disappointing conclusion dawned that the President, while upholding the rights of labor in every one of his fireside broadcasts, had no intention of backing his protestations with action. The NRA, once regarded as the beginning of a new era in labor rights and welfare, was simply added to the list of "repressive devices" that the wicked Republicans of old had once employed.

Finally there was *Farleyism,* brought to its fullest flower in the last elections. The young idealists of the new dispensation, coming into office not as the result of political pull but on their intellectual merits alone, were not only surprised, they were horrified when they found how deeply politics led into the White House. If they were not Reds, they were firm supporters of the various Progressives and

radical bloc members who were standing for re-election to the House and Senate. They looked to President Roosevelt to give his support to such men as the LaFollettes, who had supported him, to Cutting of New Mexico, who had also been a consistent New Deal champion—even to Upton Sinclair who, if he were a hare-brained utopian, at least promised to redeem California from the Tory ranks. The support was not given. A faint word was said for Bob LaFollette, months before the election—nothing at all for his brother Phil, who was running for the Wisconsin governorship. Cutting was ignored in favor of a Democratic war horse who had nothing more than party regularity to recommend him. Sinclair, led to believe that the President was at least benevolently neutral, was knifed in one of the most dubious political moves on record. Farley, the apotheosis of all the generous young held in contempt, was triumphant. Those of them who held that the President while permitting certain things they frowned upon, was more the prisoner of circumstances than the conscious agent of political and financial expediency, were undeceived.

The disillusionment is bitter. From an exhilarating few months as junior prophets of the new dawn the young people have found themselves reduced to the status of minor employees working for a government that has alienated most of their earlier confidence. The stimulus of Washington life has vanished. Routine tasks are replacing the racing activity of the first weeks when America's rebirth was under way. Perhaps—(Who knows?)—the future contains nothing more exciting after all than the alpaca coats, the clock watching and the dawdling nine to five régime of the conventional civil servant. It is a dismal prospect for the strongest to face. Already some are shying away from it, coming back to their old posts as college instructors, or gratefully falling into what business places may be available for their talents.

When one has embarked on some course with high and idealistic hopes for its achievement, and finds only disillusionment at the end, it is natural to look for some clue to one's mistake. Most of these young people have inquiring minds, and they are hunting for some such explanation. The cynical are finding it in their own credulity, and making up their minds never to be deceived again. The more embittered ones are convinced that the ideal of public service is false, that they should never have attempted to carry out their social dreams in a political framework. Some—perhaps the hardest thinking of the group—are concluding that the New Deal from the beginning did not offer anything approaching the reality of social advance that it promised. They are even realizing that such promises could not be carried out, however sincere the promisers tried to do so, while the present social and economic system is maintained. This group is refusing to accept the dull future offered to those who remain, and its members are leaving government service in droves.

NEW
OUTLOOK
ALFRED E. SMITH
Editor-in-Chief