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Origin of the Welfare Plan of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Leonard J. Arrington and
Wayne K. Hinton*

During the Great Depression of the 1930's the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced in an open letter in the church-owned newspaper, *The Deseret News*, a plan to improve the economic welfare of its members. Originally titled "Church Security Program," it was renamed the "Church Welfare Plan" in 1938. The program was based upon the findings of a survey undertaken in September of 1935 which sought to determine relief conditions within the L.D.S. Church. The survey indicated that 88,460 Latter-day Saints, constituting 17.9 percent of the church population, were receiving some form of relief. Some 16.3 percent of the church population (80,553 persons) were receiving relief from public sources, and another 1.6 percent (7,907 persons) were receiving church funds. Of the members on relief, 13,455 were unemployed. The others were working on depression-inspired projects of the federal government. The report also stated that between 11,500 and 16,500 of the church members on relief "did not need" such assistance.

In view of the findings of the survey, the First Presidency outlined a program whereby "those now on relief would continue thereon," and those 13,455 unemployed members who were receiving outright relief, or "a dole," were to be taken care of under a church program at an estimated cost of \$842,000 per year.¹

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¹*Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), April 7, 1936; Albert E. Bowen, *The Church Welfare Plan* (Salt Lake City, 1946), p. 41.

I

It is commonly asserted that the Church Welfare Plan originated as a conservative gesture opposed to the "degrading tendencies" of the New Deal and that it was politically motivated. Hardly had the program been announced than the conservative press lauded the church for its proposal "to transfer all Church members from government relief to Church relief."² Conservative magazines and journals, such as the *American Banker*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Reader's Digest*, interpreted the program to represent an anti-New Dealer's dream come true.

A year and a half ago [stated the *Reader's Digest*] 84,460 Mormons, about one-sixth of the entire church membership, were on direct relief. Today none of them are. The Church is taking care of its own Within a year every one of the 84,460 Mormons was removed from the government relief rolls all over the country.³

The article was inaccurate, for not all of the 84,460 were on government relief. Moreover, the church at no time succeeded in removing all of its members from government relief, and at the outset the church did not even attempt to do so.

This interpretation of the Welfare Plan as a gesture of defiance against the New Deal was compounded by the "liberal" press. "Although it ridicules federal work projects," wrote Martha Emery in *Nation*, "the church attempted to solve the unemployment problem among Mormons by creating projects of its own." The Welfare Plan, she asserted, "was an ultra-conservative gesture of withdrawal into the old isolation which in the past was a major source of the Church's strength."⁴ Mormon leaders, wrote a Utah political scientist, generally opposed federal social security and relief measures.⁵ "Angered and alarmed by . . . the flocking of its members to federal relief and public works payrolls, it [the church] issued an open announcement . . . endorsing the presidential candi-

²Harold B. Lee, "Church Security: Retrospect, Introspect, Prospect," *Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City), April, 1937, p. 206.

³Marc A. Rose, "The Mormons March Off Relief," *Reader's Digest*, June, 1937, pp. 43-44. See also "Tithes and Security," *Time*, August 1, 1938, p. 26.

⁴Martha Emery, "Mormon Security," *Nation*, February 12, 1938, pp. 182-183.

⁵Frank H. Jonas in Thomas C. Donnelly, ed., *Rocky Mountain Politics* (Albuquerque, 1900), p. 48.

dacy of Republican Alf Landon," and simultaneously established its own welfare program.⁶

While there can be no question that the Mormon Welfare Plan came to be praised by ultra-conservatives as an effective alternative to the "demoralizing relief handouts" of the New Deal and by ultra-liberals as a "step backward," a review of the events and thinking which led to the establishment of the plan will show a completely different motivation.

II

It is well known that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had long believed in "caring for its own." This doctrine, according to Mormon belief, had come directly from God, who, in the early days of the church, had said, "it is my purpose to provide for my Saints But it must needs be done in mine own way" ⁷ At first this "way" was the Law of Consecration and Stewardship, whereby each member was asked to turn over to the bishop all his surplus property and income to be used in supporting the poor.⁸ After 1841, members were asked to contribute a tenth of their income—either in cash or kind—and to pay "fast offerings." When the Latter-day Saints organized for the Great Migration from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Salt Lake Valley, such property as wagons and teams was mobilized so that all could be moved. In Utah there were many programs designed to help out those in need, and a relatively equalitarian society was maintained. One church official summarized Mormon economic policy under five headings:

1. The acquisition of worldly riches was not a worthy goal.
2. "Every man should esteem his brother as himself."
3. The church should care for the temporal needs of those whom the Lord called into church service.
4. The worldly goods of the members, beyond family necessities, should be made available for the Lord's work.
5. The church should see that its poor are cared for.⁹

⁶Frank H. Jonas, *Western Politics* (Salt Lake City), p. 278.

