

THE FDR MODEL FROM 1933

Put Millions to Work Rebuilding the Nation

by Marcia Merry Baker and Edward Spannaus

In November 1933, at the direction of President Franklin Roosevelt, his emergency relief administrator Harry Hopkins established the Civil Works Administration, putting 800,000 people to work within ten days, and almost 2 million to work within two weeks. Over 4 million people were working on CWA projects within nine weeks—the largest peacetime mobilization in U.S. history. They were put to work building and repairing streets and roads, bridges and sewers, schools and public buildings, playgrounds and parks, and in projects of flood control and water management.

Could we do it again, today? Absolutely. The agency structures exist, with enabling legislation already passed, which would allow us to immediately, overnight, absorb millions of Americans, particularly unemployed and underemployed youth, into useful jobs building, repairing and maintaining all manner of infrastructure, public works, and public health projects. Despite being underfunded and under ideological assault, certain key Federal agencies are still intact, through whose administrative networks and experience, the necessary programs can be rapidly implemented.

These Federal-level agencies are already mandated to interface directly with other entities on the local, state, and Federal level—for all manner of basic economic purposes, ranging from economic production, to defense, transportation, health care, and for natural disaster-response, as well as youth skills-training and jobs. Moreover, these agencies all have an *institutional legacy of nation-building* still intact, no matter how diminished they have become in recent years of “post-industrial” policies.

Here, we will profile three such agencies, which have the immediate capacity to assimilate hundreds of thousands,

indeed millions, of people into immediate, useful work. These are 1) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2) the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and 3) AmeriCorps, which includes VISTA and the National Civilian Conservation Corps. The last organization is directly modelled on the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the 1930s, which took millions of youth out of poverty and idleness, and put them to work on projects of permanent value, of which the American people still enjoy the fruits today.

In our next issue, we will additionally examine the capacities and capabilities of 4) the U.S. Public Health Service, and 5) the Veterans Administration.

What's To Be Built?

Many of the specifics we summarize below have been provided in the flood of responses from experienced individuals—civilian and military—to the recent circulation of Lyndon LaRouche's call for Federal “Emergency Legislation, Now,” issued May 2, 2006 (EIR, May 12), and now circulating as a mass-distribution pamphlet through the LaRouche Political Action Committee, entitled “The U.S. Economic Recovery Act of 2006” (www.larouchepac.com). LaRouche's proposal centers on acting immediately to preserve and expand the vast, unused industrial and machine-tool capacity in the auto sector, now facing a catastrophic shutdown.

Through Federal receivership, this threatened capacity can be saved and deployed for the needed diversity of production to supply inputs for infrastructure reconstruction, defense and related needs, and to launch a massive “civilian construction corps” drive. Financing and credit requirements can be



National Archives

In November 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt established the Civil Works Administration. Within nine weeks, over 4 million people were working CWA projects, building and repairing infrastructure. This was the largest peacetime mobilization in U.S. history. Here Roosevelt is shown at a CCC camp.

met through Federal capital corporation methods—not the quagmire of budgetary offsets, and other such ruses for inaction, denial, or opposition.

Over the last 12 months, at least ten cities and states have passed resolutions calling on Congress to get going to save the auto industry through retooling. An additional key part of the “institutional response” to the LaRouche emergency action drive, has been the activation of local labor union leaders, reporting on exactly what idle production capacity—especially machine tools and workforce skills—can be deployed, where, and for what best purposes. As many stress, the binge of outsourcing over recent years has reached the stage of a national security crisis (see International Association of Machinist conference report, p. 46).

What’s to be built? The best way to understand the role of these agencies in emergency action, is to keep in mind the decrepit state of U.S. infrastructure—both “hard” (transportation, power, water, etc.) and “soft” (schools, hospitals, health care), and the extent of unemployment, population loss, and dislocation now prevalent across large parts of the nation, especially involving youth. The pre-eminent institution on which to center hard-infrastructure-building, industrial revival, and restoring military strength, is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Army Corps of Engineers today is comprised of 650 military officers and 34,600 civilians. The Corps has responsibility for serving both direct military logistics needs—power, sanitation, transportation, etc.—through its Directorate of

Military Operations, and for building and maintaining critical parts of the U.S. national transportation infrastructure and various other major installations, through its Directorate of Civil Works.

The Civil Works directorate oversees its navigation, flood-control, and other projects—with an enormous potential for expansion and for involving newly trained young people.

Domestically, the Corps has built and maintains more than 12,000 miles of inland waterways, including 235 locks. The Corps also maintains 300 commercial harbors, which process more than 2 billion tons of cargo a year, and 600 smaller harbors.

The Corps is responsible also for flood control, and water management for power (it operates 75 power plants), and recreation (it directly operates more than 2,500 recreational sites, and leases another 1,800 to state and local authorities, and private entities). It plays a key role in response to natural disasters and other emergencies.

Of the national roster of some 90,000 dams, the Corps has responsibility for over 600 dams and reservoirs, including all of the major downstream installations. It monitors water flows and levels throughout the nation.

Over the past three decades of “post-industrialism,” a huge backlog of Corps work has built up for lack of capitalization, to the point where hundreds of structures—dams, levees, jetties, etc., are barely kept in operation—such as locks and



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**



National Archives

The agency structures exist, with enabling legislation, which could employ millions of Americans—especially unemployed and under-employed youth—overnight. Shown here is a CCC project in California during the Depression.

dams on the upper Ohio.

The Corps presently has a short list of both authorized work, for which the appropriated funds have been minimal or nonexistent; and a long list of projects awaiting authorization as well as appropriations.

