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Article Summary: In September of 1935, President Franklin D Roosevelt sought assistance from the nation's clergymen by sending out letters to 121,700, soliciting feedback on conditions and attitudes toward his New Deal programs. This article is a study of the Nebraska Clergy file in the Roosevelt Library which contains 163 letters. These clergymen supported the New Deal but not without significant reservations.

#### Cataloguing Information

Names: J O Sullivan [Tilden]; David H Wice [Omaha]; William J Petter [Plattsmouth]; Homer L Dickerson [Gretna]; Ernest J Secker [Omaha]; Arthur A Huebsch [Bee]; Otto A Quaiife [Giltner]; H M Wyrick [Omaha]; W A Mansur [Bloomington]; Harry George Miller [Grand Island]; G Irwin Friday [Lewiston]; Ben F Wyland [Lincoln]; Otto D Hermann [Omaha]; Leroy N Blough [Lincoln]; Andrew Olsen [Sutherland]

Photos / Images: President Franklin D Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Nebraska Governor Robert L Cochran and Lincoln May Charles W Bryan on October 10, 1936 in Lincoln; Canning center at South Sioux City, one of seven such relief projects in Nebraska; Various charts summarizing attitudes and perceptions of the clergy toward various programs in the New Deal; Unloading molasses meal relief fodder, state fairgrounds, Lincoln; Commodity distribution at Columbus; CCC camp at Alma; Burial in Holt County of livestock purchased and condemned by the government; Dust storm, Naponee, March 26, 1935; Home of relief client, Lincoln

# NEBRASKA CLERGYMEN, FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, AND THE NEW DEAL

*By Monroe Billington and Cal Clark*

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated president on March 4, 1933, the United States was in the deepest economic depression in its history. It brought economic and political systems to near breakdown and threatened social chaos. Worsening conditions had forced numerous banks to close before the new president and Congress ordered a banking "holiday." The stock market was at a low ebb. Industrial production was down to fifty-six percent of the 1923-25 level. Out of a labor force of fifty-two million, one wage earner in four did not have a job. Another 5.5 million laborers were only partially employed. In farming areas conditions were hardly better. Unable to sell corn for a profit, midwestern farmers burned the previous year's crop for fuel. Essentially no markets existed for southern cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, and peanuts.<sup>1</sup>

At the new president's initiative, Congress passed dozens of major bills and hundreds of lesser ones to attack the problems the Great Depression had created. Compared to the previous Herbert Hoover administration, the Democrats appropriated unusually large sums to attack Depression woes.

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The nation's political leaders created a vast bureaucracy to administer the multiple agencies and programs which sprang up in response to economic need. A flurry of activity occurred as the government's leaders inaugurated and implemented a "New Deal for the forgotten man."

These momentous political events stimulated questions concerning the impact of the New Deal. How effective were the New Deal measures? How did Americans respond to them? What else could government do to help? On September 23 and 24, 1935, the president mailed the following form letter to members of the clergy across the United States:

Reverend and dear Sir:

Your high calling brings you into intimate daily contact not only with your own parishioners, but with people generally in your community. I am sure you see the problems of your people with wise and sympathetic understanding.

Because of the grave responsibilities of my office, I am turning to representative Clergymen for counsel and advice, — feeling confident that no group can give more accurate or unbiased views.

I am particularly anxious that the new Social Security Legislation just enacted, for which we have worked so long, providing for old age pensions, aid for crippled children and unemployment insurance, shall be carried out in keeping with the high purposes with which this law was enacted. It is also vitally important that the Works Program shall be administered to provide employment at useful work, and that our unemployed as well as the nation as a whole may derive the greatest possible benefits.

I shall deem it a favor if you will write me about conditions in your community. Tell me where you feel our government can better serve our people. We can solve our many problems, but no one man or single group can do it, — we shall have to work together for the common end of better spiritual and material conditions for the American people.

May I have your counsel and your help? I am leaving on a short vacation but will be back in Washington in a few weeks, and I will deeply appreciate your writing to me.