⁷*Doctrine and Covenants*, 104:15-16.

⁸Leonard J. Arrington, "Early Mormon Communitarianism: The Law of Consecration and Stewardship," *Western Humanities Review*, VII (Autumn 1953), 341-369.

⁹Bowen, *The Church Welfare Plan*, p. 6, quoting the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.

A sixth doctrine was "Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer."¹⁰ The application of this doctrine was stated as follows by Brigham Young:

My experience has taught me, and it has become a principle with me, that it is never any benefit to give, out and out, to any man or woman, money, food, clothing, or anything else, if they are able-bodied and can work and earn what they need, when there is anything on earth for them to do. This is my principle and I try to act upon it. To pursue a contrary course would ruin any community in the world and make them idlers.¹¹

Under this thinking, the Mormons had often maintained work relief programs. A church public works department had supported workers' families by employing those otherwise unemployed in building theaters, tabernacles, temples, walls, and canals.¹² During the depression of 1873-1876, when the resources of each Mormon community were mobilized to counteract unemployment and poverty, the *Deseret News* commented:

It is indeed surprising, in these days of controversy concerning reform, political and domestic economy, communism and the like kindred subjects, discussed by the greatest intellects of the age without practical results that . . . a Mormon community at that, should be steadily and successfully demonstrating the feasibility of uniting the industries of a whole community and resolving them into a commonwealth.¹³

That the Mormons had built something of a reputation for favoring work relief, as opposed to an outright dole, is indicated by the acknowledgment of Harry Hopkins, administrator of the Works Progress Administration, that work relief in the United States was originated by Brigham Young.¹⁴

III

Serious thinking about a program of economic assistance for Mormons affected by the Great Depression of the 1930's apparently began in 1931. The *Deseret News* in that year

¹⁰*Doctrine and Covenants*, 42:42.

¹¹*Journal of Discourses*, (26 vols.; Liverpool, 1854-1886), XI, 297.

¹²Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 108-112, 154-155, 211-215.

¹³*Deseret News*, September 20, 1876.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, September 10, 1936.

carried an editorial stating that, although it was not subject to argument that the needy must be fed, clothed, and have shelter whether or not they had work, money should not be spent for charity, but to provide work for the unemployed. The paper suggested that a good means of helping to relieve the desperate situation would be for state and local government units, with the help of federal aid, to undertake road building and improvement projects. The *News* felt that if such permanent projects as lining ditches and canals with concrete to eliminate water wastage were undertaken, it would not only help the employment situation but also create wealth which would benefit communities for years to come.¹⁵

Following this line of thought a number of local Mormon units initiated local programs of relief. Liberty Stake in Salt Lake City, for example, initiated a program in 1932 through which an expected 2,500 persons would receive wood, blankets, quilts, clothing, and canned peaches and tomatoes. The stake project was expected to furnish "steady work" for 75 men, recommended by their bishops according to their need. Others were given work renovating chapels and cutting wood. Some persons were given the opportunity of helping farmers harvest crops in return for produce to be used for relief purposes. The Bamberger Electric Train Company Warehouse in Salt Lake City was rented, at a cost of \$100 a year, in order to store goods which were donated to the stake. Some of these goods were given outright to the needy. The surplus was sold to members in the stake who could afford to pay, and the money received was used to buy blankets and quilts for the poor.¹⁶

At the October 1932 general conference of the church in Salt Lake City, Anthony W. Ivins, a member of the First Presidency, reported that in ten stakes in Salt Lake County \$177,438 had been disbursed for relief from September 30, 1931, to June 20, 1932. Of this amount, \$34,027 had been collected from fast offerings and donations, \$28,471 from the Women's Relief Society, and \$105,114 from tithes. During the same period, the church had expended \$361,243 for relief. President Ivins encouraged fuller tithes and offerings so that more relief could be given.¹⁷

¹⁵*Ibid.*, August 7, 1931.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, September 4, 1933.

