

Iowans Harry Hopkins and Henry A. Wallace Helped Craft Social Security's Blueprint

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Iowa-born Harry Hopkins was a key member on the cabinet-level Committee on Economic Security. Here in his office in the Walker-Johnson Building in Washington, D.C., three phones stand ready and a December 1934 calendar marks the committee's deadline for a report to FDR.

by David E. Balducci

A staggering 25 percent of American workers were unemployed. Poverty rates for the elderly neared 50 percent. The spring of 1934 was a time of colossal hardship. In the months to come, however, Iowans Harry Lloyd Hopkins and Henry Agard Wallace would help invent the landmark Social Security Act, which would include unemployment insurance. While Hopkins and Wallace are known as liberal lions of the New Deal in areas of work relief and agricultural policy, their influential roles on the cabinet-level Committee on Economic Security are little known.

Harry Hopkins was born in Sioux City in 1890, where his father operated a harness shop. The family lived in Council Bluffs and a few other midwestern towns. When Hopkins was 11, they settled in Grinnell; his mother hoped her children could attend college there. Hopkins graduated from Grinnell College in 1912 and then began to make a name for himself in child welfare, unemployment, work relief, and public health, particularly in New York City. Agreeing with New York Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt's push for aggressive unemployment relief measures, Hopkins supported Roosevelt's presidential bid. In May 1933 he joined Roosevelt in Washington as the bulldog head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). His mastery of interpreting and carrying out Roosevelt's wishes later would make him the president's closest advisor.

Henry A. Wallace was born on a farm in Adair County in 1888. His father, Henry C. Wallace, had been secretary of agriculture under Republican presidents Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. A 1910

graduate of Iowa State College, young Henry became editor of the popular *Wallaces' Farmer*, the family-run periodical. Wallace experimented in botany and genetics and formed the first commercial company to produce hybrid seed corn. Although initially a Republican, he supported Democratic farm and tariff policies in 1928, helped devise Roosevelt's farm policy in the 1932 campaign, and prodded Iowans, albeit overwhelmingly Republican, to vote for the native New Yorker.

A few months before the election, Wallace was invited to meet with Roosevelt and his advisors, the famed Brain Trust, at Hyde Park. The scholarly corn breeder impressed them, particularly agricultural economist Rexford G. Tugwell, who admired Wallace's modesty, polish, and forward thinking.

Wallace met again with Roosevelt, this time in the president-elect's one-story vacation cottage in Warm Springs, Georgia. Wallace was escorted through a cozy living room to Roosevelt's back bedroom, and the two men talked while the president-elect shaved with a straight-edged razor and breakfasted. A month before the inauguration Roosevelt offered Wallace the secretary of agriculture post.

Wallace and Hopkins were both dedicated social reformers. Wallace was a thinker with a scientific bent, courteous though perplexing, an intellectual loner ill at ease in social settings. He was a vegetarian and often walked the three miles to work. With a taut physique, he looked younger than 46. Hopkins, on the other hand, was a doer, brusque, but with a sense of humor. He enjoyed parties and thick steaks. His gangling frame made him look older than 44.

The story of how these two Iowans—so different in style and experience, attitude and approach—helped craft the report that recommended Social Security begins in the summer of 1934.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Iowa native son and U.S. secretary of agriculture, Henry A. Wallace also served on Roosevelt's Committee on Economic Security. "Our greatest wealth," Wallace said in 1934, "is the understanding and sympathy which exists in our humanity here in the United States."

Earlier that year, bills had been introduced in Congress to adopt old-age retirement and unemployment insurance. But Roosevelt saw the problem as bigger than the solutions offered; his goal was to revitalize capitalism and prevent dependency. Roosevelt told the bills' sponsors that a thorough study of social and economic security was needed. Ever pragmatic, he also wanted to wait until after the mid-term election before deciding what programs had the best chance for congressional approval. Laying the groundwork in June, Roosevelt told Congress he intended to offer special legislation to protect people against the economic



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



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"Next winter," Roosevelt continued, "we may well undertake the great task of furthering the security of the citizen and his family through social insurance. . . . The various types of social insurance are interrelated; and I think it is difficult to attempt to solve them piecemeal. Hence, I am looking for a sound means which I can recommend to provide at once security against several of the great disturbing factors in life—especially those which relate to unemployment and old age."

Later that month, Americans who tuned into his fifth radio fireside chat heard him tally up Congress's and the administration's successes in economic recovery. Now, he reminded his listeners, America "must look to the larger future" and "use the agencies of government to assist in [providing] sound and adequate protection against the vicissitudes of modern life—in other words, social insurance."

Roosevelt had already decided, at the suggestion of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, to form a "Committee on Economic Security" to address the problem of social insurance (broadly called "economic security"). He drafted five members of his official family to serve on the committee: Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (as chair), Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Attorney General Homer Cummings, and FERA Administrator Harry Hopkins.

Perkins had recommended Morgenthau, Cummings, and Hopkins, as well as Secretary of Commerce Daniel C. Roper. But FDR scratched Roper, even though industrial workers would become a focus of the committee's work, and chose Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace instead. Roosevelt surely had his reasons: Wallace was a fervent liberal; agricultural labor represented a quarter of the U.S. workforce; the ever-curious Wallace was interested in economic security; and he and Perkins had become close friends. Perkins, along with native Iowans Hopkins and Wallace, would be a prime mover in recommending economic security programs. The Committee on Economic Security often was referred to as the cabinet committee, though Hopkins did not yet head a cabinet department.

