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**Government
Project**

BY EDWARD C. BANFIELD

FOREWORD BY REXFORD G. TUGWELL

The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois

To
Sam Hamburg
WITH GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION

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Foreword

IN THE SPRING OF 1935, at what might be called the apogee of the New Deal, President Roosevelt signed an Executive Order establishing the Resettlement Administration. The condition of the low-income folk in the rural areas of America was very much on his mind. It had been on his mind for some time as can be seen from his public statements on the subject when he was Governor of New York State. As Governor he had appointed an Agricultural Advisory Commission and on its advice had done what a Governor could do to mitigate rural poverty and forward a program of conservation. During these years he had, moreover, held steadily to the belief that sub-marginal lands ought to be retired from use and that rural communities ought to be established to which many of the unemployed in the cities might be moved. One of his life-long interests had centered in conservation. He loved well-tended farm lands, forests and parks. He thought our farm lands were misused and that our forests, parks and streams were ill-managed and not so extensive as they ought to be.

As for me, who was named Administrator in the Executive Order, I had my own reasons too. My impulse, like President Roosevelt's, went back to my earliest days. He had been a boy on an estate in Dutchess County of New York and had gone to a private school in New England; but he had seen plenty of eroded farms and hard-scrabble farmers. He had travelled widely and seen the contrasts between high- and low-income folk everywhere in our land and in Europe as well. Also he had followed closely the attempts of Theodore Roosevelt to organize the conservation movement; and he had been a friend of that great pioneer forester, Gifford Pinchot. I had not had those contacts and advantages. I had come, some years later, into some consciousness of the relation between poor land and poor people;

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but it had been a realistic experience. For the New York County in which I had been born and had lived my early years had been Chautauqua, the most western of the southern tier counties of New York. That region had passed its period of prosperity during my boyhood and, as a consequence of deforestation, erosion and competition from new farming areas in the West, had begun to decline. The prosperous farms I had known as a boy and the great families of my neighborhood were by the time of my adolescence, falling into neglect and poverty.

It was thus natural, although our circumstances had contrasted greatly, that we should agree on trying to do something to better the situation of rural people and to improve the face of the land. Resettlement was the product of this agreement. It was not the first effort; it was merely more intensified than the ones that had been tried before. The Civilian Conservation Corps had been organized at the very beginning of President Roosevelt's Administration, relief was being extended to rural as well as to urban areas and a program for retiring submarginal land from cultivation was under way. These efforts were all brought together in Resettlement with the idea of better coordination and more effective administration; and, also, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, set up in the Department of the Interior under the authority of the National Recovery Act was transferred to it.

So that when the Executive Order was signed on 1 May, I found myself the Administrator of several organizations already in being with many thousands of employees and a huge task to be accomplished. The effort had not been specifically authorized by the Congress; but the funds for operating it beyond the first year were dependent upon appropriations by that body. We were not very favorably regarded by several powerful interests with considerable legislative influence. The larger farmers were more interested in having the prices of their products raised than in extending assistance to their poorer neighbors; and those who were economy-minded grudged the funds for our work. As a result much of my effort and that of my immediate assistants had to be devoted to simple perpetuation of the organization

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against objections which grew as recovery occurred. Besides this, the notion of agricultural communities seemed somehow—or was made to seem—a radical departure from American practice.

A nice division of effort had to be made in Washington between merely keeping alive and the work of creating and maintaining an organization devoted to the policies outlined in the Executive Order. The task proved to be too formidable a one. We neither overcame the opposition in the Congress nor conveyed to the furthest reaches of our agency the policies necessary to its success. As it was first conceived, Resettlement only survived two years, although much of the work it undertook went on for a good deal longer.

Casa Grande, as Mr. Banfield tells its story, is the history of a failure—one of many. It was a noble failure, perhaps, but that nobility was small comfort to those who had hoped for its success. As the Administrator, I had hoped that our experiment would find its own sources of strength and gain support as the necessity for this kind of thing was demonstrated. Instead of that, support very rapidly leaked away. The sources of this unfriendliness were very broadly and deeply characteristic of American life; and as I look back now after almost two decades it seems to me that we were doomed to failure from the start. We did all we could. The administration was not inefficient, considering the difficulties; there was always a priceless enthusiasm in the organization; but those who had to do the work were always conscious, necessarily, of moving in an atmosphere of disapproval.

It is one of the penalties of a large organization that its Administrator has always to deal with problems of policy at the center and that he has a constant burden of paper-work whose end result he can never see. It is only now, as I read Mr. Banfield's account of Casa Grande, that I can really visualize the meaning of many Washington conferences and many reports and documents with which I had to deal. But I was always conscious of dissatisfaction.