¹⁷*One Hundred Third Semi-Annual Conference of the Church . . .*, October 7, 8, 9, 1932 (Salt Lake City), pp. 16-17.

At the same conference, Presiding Bishop Sylvester Q. Cannon, who was charged with improving the temporal interests of the Mormon people, reported that he had never seen such a spirit of cooperation as was then being demonstrated by the stakes, wards, and Relief Societies. He added that many of the needy were helping to gather foodstuffs in order to earn their own relief. Bishop Cannon felt that, although the nation should give great consideration to emergency unemployment relief, those who could carry on without aid should do so. He said:

There are people . . . who feel that the world owes them a living and that others ought to do for them things that they should do for themselves I have no time to go into detail regarding these things, but call your attention to the fact that it is vitally important that everyone who is in distress and trouble seek as far as possible to help himself.¹⁸

As the depression deepened and relief rolls lengthened, the First Presidency continued to consider the implementation of a church-wide program in order to supplement programs established in the various stakes. Commenting upon a survey made in 1933, the First Presidency declared:

Reported conditions in the state and nation suggest that a considerable burden may rest upon our Church Relief activities in the near future. While it seems our people may probably look, as heretofore, for relief assistance from governmental and perhaps other sources, it cannot now certainly be foretold either what or how fully sufficient this assistance will be, and we must therefore prepare ourselves to meet the necessities that may fall upon us No one must be permitted to starve or freeze in our midst.¹⁹

When the newly-elected national president, Franklin Roosevelt, urged the nation to redouble its efforts to care for those people who were victims of the depression in order to prevent the disintegration of home life, Presiding Bishop Cannon responded that his office would do everything possible to provide adequate relief. It was the primary desire of the church, he said, to help men and women help themselves. To this end, he explained, the church expected to establish a plan whereby the unemployed among its own members could obtain

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹*Deseret News*, September 2, 1933.

work and thus have no need for private or public charity. Above all, said Bishop Cannon, those in need would be cared for—none would be allowed to suffer; the church would cooperate with government and private relief agencies in meeting the problem.²⁰

This declaration was supported by other church officials. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., gave primary emphasis to the necessity of members becoming independent of government relief. He chastized members with cattle, hay, and chickens who had, nonetheless, accepted relief. He warned the people that relief was not for those who did not need it:

The thought that we should get all we can from the government because everybody else is getting it, is unworthy of us as American citizens. It will debauch us We must be as careful with the government's funds as with our own or as with the Church's.²¹

Apostle Stephen L Richards, later a member of the First Presidency, also supported the statement of Bishop Cannon, stressing that the church would support "the government and the leaders in the great recovery experiment." "Wherever our people are located," he said, "they are admonished to support, not only the form of government under which they live, but those who preside over them It is part of our creed."²²

IV

The subsequent measures of relief adopted by Franklin Roosevelt and the Congress in 1933, 1934, and 1935 are well known. Since antidepression legislation involved the twin aims of relief and recovery, measures designed primarily for relief were often criticized because they did not contribute to recovery, while recovery measures were often deemed inadequate in providing relief. A degree of recovery having been attained by 1935, President Roosevelt went before the Congress to declare that "the federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief."²³ He presented Congress with a program of government planning which was to prevent the federal government from giving direct relief, but which would put 3

²⁰*One Hundred Fourth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church . . .*, October 6, 7, 8, 1933 (Salt Lake City), pp. 31-35.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 102.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 65.

²³*Deseret News*, January 4, 1935.

to 4 million Americans to work on government emergency work-relief projects. Under this plan the President hoped to cut the cost of federal relief and at the same time give citizens more security. Roosevelt echoed the view of church officials when he said that the direct dole was contributing to "spiritual and moral disintegration."