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Edwin Witte as executive director of the committee. A technical board of economists, statisticians, lawyers, and policy analysts were divided into working groups of unemployment, public employment and relief, medical care, and old-age security; an advisory council of experts was also assembled. Although most Americans today associate the term Social Security with old-age benefits funded through payroll taxes, the original law would also include unemployment insurance, as well as federal grants to states for aid to dependent and physically disabled children, the elderly, and the blind, and for maternal and child health, child welfare, and public health. As Witte later recalled, "Just about everybody who had ever written anything on social security and representatives of all interested organizations were drawn into the work." In developing the cabinet committee report, how to administer unemployment insurance would become the most hotly contested issue.

Roosevelt's timeframe was critical. Looking toward his reelection campaign, FDR planned to introduce a bill in the 74th Congress in early 1935. He ordered the committee to have its report on his desk by December 1.

Aside from Perkins, the canny Hopkins would be the most involved committee member. He had made provision for the cabinet committee staff to work out of his agency's third-floor offices at 1734 New York Avenue NW. Even so, Hopkins missed the start-up. He and his second wife, Barbara, set sail on the Fourth of July aboard the SS *Washington* for a six-week European tour to investigate how other countries were managing the worldwide economic collapse, specifically through their social insurance programs. Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain all had old-age insurance; by 1935 ten European countries had some form of unemployment insurance laws. But as he later summarized in a radio broadcast, "No European system [was] exactly suited to American needs."

Roosevelt needed this information, but he also knew that the chain-smoking, stress-ridden Hopkins needed a rest. Hopkins had been running tirelessly since joining the presidential team. (Poor health would plague him throughout his years under FDR; he died in early 1946.) The European tour was his debut on the world stage. At a London press conference, the matter-of-fact Hopkins announced the president's intention to sponsor an economic security bill. He did this before a single word of the administration's bill was drafted.

Back in Washington, the committee first gathered on August 13 in Perkins's office at the Department of

Labor. (All of the 13 regular meetings would be held in Perkins's office.) Witte, its director, was describing the reports to be prepared when the White House called to say the president wanted to see the committee. At this hour-long meeting, one question arose that would dominate the committee's work and become a major sticking point in the months ahead. Perkins, Witte, Second Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Altmeyer, and Thomas Eliot from the Labor Department, told the president that some advocates might urge setting up a straight federal system of unemployment insurance.

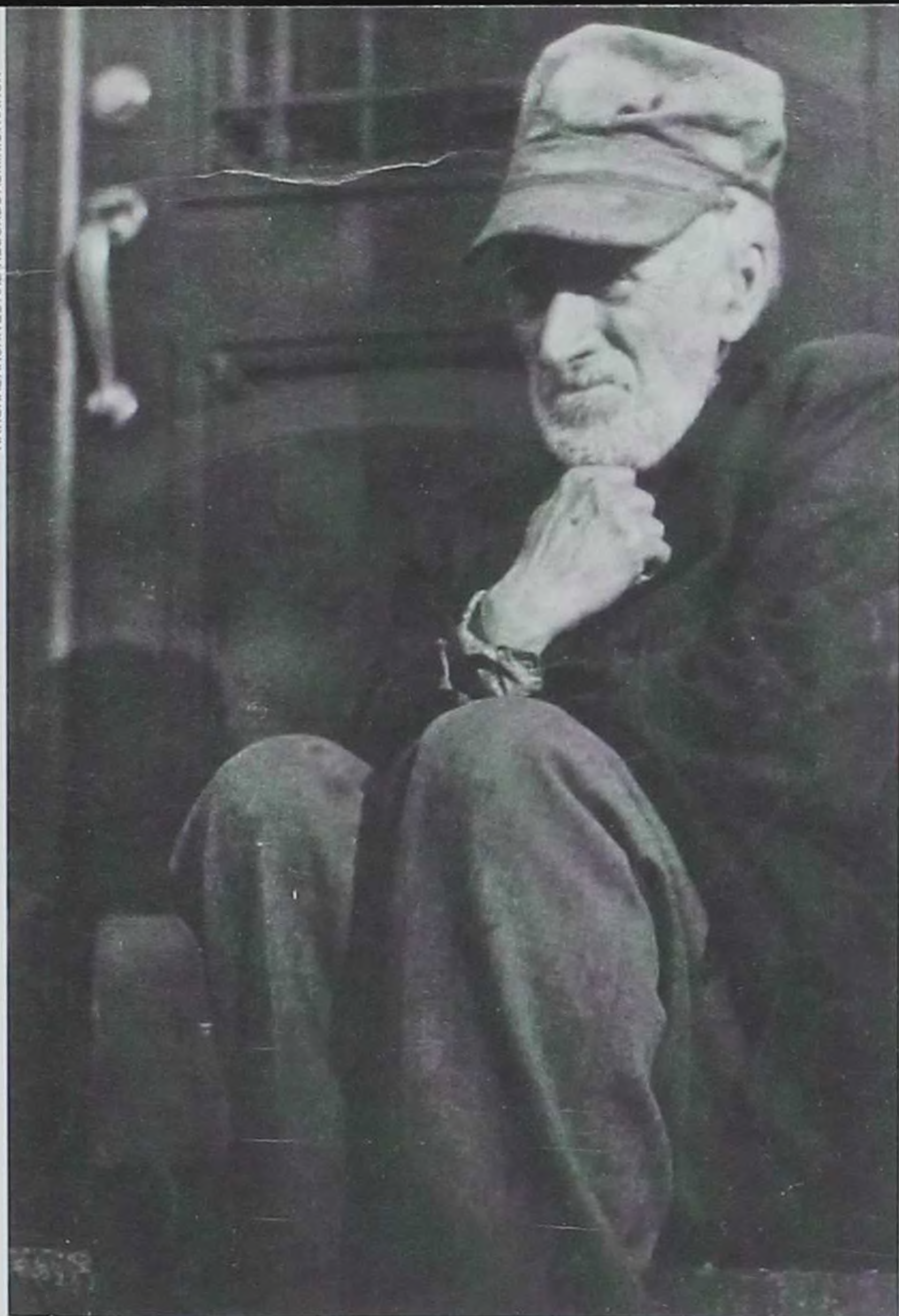
Roosevelt preferred a federal-state system with "a maximum of cooperation between States and the Federal Government," as he had announced to Congress months ago. He also preferred that the necessary funds "to provide this insurance should be raised by contribution [self-financing] rather than by an increase in general taxation."