Very sincerely yours,  
Franklin D. Roosevelt<sup>2</sup>

The number of clergymen in the United States in 1935 was about 200,000. The White House staff mailed the president's letter to every minister, priest, and rabbi (121,700) whose addresses were available. Slightly more than 100,000 letters reached the addresses, and approximately 30,000 clergymen responded.<sup>3</sup> Letters poured in from representatives of all major religions and denominations as well as many small religious groups in the United States. Because Roosevelt himself had a religious background and was a church member,<sup>4</sup> many clergymen identified with him and gave their honest, personal responses to the presidential inquiry. These clergymen were familiar with public opinion about and reaction to the government's attempts to respond to problems caused by the Depression. Their responses reflected many socio-economic, political, ethnic, and regional interests.

Because they were deeply involved in the day-to-day lives of the members of their congregations, clergymen in the Great Plains were peculiarly qualified to respond to the president's letter. Because Nebraska is a microcosm of the Great Plains, how Nebraska clergy viewed the New Deal reveals much about its impact upon the state and the region.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt was accompanied on a tour of Lincoln on October 10, 1936, by Eleanor Roosevelt, Nebraska Governor Robert L. Cochran (right), and Lincoln Mayor Charles W. Bryan (center). (NSHS-B914-103)

The Nebraska Clergy file in the Roosevelt Library contains 163 letters. Of this total, sixty-eight letters did not indicate the religion or denomination of the writer. Table 1 lists the breakdown of the remaining ninety-five letters according to the number of respondents and their religious affiliation.

Methodists were easily the most numerous group, one-third of all respondents, while Lutherans were second with one-fifth of the total. The next largest groups were Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists at twelve, eleven, and nine percent, respectively. Roman Catholics constituted five percent, and Episcopalians represented four percent of the total. Jewish rabbis comprised two percent, while three other denominations with one respondent each made up the remaining three percent.

Table 2 lists the percentages of ministers representing each religious group and the strength of each group expressed as a percentage of the total membership of all the groups.<sup>5</sup> The ministers in four of these religious

groups (Baptist, Congregationalist, Episcopal, and Jewish) overrepresented each of their denominations by almost double. The Methodist and Presbyterian ministers responding to the president's letter overrepresented their denominations to a lesser degree. The Lutheran ministers underrepresented the total membership of the various Lutheran groups by about the same ratio as the Methodists and Presbyterians overrepresented their groups.

The greatest disparity occurred in regard to Catholics. Catholic priests constituted only five percent of the total number of identifiable responding clergymen, but Catholics amounted to one-third of the total of the combined population of all eight religious bodies. Two factors probably accounted for many of these discrepancies. First, religious bodies with large congregations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, were underrepresented, while those with many small congregations, such as the Baptists, were overrepresented because of the higher ratio of

ministers to members. Second, churches which had more highly educated clergy (Jews and Episcopalians) were also overrepresented, probably because these rabbis and priests were more likely to respond to the president's letter.

In 1936 in Nebraska, 566,806 persons belonged to a total of 2,710 religious congregations.<sup>6</sup> Assuming an average of one clergyman per congregation, the 163 clergymen who responded to FDR's letter constituted six percent of all clergymen then residing in Nebraska, a statistically significant sample.

Each of the 163 Nebraska letters has been coded according to its general tone toward Roosevelt and the New Deal: (1) very unfavorable (2) unfavorable (3) neutral (4) favorable, and (5) very favorable. Table 3 shows that the responding clergymen were supportive of the New Deal by a margin of fifty-six percent to twenty-four percent with twenty percent neutral. This favorable percentage of the clergy in 1935 was in line with the sentiments of Nebraska

Table 1  
CLERGYMEN'S DENOMINATION OR RELIGION

	Number of Clergy	Percentage of Total Respondents
Methodist	31	33%
Lutheran	20	21%
Congregational	11	12%
Presbyterian	10	11%
Baptist	9	9%
Roman Catholic	5	5%
Episcopalian	4	4%
Jewish	2	2%
Others	3	3%