A governing principle of the new work projects was that all work undertaken must be useful. Leaf raking and lawn mowing, the President thought, were just another form of dole. The projects must be designed to provide permanent improvement and create new national wealth. On the other hand, the projects must be designed to provide work for the largest number of unemployed. Wages were to be higher than relief had been under the direct dole, but not high enough to encourage workers to reject employment in private industry. It was intended that approved projects should not be competitive with private enterprise.²⁴

President Roosevelt's message, stated the *Deseret News*, was "gratifying" and was received with "marked approval and enthusiasm." "The message is of a spirit and character to take fear and despair out of the hearts of the people and put courage, faith and confidence in their place."²⁵ Nevertheless, the probable implementation of the President's message through Congressional legislation led church officials to warn members to prepare for the day when Federal Emergency Relief Assistance would be cut off. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said that the former policy of giving something for nothing had created precedents which spelled trouble ahead for both communities and individuals. Commending the government for its new relief policy, President Clark added that the ideal policy was one of "working for what we receive."²⁶

When the Works Progress Administration was established in 1935, every attempt was made to get it into full operation before the winter of 1935-1936. Many felt that another hard winter could be avoided if "those entrusted with the spending of \$4,800,000,000 in works funds show the proper initiative and determination in attacking their task."²⁷ Nevertheless, although federal relief work projects under such agencies as the

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, January 7, 1935.

²⁶*Ibid.*, February 6, 1935.

²⁷*Ibid.*, October 23, 1935.

Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration, National Youth Administration, and Civilian Conservation Corps increased in activity and more persons were employed, the relief demands from state and local governments (asserting their inability to carry the load) were such that the plan to end federal "dole" was never fully executed.

During the winter of 1935-1936, however, it seemed clear that the administration in Washington fully expected to end federal direct relief assistance. It was at first announced that all direct federal relief payments would end on July 1, 1936. This plan was now "definite."²⁸ Because of claims by states and local governments that they were not in a position to assume the heavy burden of direct relief, this plan was later modified to provide that federal aid to those not working on relief projects would be cut by 50 percent. Still later, it was stated that federal relief through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration would cease in November 1935. All employable men were to be put to work under the Works Progress Administration, and all direct relief would be turned over to the states and counties.²⁹

It seems clear that this intended shift of the burden of relief from the federal government to the states and localities was the immediate factor which led L.D.S. officials to announce the Church Security Program in April 1936. Aware that the local governments in Utah and surrounding states were not in a position to assume a large burden of this nature, the church established the Security Program to assure that at least its own faithful members were taken care of. "Where preparation is being made to meet this problem [the reduction of federal relief]," it was stated, "there will be but little difficulty. But where no preparation has been made, suffering, difficulties, and bloodshed are not remote possibilities."³⁰ The latter reference may have been prompted by a riot at the Federal Emergency Relief Administration headquarters in Salt Lake City, when a crowd of about 200 unemployed and police officers demonstrated against the intended slash in relief. "Oh, I pray you, my brethren and sisters who are the dole,"

²⁸*Ibid.*, April 10, 1936.

²⁹*Ibid.*, August 22, 1936.

³⁰*Ibid.*, June 1, 1937; Joseph L. Wirthlin, "Church Watches Temporal As Well As Spiritual Welfare," *Deseret News*, Church Section, August 17, 1940, p. 1.

said Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, "get off relief just as soon as you can. If you don't you will be thrown off and it will be a sorry day when that time comes. Get off and get on your own feet" ³¹

When Elder Ballard warned church members to quit relief before they were "thrown off," some interpreted this to include the benefits provided under the federal Social Security Act of 1935. When asked if he meant "legal pensions" under the Social Security Act, Elder Ballard replied, "No, not at all." ³² Church officials seem to have classified public aid under two general plans: direct relief and earned benefits. *Direct relief* consisted of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, aid to adult blind, and general relief. Under the Social Security Act, these programs were administered through the state and county welfare departments, with the federal government providing approximately half of the necessary funds. *Earned benefits* included receipts from employment on federal work projects, unemployment insurance or compensation, and Old Age and Survivor's Insurance. (Unemployment Compensation and Old Age and Survivor's Insurance benefits were, of course, financed from payroll taxes on employers and employees.) Church members were counseled against seeking or accepting direct relief (likely to be cut), but were encouraged to accept earned benefits (likely to be permanent). ³³

Those members who had accepted, or would be forced to accept, direct relief were to be cared for under the Church Security Program. Aged persons who were not covered by Old Age and Survivor's Insurance, and who had no other means of support, would contribute funds and labor to the Security Program in their productive years and then draw it out after retirement or when they became incapacitated. Under the church plan many old persons could also earn their welfare by doing vicarious work for the dead in one of the church's temples.