Now he told the committee members, "All the power shouldn't be in the hands of the federal government. Look—just think what would happen if all the power was concentrated here, and Huey Long became president!"

Roosevelt had reason to be concerned about U.S. Senator Huey Long from Louisiana. Although Long had backed Roosevelt in the 1932 election, he pulled away in mid-1933 with plans to run for president in 1936. Meanwhile he was pushing his own remedy, Share-the-Wealth, to fix the economy and undercut Roosevelt's political base. Share-the-Wealth called for setting a cap on personal fortunes through the federal tax code and using this revenue for benefits and public works. The program included old-age pensions.

Francis Townsend and his National Old Age Revolving Pensions plan also were threats. Townsend was a physician and municipal health director who had lost his job in his mid-60s. Under his proposal, a federal tax of 2 percent on all wholesale and retail sales would fund monthly payments of \$200 to everyone over 60 who was retired. Townsend believed that his plan would stimulate consumer spending because the recipients were expected to spend the money within 30 days. The simplicity and Townsend's zeal appealed to thousands, who formed clubs and pressure groups. As Witte later said, "There were but few members of Congress who considered the Townsend Plan feasible but many who felt that voting for the moderate Administration program would only earn them the enmity of most older citizens."

Wallace feared that the "leftist" redistribution plans of Long and Townsend might cause an economic "nightmare" if they continued to attract unemployed



“There is no tragedy in growing old,” Roosevelt said in 1934, “but there is tragedy in growing old without means of support.”

young men and farmers. Roosevelt criticized such plans that “aroused hopes which cannot possibly be filled” and interfered with efforts to get “sound legislation.” He saw these extremist plans as threats to his reelection and to the republic itself.

As FDR’s deadline neared, the cabinet committee, as well as its staff and advisory council, debated intensely over the collection of funds to pay for unemployment insurance and administration of expenditures to provide benefits. Would it be a straight federal system or one shared by federal and state governments? Or a tax credit for employers to induce state participation or a subsidy (grant) to states to pay for benefits? The committee sometimes changed their recommendation twice in a day.

On Election Day, November 6, 1934, Americans voted in the most Democratic Congress in two generations. Historians cite the mid-term election as opening the door to a Second New Deal. Hopkins told his staff, “Boys—this is our hour. We’ve got to get everything we want—a works program, social security, wages and hours, everything—now or never. Get your minds to work on developing a complete

ticket to provide security for all the folks of this country up and down and across the board.”

Hopkins wanted to find a way to provide the unemployed with public works jobs instead of relief handouts, but most of the committee members thought placing a public works program in the bill would blur the lines between relief and social insurance. The New Deal was already opposed by much of business, the press, and the rich; such a plan might further alienate support for economic security. Perhaps the final blow to Hopkins’s idea came when Budget Director Daniel Bell advised that placing a public works program in the bill would cause a paralyzing turf battle among congressional committees.

At a mid-November luncheon at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, Hopkins delivered a strong message to 300 participants of the National Conference on Economic Security. Panels of reformers and scholars had discussed economic security programs in the morning, but few were probably as direct as Hopkins. “It is ridiculous to say that out of our national income we cannot find the money to take care of those who need it,” he said. “I am convinced that now is the hour to strike for economic security. By a bold stroke we will get it, but it has to be a bold stroke. This is not child’s play, and for the life of me, I can’t see why we should wait until kingdom come to give security to the workers of America.”

In the White House Blue Room late that afternoon, the president told the conference’s advisory council that a federal-state system of unemployment insurance would definitely be in his bill. But then he added cautiously, “I do not know whether this is the time for any federal legislation on old-age security. . . . We cannot work miracles or solve all our problems at once.”

Startled that Roosevelt appeared to be shelving old-age insurance, some committee staff leaked their objections to reporters. Roosevelt left Washington the next day to speak in the South while newspapers accused him of pulling the rug out from under the elderly. Perkins issued a hurried press statement to deny it, and the following day Roosevelt, in written remarks to the National Conference of Mayors, said that his bill would include old-age insurance, settling that issue.

