

News and Comment

From the National Capital

Assumption of Political Duties by the President's Wife, One of the Trends of the Roosevelt Administration, Meets Approval in Some Quarters and Opposition in Others

One of the trends of the Roosevelt Administration to be noted by historians is the assumption of political duties by the wife of the President of the United States.

With the Constitution making no provision whatever for the duties of Presidents' wives, they have heretofore confined their activities largely to the social side of the White House.

The First Lady, in most cases, has felt she was doing well if she could keep up with the course of the Government through conversations she heard within the White House.

Those reputed to have exerted considerable influence in public affairs usually operated behind the scenes through the President. It was only by the chance disablement of her husband that the second Mrs. Woodrow Wilson came near to being a substitute President. However, Eleanor Roosevelt, more than any of her predecessors, comes close to being an Assistant President.

Work for New Deal

Once the outlines of the New Deal had been laid, some of its projects originated in Mrs. Roosevelt's councils. Without her backing, others would not have gone so far. It is because she is careful not to have it appear that her acts have anything official about them that the country generally can't



Public speaker

put its finger on a project and say positively that it is Mrs. Roosevelt's idea. Any Federal worker knows, however, that a request from her is treated by the Departments with a degree of authority second only to one from the President himself.

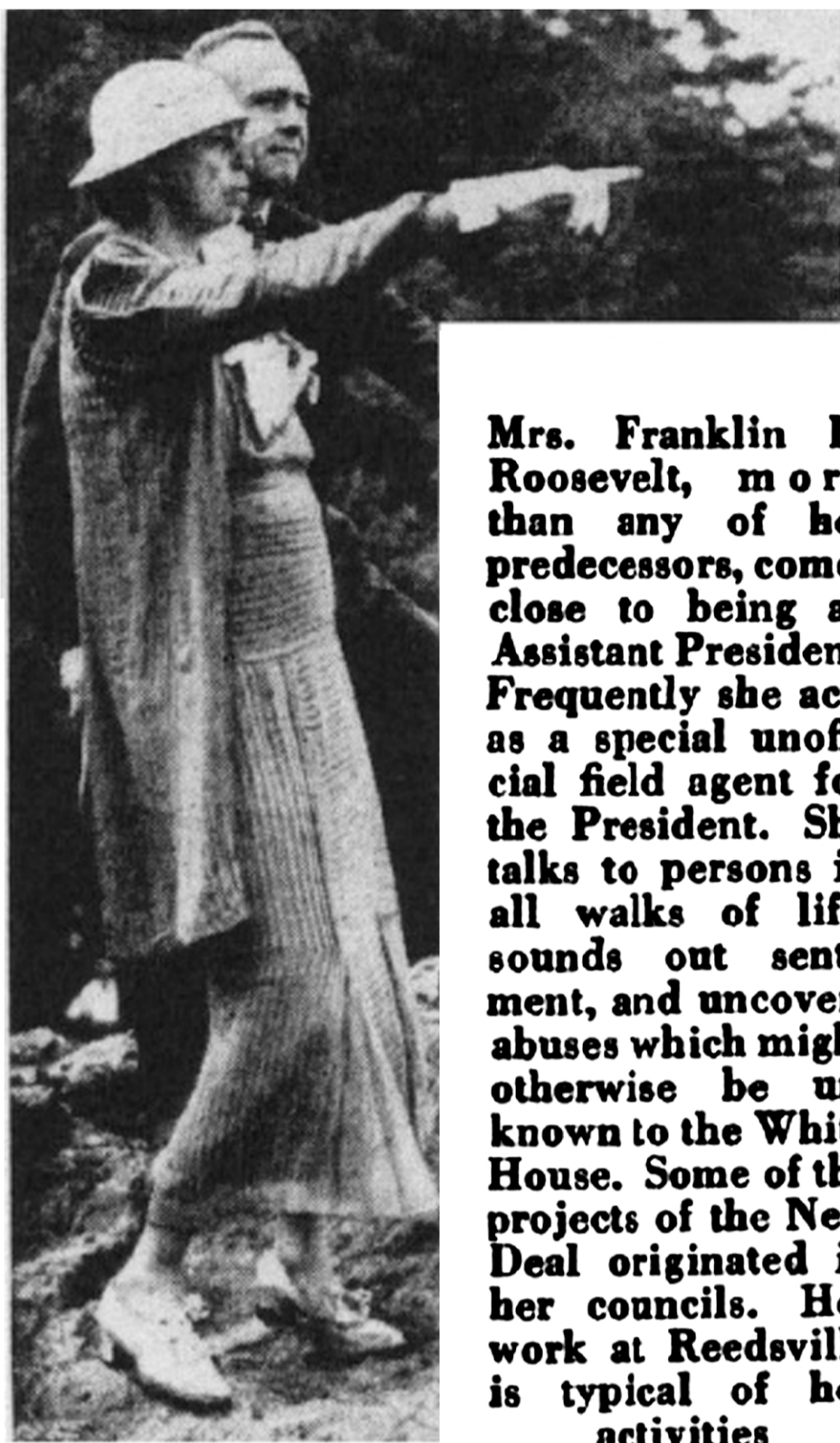
One day the alert women reporters who "cover" Mrs. Roosevelt discovered that she had picked up the telephone