There was no intimation in these announcements that the church was opposed to the work-relief measures of the New Deal. In June 1936, two months after the Church Plan had

³¹*One Hundred Sixth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church . . .*, October 2, 3, 4, 1935 (Salt Lake City), p. 50.

³²*Ibid.*; *Deseret News*, September 23, 1936.

³³*L.D.S. Church Welfare: Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City, 1944), pp. 60-62.

been announced, a *Deseret News* editorial stated: "Of course, it would be impossible to cut off the flow of 'recovery' funds immediately. The unemployed must not be permitted to starve."³⁴ Indeed, Presiding Bishop Cannon found it necessary to explain to church members that there had been "some misunderstanding in Utah regarding the Federal appropriations." "The so-called 'dole,'" he said, "was abandoned in 1935 and replaced by work relief for all able-bodied persons in need, and by direct relief for those who are incapacitated."³⁵ It was not the purpose of the church to take members off WPA projects, but simply to encourage them to be scrupulous in doing "an honest day's work for a day's pay."³⁶

The sequence of events at the time of its establishment makes it clear that the Church Security Program was essentially a reaction to the prospective curtailment of federal relief. Each time there was uncertainty as to the amount and extent of federal relief assistance, the church renewed its efforts to strengthen its own program of relief.

Speaking to the general conference of the Relief Society, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., pointed out that the relief needs of the Latter-day Saints rose and fell with the business cycle. By 1936, he said, "with government relief to be cut down appreciably in the near future, a much greater burden is to fall on church and private organizations, and the Relief Society will have to devote its greatest energy to its prime objective of succoring the needy."³⁷ A contemporary statement of the First Presidency added that "The curtailment of Federal aid which is now forecast, makes it imperative that the Church shall, so far as it is able, meet this emergency."³⁸

V

The Church Security Program, as outlined in April 1936, was designed to help out the "worthy poor" by establishing agricultural and factory enterprises which would provide work for the unemployed and produce goods which could be used by the poor; and by establishing a chain of "storehouses" to

³⁴*Deseret News*, June 9, 1936.

³⁵*One Hundred Seventh Semi-Annual Conference of the Church . . .*, October 2, 3, 4, 1936 (Salt Lake City), p. 84.

³⁶*Deseret News*, April 7, 1936.

³⁷*Ibid.*, April 3, 1936.

³⁸*Ibid.*, April 7, 1936.

which goods produced by these projects would be taken, and where food would be made available to the poor or to their bishops. The central agencies in establishing and managing these production and distribution enterprises were those which had long been set up to look after the temporal welfare of the Mormons: the ward bishoprics, the men's "priesthood quorums," and the women's Relief Societies. Contributions were to consist primarily of donations of labor and supplies to the various wards and stakes. The regular sources of tithes and fast offerings were of particular importance. The surplus foodstuffs and other products raised in one area were to be transported to deficit areas, which in turn produced other surplus crops for exchange. Indeed, through this form of labor and commodity donation, some 70 percent of all Church Security requirements were produced by the church, and only 30 percent had to be purchased through commercial channels.³⁹ Every attempt was made to keep dollar costs at a minimum. No cash value was placed upon labor: A man was paid according to his needs; *i.e.*, a man with dependents would be given more than a man with no dependents.

"The underlying principle of the assistance program," said an official description of the program, "is that one gives what one has and gets what one needs."⁴⁰ The assistance was to be given primarily to those whose resources were inadequate and to those to whom public work had not brought relief.⁴¹ Outright relief, said the First Presidency, should not be extended as charity except to the sick or disabled, and able-bodied members should not have to be embarrassed by accepting charity "except as a last resort."⁴²

Thus, the three main objectives of the Church Security Plan were: (1) to supply food, clothing, and shelter to those who were unable to otherwise obtain these necessities; (2) to find employment for all able-bodied members who were unemployed; (3) to improve the conditions of employed members whose meager incomes provided only the bare necessities of life. Employment to idle able-bodied persons was furnished

³⁹Delbert L. Stapley, *The Lord's Plan* (Salt Lake City, 1956), p. [7].

⁴⁰*Helping Others to Help Themselves: The Story of the Mormon Church Welfare Program* [Salt Lake City, 1941], p. 8.

⁴¹*Deseret News*, September 2, 1935.

⁴²*Deseret News*, Church Section, September 2, 1933, p. 1.