The cabinet committee continued to wrestle with unemployment insurance, with time drawing short. Law professor and committee staffer Barbara Armstrong, who had leaked information to the press, as well as some advisory council members and other staff, still strongly opposed a federal-state system. They feared that employers would relocate to states with less costly (and therefore less adequate) plans. Wallace, too—likely influenced by Tugwell, who was

now undersecretary of agriculture—made strong arguments for a straight federal system.

The committee spent remarkably little time on the old-age insurance system, probably because there was less dissension. At a late November meeting, they agreed that rather than everyone receiving the same amount of benefits, an individual's earnings would determine the amount because that fit with the American work ethic. Realizing the complexities of old-age insurance, they also agreed that only the federal government would administer it, rather than to diffuse functions to states. The only change the committee made to the staff paper was to extend eligibility to agricultural and domestic workers.

Between meetings the committee confronted the complex problem of how the government would identify agricultural and domestic workers. These workers often had multiple employers in different locations, which made tax collection administratively unfeasible. Likewise, they recognized there would be brutal opposition in Congress by southern states, where many blacks were employed in those occupations. At the next meeting, Wallace persuaded the committee that before agricultural and domestic workers were brought into the system, a method to identify them had to be devised. In the final report, Treasury Secretary Morgenthau in a cost-cutting move insisted that agricultural and domestic workers be excluded from both old-age and unemployment insurance.

Looking back three decades later, Altmeyer remarked, "We were smart enough politically to know there was no chance of covering the farmers to begin with. They had been excluded traditionally from all forms of regulatory legislation. . . . They're the last stronghold of individualism, reactionism, independence—whatever you want to call it." It would be years before agricultural and domestic workers were able to participate in social security, including unemployment insurance.

Roosevelt's December 1 deadline came and went; the final report was still not on his desk. With direct access to the president, Tugwell, who had no committee assignments, went to the White House on December 17 to lobby for a federal-state system of unemployment insurance funded by a federal subsidy plan, as endorsed by the Advisory Council. Tugwell and others held that unemployment insurance required strong oversight, and a subsidy to states would allow for tighter federal strings compared to a tax-credit plan, which left states in control of benefit eligibility.

The president asked Tugwell to do some undercover work to assess the political sentiment.

Later the same day, Tugwell sent the president a handwritten memorandum (it is likely that the full text appears here for the first time). "After our discussion this morning," he wrote, "I went nosing around a little to see where the support for a Federal subsidy plan came from. I can tell you that it is formidable just from what I have learned so far. I got together the enclosed documents from several of its supporters so that you might have a look at the arguments on which it is founded. I believe these are the memos, which decided the action of the Advisory Comm. Needless to say my inquiries were casual and no one knows that I have any other than a student's interest. I feel there will be powerful support for this point of view—but that may be because, as I confessed to you, I really believe in it. I hope you will consider the positions of these people before making a final decision."

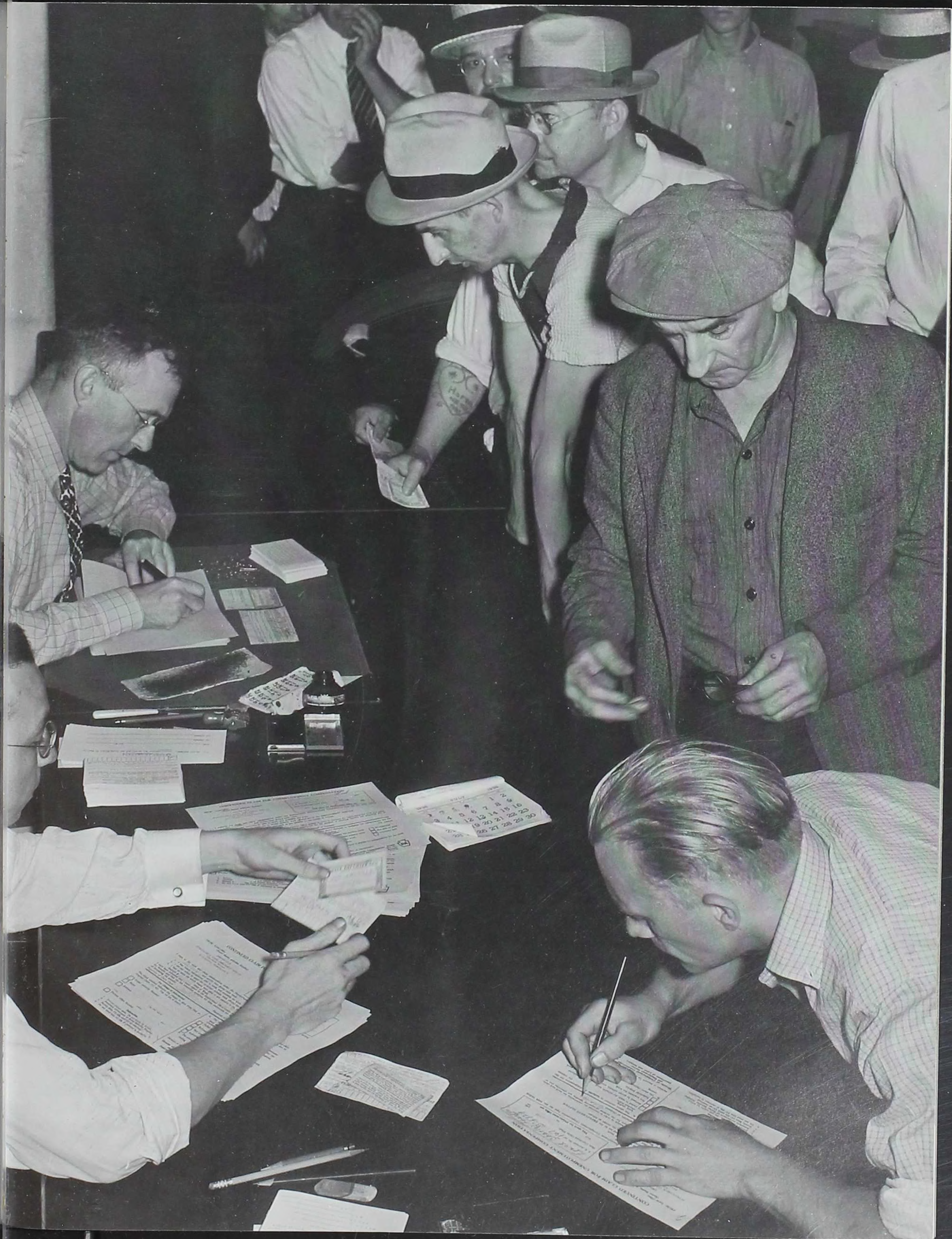
Tugwell attached an 11-page analysis of ways to administer unemployment insurance. As he noted in his diary, Tugwell got much of this from one of Perkins's staff, Isador Lubin, the commissioner of labor statistics and technical board member, likely without knowing what he was going to do with it.