It is not a nice story. Our simple impulse to better the eco-

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omic situation of a few almost hopelessly poverty-stricken folk in the Southwest came to grief not because the conception was bad or because the technique was mistaken but because the people there could not rise to the challenge. It was character which failed. And that was not because the human stock was feeble; it was because the environment was hostile to the development of character. Mr. Banfield would have had a different end for his story if Americans had approved what was being tried at Casa Grande; since they did not approve, how could a few families—who were Americans too—wrestle successfully with that impalable hostility?

This account is as complete as it could well be made. We see these few families being taken from the hovels and ditch-bank squatting places so characteristic of the depression years; we see them settled into decent homes with incomes adequate to their support; we see them approach something like prosperity; and then we see them disintegrate, returning to what they were before. Our troubles in Washington prevented us from knowing enough of what went on in what we called "the field," but there was no other decisive inadequacy in Washington. Funds did not fail; and administrators were available who did what could have been done to check the disintegration. We should not have allocated more funds or had better administrators in any case.

Mr. Banfield finds that we were too exclusively preoccupied with the material circumstances of success--and that we neglected the psychological. But improvement of economic circumstances was all we had set out to do, and, as I still think, all we could do. A rural rehabilitation project--or many of them--could not make any large contribution to general change; and it was a general sickness which was at work here. I was made aware from the very first that there were very powerful forces which opposed helping the unfortunate, especially when the unfortunate were encouraged to organize cooperatively to better themselves. The maleficent and the friendly impulses in all of us are incessantly at war. Sometimes we see startling evidences of irrepressible kindness; sometimes, we see deplorable exhibitions of selfishness; both we

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recognize as natural, even characteristic. When the unkindness can find a rationale--when for instance it is presented as patriotic, moral, generally the approved thing--we have an added tendency to give way to it. It was given way to during the depression on an almost destructive scale.

We know how constant the struggle was during that time to remind Americans of their neighborly duty to the unemployed and the rural poor. The struggle was a hard one because government, through which neighborliness had to be expressed, is a large concern, and because balancing the budget, or some other excuse, could always be resorted to and could be presented as a superior value. It is difficult for ordinary people to function as they otherwise would in circumstances like these. We are far from being fundamentally accustomed to the projections necessary to finding our duty and doing it in modern society.

The people at Casa Grande were not different from the rest of us except that they were on the receiving end. They were probably instructed by the press and the pulpit that President Roosevelt was wicked when he did not balance the budget, when he was accused of boondoggling, and of pauperizing the unemployed. They shared the hostilities built up in the very careful campaigns of those days to all that was going on. Imagine, if that was so, the conflict which must have been going on within themselves when they considered their own situations. The impulse to resolve the conflict must have been irresistible. Well, it has been resolved now. They are again members of the general public, no better and no worse, and also, no more favored, than we. I sometimes wonder how they look back at the manner of their escape from the intolerable--whether they ever consider that they might have made a success of Casa Grande. But I know well enough the rationalizations they will have made. The other fellow will have been to blame, and circumstances will have made any other reaction than the ones taken impossible.

At any rate here is the full case history. We can see in it many lessons if we will.

Rexford G. Tugwell

Introduction

THIS IS AN ACCOUNT OF

an attempt by one of the biggest, most efficient, and most democratic of governments—that of the United States—to remake the lives of a few of its citizens by establishing a cooperative farm at Casa Grande in the Arizona desert. These few citizens (at no time were there more than 57 families) were among the most desperately poor and disadvantaged in the nation. The government made an elaborate effort to help them, an effort which was sustained for seven years, which involved the investment of more than \$1,000,000, and which required the almost constant attention of several officials. Without wishing to prejudice the case (for the author wants the reader to judge for himself) it is fair to say that the government's effort was administered honestly, zealously, and—by the standards of one of the most efficient of governments—efficiently. Nevertheless the cooperative farm was a failure. It collapsed at the very moment when to all outward appearances its chances for prosperity and success were greatest.

This book is intended to describe what happened at Casa Grande in such a way as to give some insight into *why* it happened. There are a number of reasons why it seems worthwhile to make such a study. The story of Casa Grande should have, at the least, a practical value to anyone who may again set out to establish a cooperative farm under similar circumstances; there is a long history of attempts to establish cooperative farms and model communities in the United States and it would be foolish to suppose that Casa Grande will prove to be the last of these. There are other reasons, however, for telling the story. Disadvantaged people like those whom the government tried to help at Casa Grande are still with us. The problem they represent has been obscured by the events of recent years and it is in some