"through a large number of make-work projects, supplementing the work projects of the federal government."⁴³

An objective of equal importance was the stress on spirituality.⁴⁴ Thus, officials strove to instill attitudes toward material goods which were in harmony with prime Latter-day Saint virtues, *i.e.*, industry and thrift. Church members who accepted relief which they did not really need were regarded as involving themselves in a form of dishonesty and greed. By encouraging people, where possible, to decline government relief and work for their own economic welfare, the church was helping members to cultivate honesty, sympathy, service, a love of fellowmen, and a willingness to give.⁴⁵ Work, it was stressed, was not only a basis of economic advancement, but also a moral virtue. True wealth, said church officials, could be produced only through the intelligent application of human industry to natural resources—all the materials of life, both the necessities and comforts, were products of human labor. Thus, it was a moral, as well as an economic, necessity that every person be put to work; that people should be thrifty, for waste was an evil second only to idleness; and that people should live within their means. "Economic prosperity requires that men go without things rather than to go into debt for them."⁴⁶ As with the church, individuals should avoid a hand-to-mouth existence by storing goods for a year in advance. In this manner no emergency would catch them unprepared.

The idea of work-relief was so pertinent to the church relief program that the President of the Church, Heber J. Grant, said that the primary purpose of the plan was that the

. . . curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self-respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership.⁴⁷

⁴³John A. Widtsoe, "Agriculture and the Church Security Program," *Improvement Era*, January, 1938, p. 8.

⁴⁴Bowen, *The Church Welfare Plan*, p. 52; address of David O. McKay in *One Hundred Seventh Semi-Annual Conference . . .*, October 2, 3, 4, 1936, p. 103.

⁴⁵J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Church Welfare Plan: A Discussion*, a talk given at Estes Park, Colorado, June 20, 1939 (Salt Lake City [1939]), p. 5 *et passim*.

⁴⁶"The Church Welfare Plan," *Improvement Era*, June 1938, pp. 352-353.

⁴⁷*One Hundred Seventh Semi-Annual Conference . . .*, October 2, 3, 4, 1936, p. 3.

The exact number of persons to be helped was not known, but it was thought that it might run as high as 15,000. The plan intended that "those now on WPA projects shall continue on these projects making sure to give a full day's work for value received but they are expected to contribute of their time when not so employed to the carrying out of the Plan."⁴⁸

In contrast with the statements later made about it, the Church Security Program was not ultra-conservative. In many ways the church program actually supplemented parts of the New Deal. For example, both the New Deal and the church instigated resettlement programs in order to make better use of productive land. In western Canada members were transported from unproductive land to fertile areas where they could become self-sustaining. In some areas land was opened up for purchase. Young men who wanted to farm, but who lacked the funds with which to purchase farms, were assisted by the Program. Aid was also given in obtaining implements and seed—a plan not unlike the New Deal long-term low interest loan and seed loan plans. Another feature of the program was the vocational education provided for unskilled workers.⁴⁹

Under the federal Social Security Act, as originally passed, the farmers were not covered and often had little to look forward to in old age. The L.D.S. farm population—especially in Idaho and Utah—were included in the Church Security Program by laboring on church projects during their productive years. Later, in old age, they were entitled to receive welfare assistance. While the church encouraged elderly persons to retain title to their homes and sufficient ground for a garden and facilities for keeping livestock for milk and meat purposes,⁵⁰ these persons were expected to give the state a lien against their home or property in order to secure government pensions.

Utah's Governor, Henry H. Blood, a Democrat, said while visiting California that the church program was an aid to the "already sound financial status of Utah." He called the church plan a "progressive step" and added that the program was a large undertaking, but had a fine goal and would give a big

⁴⁸*Ibid.*; also *Deseret News*, April 7, 1936.

⁴⁹*What Is the "Mormon" Security Program?* (Independence, Mo., [1938]), pp. 9-10.

⁵⁰*L.D.S. Church Welfare: Handbook of Instructions*, p. 62.

lift to Utah's relief problem.⁵¹ Similarly, Salt Lake's Mayor J. Will Erwin, also a Democrat, said that big cities and counties were crippled financially and could not stand for a heavy cut in federal relief. That Salt Lake City was now in better shape from an employment standpoint than other first-class American cities, said the mayor, was due to the Church Security Program.⁵²

When church leaders stated that "Any activity or project which tends in the direction of 'helping the people to help themselves' to a position of security is in harmony with the great objectives of the plan,"⁵³ it was not illogical for Latter-day Saints to conclude that the PWA and WPA were such harmonious projects.