and asked Agricultural Adjustment Administration officials why they could not feed the needy with the surplus little pigs that had been ordered killed in the corn-hog curtailment program.

The reporters pinned her down with the question: "Is the new Federal Surplus Relief Corporation your idea?"

"Nothing is ever one person's idea," Mrs. Roosevelt replied.

Explaining that she could see no reason for destroying food when people were going hungry, she admitted she was "enormously interested" in the scheme.

The First Lady

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, more than any of her predecessors, comes close to being an Assistant President. Frequently she acts as a special unofficial field agent for the President. She talks to persons in all walks of life, sounds out sentiment, and uncovers abuses which might otherwise be unknown to the White House. Some of the projects of the New Deal originated in her councils. Her work at Reedsville is typical of her activities

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Reedsville an Example

It was after Mrs. Roosevelt had made a visit to poverty-stricken shacks of West Virginia coal-miners near Reedsville and found abuses in the system of company-stores that there was written into the NRA coal-code a prohibition against the use of scrip and compulsory trade at company-stores.

The camps which took care of 3,000 girls



Mrs. Roosevelt in the conventional rôle of the First Lady of the Land

in all parts of the country last summer were an outgrowth of Camp TERA, which was established in New York State for unemployed girls. Mrs. Roosevelt worked out the idea with Miss Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor. It was one of the many Federal activities which Mrs. Roosevelt did not actually invent but which she has promoted in the East Room of the White House.

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The organization-meeting for the Public Works of Art project she helped along by her attendance. She sent the NRA a statement in behalf of the small book-shop. The school-lunch program in the District of Columbia she helped improve. It was largely through her instrumentality that the alley-clearance bill for Washington was put through Congress after a twenty-year controversy.

Receives Huge Mail

The First Lady still wants to do something for the middle-aged woman who needs a job and for youths who have finished school only to face a jobless world. That the country is becoming increasingly conscious of her effectiveness is indicated by the enormous increase in the mail of the President's wife. A special staff at the Federal Emergency Relief Administration handles mail addressed to Mrs. Roosevelt along with that of the President.

Mrs. Roosevelt's governmental activities are approved by those who see in them altruism, sympathy for the downtrodden, and a great desire to serve others. Her activities are opposed by those who feel that she is not properly a public servant because she is not responsible to the American electorate or directly accountable to it at election-time.

This unprecedented part in the Government has led Mrs. Roosevelt into some ticklish places. In the Capital, she has found, one active in public affairs can not avoid collisions with politicians and "interests."

Twice she has had to go to the defense of the Reedsville homestead project against charges of Communism, once against Senator Thomas D. Schall, of Minnesota, and once against Dr. William Wirt. A magazine editor rejected her column in support of the Tugwell food and drug bill because its advertisers were against it.



Horsewoman

DIOGENES.