For months, the administration had been uneasy about how the Supreme Court might rule on the president's economic security legislation once it was enacted. (Concern about constitutionality was not overstated; eight New Deal laws were declared invalid by the Supreme Court in the 1935–1936 term.) "At all stages," Witte said later, "there hung over the social security bill uncertainty as to its constitutionality." Some of the staff and advisors also believed that the subsidy plan under a federal-state system would present a stronger constitutional case. Unknown to them and most others was that Perkins, perhaps by accident, had received confidential counsel from two liberal Supreme Court justices, indirectly from Louis Brandeis during a dinner-party conversation Perkins had had with his daughter, Elizabeth, and directly from Harlan Stone at another dinner party. Both "messages" vaguely intimated that the court would favor a tax credit. If this judicial meddling had been leaked to the public, it might have destroyed any chance for congressional approval.

Several days before Christmas, Perkins convened

State-level employees take unemployment insurance claims, circa 1937. "We must not allow [unemployment] insurance to become a dole," Roosevelt had emphasized in 1934. "It is not charity. It must be financed by contributions, not taxes."

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



an evening meeting at her Georgetown home. With a bottle of whiskey in the middle of the dining room table and the telephone disconnected, Perkins, Hopkins, Wallace (a teetotaler), Witte, Altmeyer, and Josephine Roche (for Morgenthau) set to work to resolve their remaining differences. To gain their approval, Perkins probably divulged what she had heard at the dinner parties. By 2 a.m. they had hammered out their differences. They would recommend, among other things, a federal-state system of unemployment insurance with a tax-credit plan.

On December 28, the committee at last finalized the draft of the report. Or so they thought. Hopkins and Perkins went over its recommendations with the president the next afternoon.

Differences in the management style of Hopkins and Wallace now became evident as both Iowans toggled between policy assignments. At the outset, Hopkins had secured strategic subcommittee assignments for FERA staff, enabling his views to have more opportunities to be included. Wallace's ability to incorporate his views seemed improvised. He had not placed Agriculture Department staff on the committee, and appeared to have solicited their views only as Roosevelt's deadline neared.

Witte and three of Wallace's staff devoted five hours on New Year's Eve to editing the draft. But the diffident Wallace still wasn't satisfied. He needed more time to ponder his positions and likely mollify some of his staff. Applying his superb grasp of facts and figures, he requested revisions to better express his views, and suggested that a draft bill accompany the final report. Hopkins's staffer Aubrey Williams also sought a change to centralize welfare programs in a single agency, as did some of Wallace's staff, who clarified that states could amend their unemployment insurance laws.

Two weeks had dragged by. With four of the five in the cabinet committee approving the draft, and the cover letter to the president typed and dated for January 15, Perkins implored Wallace to join in unanimous approval. He agreed.

The committee recommended a system of old-age insurance financed partly by a federal tax on wages (paid by workers) and partly by a tax on payrolls (paid by employers). For unemployment insurance, the committee proposed a federal-state system operated by states and financed by a federal tax on payrolls (paid by employers) with a partial tax credit (to employers) if states imposed taxes on payrolls alone (or payrolls and wages) to finance benefits. The committee also remarked that a thorough study of health insurance would take more time.

The next day a press statement summarizing the report went out. Treasury Secretary Morgenthau realized that after 1965 payments of old-age insurance would create a liability in the Social Security trust fund, and money would have to be borrowed from general revenue. This conflicted with the president's mandate to create a self-financed old-age insurance system. Morgenthau demanded a special meeting and withdrew his approval. At that point, "Wallace rolled his eyes and looked at the ceiling," Eliot recalled. "Harry Hopkins . . . stared, open-mouthed."