It is also clear that contemporary New Deal officials did not feel that the church was opposing federal relief efforts. Details of the church's program were put into the *Congressional Record*, May 25, 1936, and in late May and early June, Elder Melvin J. Ballard of the Council of the Twelve, who was also first manager of the program, met with Utah's liberal New Deal Senator, Elbert D. Thomas, and President Roosevelt in Washington to explain the church plan. Elder Ballard reported that the President gave his personal commendation of the Security Program and promised "full cooperation" on the part of the federal government. Apostle Ballard went out of his way to assure Roosevelt that the church was "anxious to be in full cooperation with the government." The motives behind the church program, he said, were pride in caring for church members and a sympathy for the unfortunate. According to the report, not only did Roosevelt endorse the program, but also expressed hope for its ultimate success. He hoped, he said, that the program might inspire other groups to do something of a similar nature.⁵⁴

VI

Experience during the months after the announcement of the Church Security Program may not have merited the exaggerated compliments paid by certain national magazines, but were nevertheless encouraging to the church. In 1935, church appropriations for the care of the poor, hospitalization, and

⁵¹*Deseret News*, April 27, 1937.

⁵²*Ibid.*, June 1, 1937.

⁵³Lee, "Church Security: Retrospect, Introspect, Prospect," p. 206.

⁵⁴*Deseret News*, June 9, 1936.

other charities had amounted to \$183,810. Fast offerings, tithes, and Relief Society contributions amounted to \$402,939, so that the total cash value of church welfare in 1935 was \$586,749.⁵⁵ One year later, after little more than six months of the Church Security Program, charity for the care of the poor amounted to \$234,019; fast offerings, charitable contributions, and Relief Society assistance totaled \$554,350. (Fast offerings had risen 107 percent in the period.) Total church assistance to the poor was \$788,369. In addition, \$24,450 was appropriated for the Primary Children's Hospital, and \$50,350 was collected from cash donations. The total cash value of the Church Welfare in 1936 was \$1,097,188. In addition to cash assistance, 2,292 persons were provided with temporary or permanent employment in private industry during 1936. A total of 3,865 needy persons and 13,712 who did not need relief were given work in farming, canning, or sewing for the church. Moreover, the erection and improvement of church buildings, stimulated by larger contributions, amounted to \$769,473 appropriated by the general church and \$513,000 raised by the localities, for a total of \$1,282,473 in 1936.⁵⁶

In the October 1937 general conference, after eighteen months of the church plan, Presiding Bishop Cannon reported that tithes were increasing, fast offerings were up 53 percent over the six-month period from April to October, and the amount dispersed to the needy through the Church Security Program was up 97 percent. The number of persons assisted by direct relief was 16,163 and those helped on work relief was 8,110. This was an increase of 51 percent over the previous year.⁵⁷ It was reported that a nonprofit financial organization, the Cooperative Security Corporation, had been incorporated in April 1937 to handle the legal and financial transactions of the Church Security Program. In 1938, as the program began to establish more permanent progressive features, the name was changed to the Church Welfare Plan. By 1938, welfare expenditures had increased to \$1,827,000, a considerable part of which was cash, and there was left on

⁵⁵*One Hundred Sixth Annual Conference . . .*, April 4, 5, 6, 1936 (Salt Lake City), p. 3.

⁵⁶*One Hundred Seventh Annual Conference . . .*, April 4, 5, 6, 1937, pp. 3-4; Bowen, *The Church Welfare Plan*, p. 34.

⁵⁷*One Hundred Eighth Semi-Annual Conference . . .*, October 1, 2, 3, 1937 (Salt Lake City), pp. 45-46.

hand at the end of 1938 some \$127,450 worth of preserved foodstuffs, clothing, and fuel.⁵⁸

In 1938 the Deseret Industries were instituted. Using discarded goods and reprocessing them at church-owned and -operated plants and factories, the goods were marketed at church-owned Deseret Industries stores in the more populated areas at less than normal retail prices for such items. Deseret Industries also provided employment for the unskilled and handicapped.