In fact, there are \$40 billion worth of Corps projects that are authorized, but await funding, *EIR* was told last year. A prime example of unfunded projects, is the case of the 29 installations of locks and dams on the waterways of the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

Many of these are long overdue for upgrading and replacement. A go-slow plan for work on just seven of these is currently in the Water Resources and Development Act of 2005 (which has other Corps projects around the country), but the White House, through Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), has refused to allow this Act even to come before the Senate! Introduced by Republican Senator Kit Bond (Mo.) in April 2005, as S. 728, its sister version (H.R. 2864) was passed by the House of Representatives in July 2005, but it has been blocked from coming up in the Senate. In February 2006, a group of 81 Senators wrote to Frist and Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), requesting that S. 728 be put on the Senate agenda for discussion, but under White House direction, Frist has continued to refuse. Thus, authorization for needed projects is currently at a standstill. Also, the regular operating budget for the Corps is likewise greatly below that which is required.

This impasse typifies the governmental breakdown now characteristic, across the board, for vital agencies and functions. But once emergency action breaks through the blockage, waves of new jobs, re-employment, orders for industrial output, and all the rest of economic revitalization can ensue.

The contracts let out through the Army Corps system, can involve large-scale construction, and integrate vast numbers of workers for the full range of activity associated with public works—from battling mosquitoes, to debris clean-up, to new-built construction, disaster response, and so on.

USDA—Upper Watershed Infrastructure

Parallel to the major water projects operated by the Army Corps of Engineers, there exists a network of smaller structures—dams, weirs, channels—built over the past half century, under the aegis of local and state entities, in partnership with a U.S. Department of Agriculture agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), founded in 1935, and formerly called the Soil Conservation Service. Almost 11,000 of these dams and structures are located in the “upper watersheds” of the tributaries of the larger rivers.

The purpose of these improvements is for flood control, agriculture, water supply, and other mostly rural needs, and, by Federal arrangement, these are the non-Army Corps dams—that is, they are smaller and upstream, not big and downstream.

Mostly built since the 1950s, many are now past their useful engineering life, and are in dire need of rehabilitation or replacement. The heavy flooding in New England this May highlights the fact that dozens of upper streamflow structures were not properly repaired and replaced—which would have mitigated the flood impact somewhat (in the Merrimack, Concord, and other basins). Now, for certain, these structures must be rebuilt.

Literally thousands of projects are “ready to go” in that they have local zoning approval, local sponsors, and await

FIGURE 1

Critical Ready-To-Go Waterways Projects Infrastructure



Sources: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Waterways Council, Inc.; *EIR*.

only the USDA/NRCS component of funding to get started.

Getting this reconstruction moving, would create large numbers of jobs, and still more would come from putting into place the right kind of maintenance and operations corps.

The authorization exists for these projects. Key elements are:

1936: "Flood Control Act of 1936."

1944: Amendments to the 1936 Flood Control Act, allowing the U.S. Department of Agriculture to work with special-

purpose local units of government for improvements in upstream flows of 11 U.S. river basins.

1954: Public Law 566 extended the upstream rural watershed program throughout the United States.

2000. Public Law 106-472 authorized needed rehabilitation on aging upper watershed structures.

What is lacking is the appropriations. In recent years, the funding has fallen to next to nothing. Even the NRCS staffing has been reduced, which is required in order to expedite the

projects, once funded.

Turn this around, and hundreds of thousands of jobs can be created in every state of the Union. Officials of the National Watershed Coalition—a non-profit group of individuals and dam officials advocating action on natural resource improvements—stress that the local programs are ready to *go active* in “X,Y,Z USA,” that is to say, everywhere. (See www.watershed.org)

AmeriCorps

This relatively new agency, AmeriCorps—founded in 1993—was modelled on the 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps, and could be scaled up in short order, to work in conjunction with the infrastructure and services drive described above, exactly as its 1930s predecessor did.

AmeriCorps incorporates a number of pre-existing programs, such as:

—National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), modelled on the CCC, comprised of young people ages 18 to 25.

1. The VISTA program, Volunteers in Service to America, initiated during the Lyndon Johnson Administration, which provides full-time members to government and private non-profit agencies, with a focus on improving health services, literacy, and housing in low-income communities.

2. Community HealthCorps, which focusses on health-care needs of people in areas with inadequate medical services.

3. Senior Corps, initiated by President Kennedy, utilizing the talents and skills of senior citizens to help others.

AmeriCorps deploys overall, on average, 70,000 persons nationwide, through networks of requesting “sponsors,” which can vary from the American Red Cross, to state and local governments and agencies. For example, after Katrina, AmeriCorps-mustered youth volunteers assisted 1 million people in Mississippi, to obtain food, clothing, and housing.

AmeriCorps has five training centers nationally, which are staging centers for sending teams of youth out to local program areas. Under the current practice, the youth volunteers serve a 10-month stint. At any time, there are varying numbers of AmeriCorps in each of the 50 states.

In ramping up the AmeriCorps programs, in conjunction with the infrastructure-building projects, there is a “natural” fit between youth-training, and the trade union-run skills programs. Already, in 2004, the Electrical Workers Union in the Midwest testified at the Army Corps briefing sessions, that if the Federal go-ahead came to refurbish the Upper Mississippi-Illinois locks and dams, the union would set up skills training for new workers to learn the trades needed.

Such education programs have been in place for years—

in conjunction with community colleges and other centers—but languished as the economy broke down, and jobs were lost. In northern Virginia, for example, the carpenters union recently set up a building trades teaching program expressly for youth with no background in physical skills, and with learning disadvantages. The first wave of 150 trainees was a complete success. These programs could be vastly expanded almost overnight.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that the very first head of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt, was Robert Fechner, Vice President of the International Association of Machinists.