Morgenthau went to FDR, who summoned Perkins. Roosevelt ordered that the language for old-age insurance must reflect a genuine self-financed insurance program. The committee members agreed to revise it once again.

On the morning of January 17, the 74-page Report to the President of the Committee on Economic Security was sent to Roosevelt (with the cover letter date of January 15 unchanged). On the same day, Roosevelt sent it to Congress, along with a 63-page legislative proposal.

In his syndicated column in the *Des Moines Register*, journalist Walter Lippmann wrote, "No one . . . can read [the report] without feeling great confidence in the intellectual honesty, the thoroughness, and the seasoned knowledge with which the committee" conducted its work.

The Economic Security Act, as it was first called, was introduced by Senators Robert Wagner of New York and Pat Harrison of Mississippi and Representatives David Lewis of Maryland and Robert Doughton of North Carolina.

The 25-member Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives, with jurisdiction over taxes, began hearings the following week. During the hearings, economist and social reformer Abraham Epstein used the term "social security." So did others, including reporters from the *Washington Post*. Later, the committee approved a motion by Congressman Frank Buck of California to rename the bill the Social Security Act.

The first three witnesses were Witte, Perkins, and Hopkins. Quizzed about his thoughts on the still-popular Townsend Plan, Hopkins responded, "Mr. Chairman, my opinion on that subject is that it is a cock-eyed plan. If the Federal Government is ever going to tax any such sum of money, we can think of 40 ways and the Congress could think of 40 ways to use that money more efficiently than this manner, it seems to me."



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Government record-keeping for Social Security was an enormous and complex undertaking. In 1937 alone, 40 million account numbers were established. "We used the expression 'account numbers' instead of registration or anything of that kind," recalled Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Altmeyer, "to avoid charges of regimentation."

The president also hadn't forgotten the Townsend Plan. "The Congress can't stand the pressure of the Townsend Plan unless we have a real old age insurance system," he told Perkins, "nor can I face the country without having devised at this time, when we are studying social security, a solid plan."

After a thousand pages of testimony and more revisions, the House bill was passed on April 19 by a vote of 372 to 33. Of Iowa's nine congressmen (three Republicans and six Democrats), all voted yes except for one Democrat who was absent. The Senate hearings gathered 1,350 pages of testimony. The bill passed the Senate on June 19 by a vote of 77 to 6. Iowa's senators, one Democrat and one Republican, voted for the bill.

On August 14, 1935, Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in the White House cabinet room as some 30 members of Congress and Labor Secretary Perkins stood behind him. Seated before newsreel and newspaper photographers (no reporters had been invited), Roosevelt said, "Young people have come to wonder

what would be their lot when they came to old age. The man with a job has wondered how long the job would last. This Social Security measure gives at least some protection to thirty millions of our citizens who will reap direct benefits through unemployment compensation, through old-age pensions and through increased services for the protection of children and the prevention of ill health." He emphasized that the law "will take care of human needs and at the same time provide for the United States an economic structure of vastly greater soundness." In additional remarks, the president revealed his view about the tasks ahead: "While the amounts provided in the Act do not give the amount of insurance and protection which I should like to see, it is a definite beginning along the proper road."

In Iowa, the editor of the *Ames Tribune* also thought it was a good start: "Changes in the law may be needed later. That will be discovered as the law becomes effective and the machinery is put to work. Nothing of such far-reaching purpose can be perfect at the start. But the

country as a whole had become pretty well convinced that social security legislation was necessary."

Within three months of when the law was signed, more than 80,000 Iowans who had registered to find work were being reclassified by occupation so that when unemployment insurance started they could be referred to job openings. A special legislative session over the week of Christmas in 1936 passed Iowa's first

unemployment insurance law. In July 1938, the first unemployment benefit claims were made.

Instituting the old-age insurance, what we know as Social Security, was the nation's largest logistical project up to that time. In very broad strokes, once the federal bureaucracy was set up and regional offices established, the U.S. Post Office delivered the forms. According to the *Oelwein Register* on November 23, 1936, "a quarter-million postmen will delivery pension applications [tomorrow] to 50,000,000 persons in every office and factory, store and mine in the country." Employers had to apply for identification numbers, and employees for account numbers. "Like 'citizens' of the penitentiary," the *Kossuth County Advance* joked, "every employer and every [employee] will acquire a number, by which he or she will be known in Washington bureaucratic circles."

A year after the Post Office distributed the applications, the Social Security Board's regional director in Minneapolis proudly reported that

"more than 34,000,000 American working men are now carrying their social security numbers around in their pockets or purses or have them hidden away for safe keeping." In January 1940, Ida May Fuller of Ludlow, Vermont, received the first monthly Social Security check, for \$22.54.

Roosevelt had foreseen the inevitable political moves to replace the program. At the third anniversary of the Social Security Act, he said, "In our efforts to provide security for all of the American people, let us not allow ourselves to be misled by those who advocate short cuts to [a] Utopia of fantastic financial schemes." To Luther Gulick, an expert in public administration, he confided, "We put those payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions and their unemployment benefits. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my social security program. Those taxes aren't a matter of economics, they're straight politics." In 1953, Congressman Carl Curtis of Nebraska questioned whether Social Security should continue to operate through payroll deductions. President Dwight Eisenhower disagreed; he thought the existing contributory system suited the American economy. Since then proposals to scrap Social Security have failed.