The Church Welfare Program has found other uses since the time of the depression. President Clark had spoken of the possibility of war and of future depressions worse than the one of the 'thirties and said that while many may have believed that the Security Plan would end with economic recovery, "we are only at the beginning."⁵⁹ In 1940, when the war was underway in Europe, Presiding Bishop Joseph L. Wirthlin declared: "I do not hesitate in declaring that the future will hold a greater need for it [the Welfare Plan] than there has been in the past."⁶⁰

The Church Welfare Plan today owns and operates approximately 700 separate enterprises throughout the country. They include peanut farms and peanut butter factories in Texas, cotton farms and grapefruit orchards and canneries in Arizona, orange groves and canneries in southern California, apple orchards in Washington, pineapple and sugar plantations in Hawaii, dairies and cheese plants in northern Utah, salmon canneries in Portland, Oregon, a gelatin factory in Kansas City, Missouri, a soap factory in Salt Lake City, and cattle ranches in Wyoming. They include some 32 fruit and vegetable canneries, as well as approximately 600 separate farming projects producing a wide variety of crops: sugar beets, hay, beans, peas, soybeans, and dairy, poultry, sheep, and hog farms. The value of all welfare properties has never been published, but would aggregate more than \$25,000,000. Welfare projects produce 90 percent of all welfare needs, including such items as soap, shoe polish, bowl cleaner, clothing, blankets, dairy products, and canned fruit and vegetables. These are distributed to those in need through some 150

⁵⁸Clark, *Church Welfare Plan: A Discussion*, p. 19; *Deseret News*, April 22, 1937.

⁵⁹*One Hundred Seventh Annual Conference . . .*, April 4, 5, 6, 1937, p. 25.

⁶⁰Wirthlin, *loc. cit.*

bishops' storehouses located at Latter-day Saint centers throughout the nation. In this way, some 90,000 persons are given approximately \$6 million in cash and welfare products each year. The plan has furthered economic development by establishing "demonstration" or model farms and industries, by providing gainful employment for church members otherwise unemployed, by utilizing in a productive way the leisure time of employed members of the church, and by salvaging many consumer and producer goods which would otherwise be wasted.

VII

A continuation of traditional church policy toward the problem of involuntary unemployment and economic disaster, adapted to the new needs and demands created by the depression of the 1930's, the Mormon Church Welfare Plan was not in essence a political move. Church leaders joined with national leaders in proposing the abolition of the dole—*i.e.*, relief unaccompanied by a program of work. At a time when the nation began to suspend direct relief in favor of a program of work-relief, the church proposed to mitigate suffering among its own members by instituting its own program of work-relief. Such action was welcomed by the administration in Washington and followed with intense interest. The Security Program progressed satisfactorily and helped to ease the relief burden of local units of government as the federal government abandoned direct relief.

It was perhaps too much to hope that in the heat of political campaigning the Mormon Program would not be involved. Conservative magazines praised the program as a welcome alternative to the New Deal, while liberal journals condemned it as being a politically-inspired reactionism.⁶¹ It was a disservice to the church as well as to the government to misrepresent the plan in this way, for many rejected the plan for political reasons at a time when, with proper support, it might have rendered yeoman service to families, municipalities, and state governments. Those who belittled the program because of its failure to remove all church members from federal re-

⁶¹President David O. McKay reported in 1937 that the First Presidency had received a letter which accused the church of launching its Security Program "merely for political reasons." Replied President McKay: "There has never been a more false accusation . . . three years ago, yes, back as far as ten years ago, this plan was visioned." *Deseret News*, Church Section, February 13, 1937, pp. 1, 7.

lief rolls did not perceive that its primary object was simply to assist its members in a time of dire emergency.⁶²

⁶²In an address to regional church officials in May 1936, Elder Melvin J. Ballard stated that the Church Security Program was originally designed as a stop-gap to help in the transfer of members from government relief, the appropriations for which would soon cease, to positions of permanency. The church, said Elder Ballard, was "deeply concerned to help the government, and we are not criticizing or fighting the government." The objective of the church, he said, was to care adequately for those who were already on church relief, and to be in a position to care for those on government relief when the heavy appropriations for relief ceased. The church plan should be a blessing to the government, he added, for the latter is striving to find a practical way to stop its vast expenditures on relief. *Deseret News*, May 9, 1936.