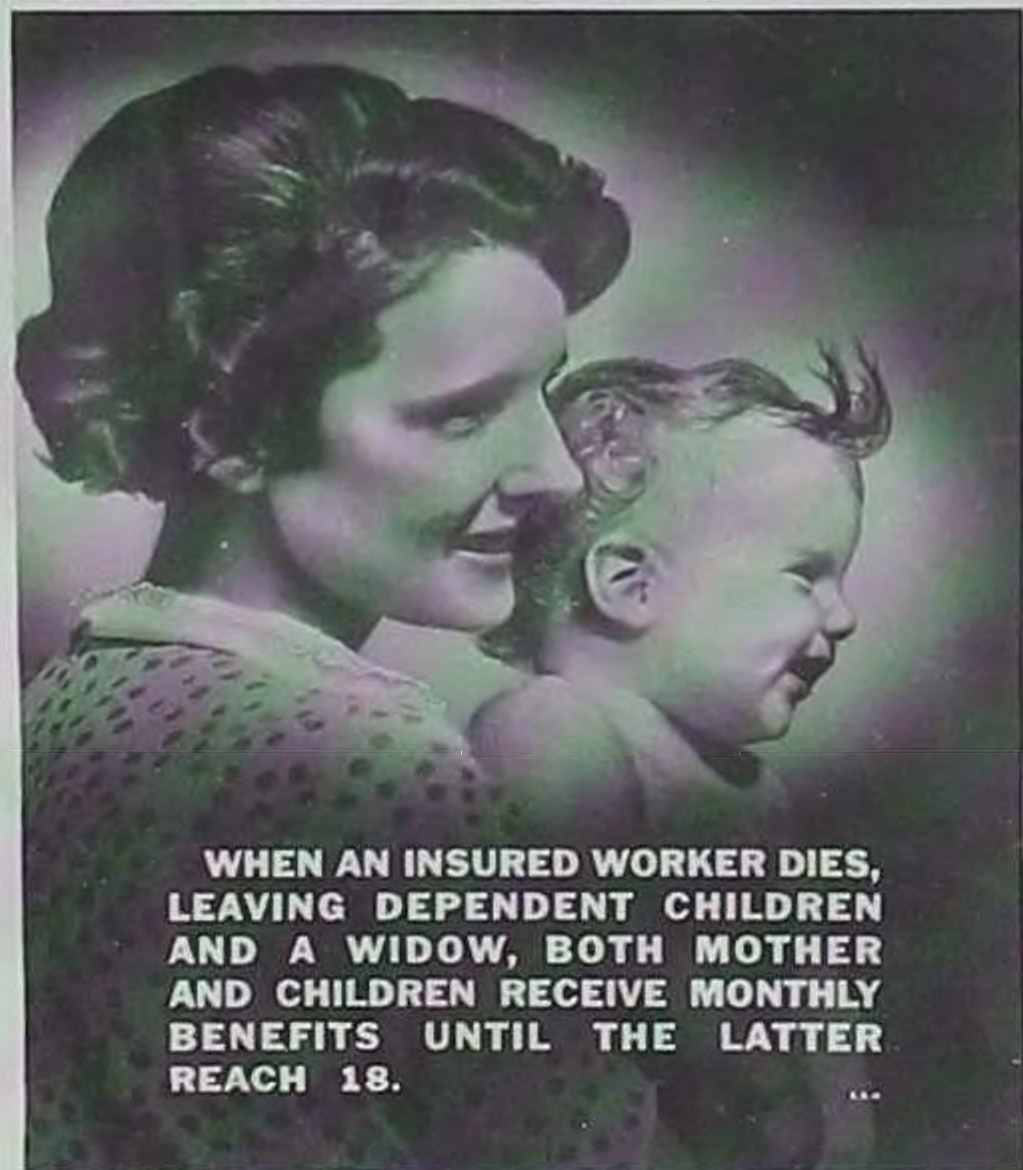
Born and raised in Iowa, Hopkins and Wallace shared a strong sense of social justice, but not much else, and throughout their government careers they were not personally close. Biographer George McJimsey characterized Hopkins as an insider and Wallace as an outsider. The savvy Hopkins was adroit at identifying the levers of power, whereas the more naive and reflective Wallace was motivated by ideas. Hopkins used committee meetings to advance his agenda (though some of his ideas were unworkable). Wallace used them to thrash out policy.

Americans have always been skeptical of big government. But it is hard to imagine what it was like to be out of a job or elderly and destitute before Social Security. Drawing upon their aspirations, pragmatism, and skills, Iowans Harry Hopkins and Henry Wallace helped draw up the blueprint for a new system of caring for ordinary people's well-being. ❖

David E. Balducchi is a policy consultant in Washington, D.C., specializing in unemployment insurance and employment programs. For three decades, he worked for the U.S. Department of Labor. This article is dedicated to Raymond Dinelli, who during the Great Depression supported his mother and six siblings on a farmstead near Plainfield, Iowa.

BOTH POSTERS: NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

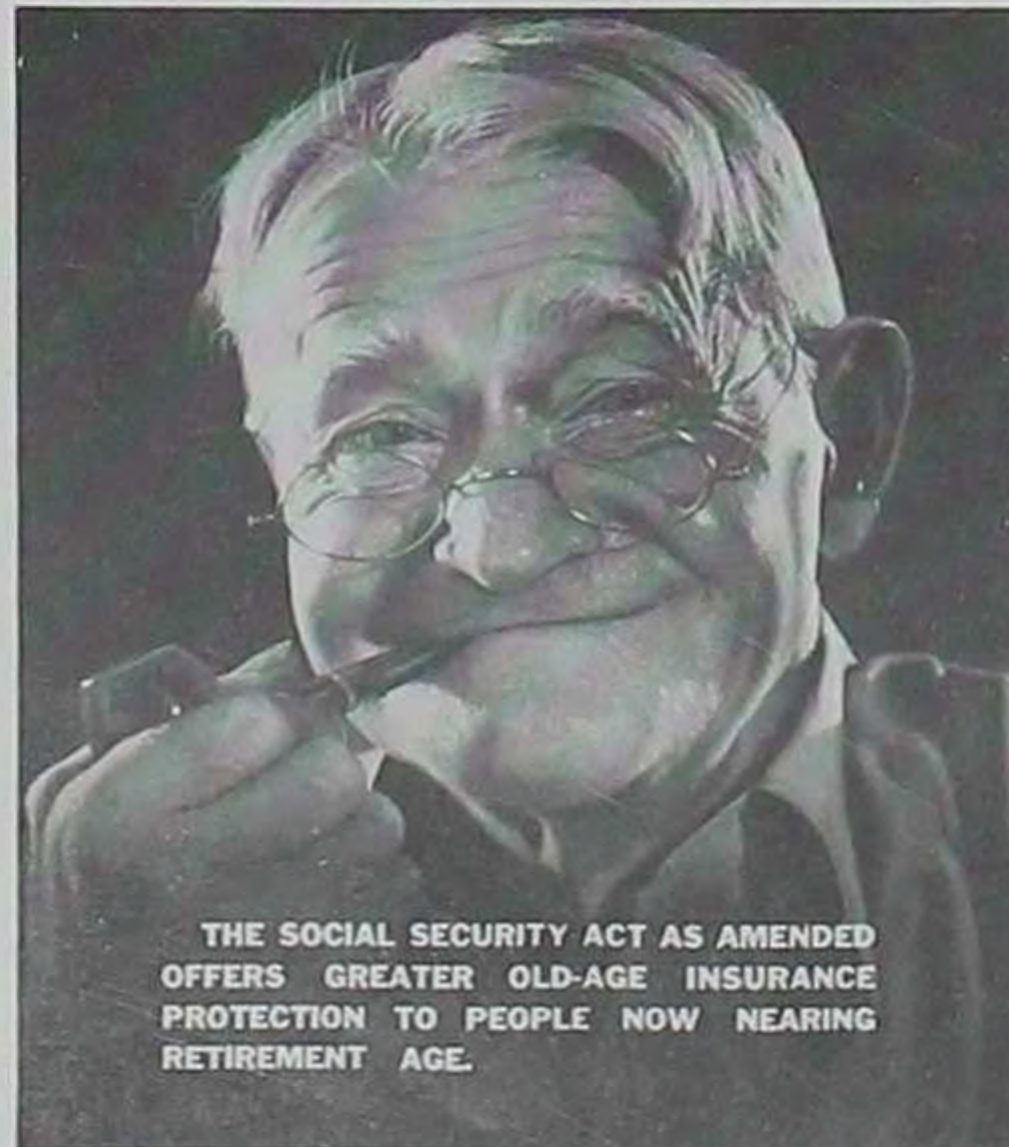
MORE SECURITY FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY



WHEN AN INSURED WORKER DIES, LEAVING DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND A WIDOW, BOTH MOTHER AND CHILDREN RECEIVE MONTHLY BENEFITS UNTIL THE LATTER REACH 18.

FOR INFORMATION WRITE OR CALL AT THE NEAREST FIELD OFFICE OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD

MORE SECURITY FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY



THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT AS AMENDED OFFERS GREATER OLD-AGE INSURANCE PROTECTION TO PEOPLE NOW NEARING RETIREMENT AGE.

FOR INFORMATION WRITE OR CALL AT THE NEAREST FIELD OFFICE OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD

Posters promoting amendments to Social Security reassured Americans that widows, their dependents, and the elderly could receive benefits.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Social Security staff in 1937 processed more than 75 million pieces of information related to employees' earnings. Looking back to the first years of Social Security, Edwin Witte stated in 1955 that "no confusion in keeping the records straight, which everybody feared in 1935, has developed."

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources for this article are rich and varied. Valuable primary sources available online include Social Security Online, which features historical context, speeches, diaries, appointment books, broadcast transcripts, reports, presidential statements, memoranda, minutes, and oral history interviews; see www.socialsecurity.gov/history. Others include the Social Welfare History Project at www.socialwelfarehistory.com/people and the New Deal Network at <http://newdeal.feri.org>. Readers should note that memoirs used, both published and unpublished, are sometimes conflicting. For example, sources differ regarding the date in late December 1934 when Hopkins and Perkins met with Roosevelt. According to the White House usher's log, the date was December 29; see www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday. Other authors have used December 24, based on Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, but there is no entry for that day in the appointment diary or usher's log to support it. A particularly valuable primary source is Rexford G. Tugwell, "Memo to the President" and attachments, December 17, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum.

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An annotated version of this article is kept in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI, Iowa City).