Table 2  
CLERGY AND DENOMINATIONAL STRENGTH

	Percentage of Total Respondents	Percentage of Denominational Strength in Nebraska
Methodist	33%	19%
Lutheran	21%	30%
Congregational	12%	5%
Presbyterian	11%	7%
Baptist	9%	5%
Roman Catholic	5%	33%
Episcopalian	4%	2%
Jewish	2%	1%

voters, who favored Roosevelt by sixty-three percent in 1932 and by fifty-seven percent in 1936.<sup>7</sup> It approximated FDR's nationwide support in the 1932 and 1936 elections in which he received fifty-seven percent and sixty-one percent of the total votes cast.<sup>8</sup>

Some Nebraska clergymen approved of the New Deal because of their intellectual and professional commitment to social services. But others extended support because of their firsthand experience with poverty in the Great Plains. A careful reading of the letters for both their tone and specific comments revealed that the Nebraska clergy's support of the New Deal devolved mainly from economic deprivation, not social theory or political preference.

A number of Nebraska clergymen were effusive in their support for the president. The Reverend J. O'Sullivan in Tilden expressed the sentiments of

many others when he told Roosevelt that "your name deserves to go down in history as the most christian and humane of all the Chief Executives of this nation."<sup>9</sup> Jewish Rabbi David H. Wice in Omaha wrote: "The New Deal, with all its implications of a just society in the United States, was a magnificent step in the right direction."<sup>10</sup> Representative of those hard on the president and the New Deal was a Church of Christ minister in Bayard who concluded an extremely critical letter with these words:

We the clergy of the United States have great faith in and respect for the 'Office of President,' but there are times when we almost loose [sic] faith in and respect for the 'Person of the President.'<sup>11</sup>

Evidence that the Nebraska clergymen as a group were more inclined to favor than oppose the New Deal is hardly astonishing. More significant is their relative interest in the various issues associated with the

New Deal and FDR and the substantial variations which occurred in their degree of support for or opposition to specific issues. Each of the Nebraska clergymen's letters has been analyzed regarding the specific issues they mentioned. Each response on each issue has been coded (1) highly unfavorable (2) unfavorable (3) favorable or (4) highly favorable.

The subjects of these letters were surprisingly concentrated on a few issues. Of the twenty-one issues which one or more Nebraska clergymen mentioned specifically, seven were cited by so few respondents that they were statistically insignificant. Five of the remaining fourteen issues were mentioned by one-fourth or more of the responding clergy. These most significant issues were social security (sixty-three percent), Prohibition repeal (forty percent), the New Deal's agricultural policies, particularly the Agricultural Adjustment Act (thirty-four percent), public works programs (twenty-nine percent), and public relief programs (twenty-five percent). Next in importance were bureaucracy and corruption (seventeen percent) and budgets and debt (ten percent). Each of three other issues (taxes, the munitions embargo during the Italian-Ethiopian war, and arms expenditures) were mentioned by nine percent of the respondents. The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Recovery Administration were tied at seven percent. Finally the constitutionality of the New Deal and the diplomatic recognition of Russia weighed in at four percent and two percent, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

An interesting result of the analysis of the specific issues is that no single issue evoked an even division of opinion. Five of the fourteen issues produced approval rates of sixty-four percent or more, while nine of them evoked approval rates of thirty-four percent or less. In other words, the clergymen perceived negatively nine of the fourteen issues which drew statistically significant comments, despite their overall support of the New Deal. Only the

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*Dust storm, Naponee, March 26, 1935. (NSHS-F293-2966) . . . (right) Home of relief client, Lincoln. (NSHS-F293-2975)*



munitions embargo, social security, the Civilian Conservation Corps, public works programs, and the National Recovery Administration elicited positive responses from the Nebraska churchmen. These responses revealed that while the Nebraska religious leaders generally approved the principal policy thrust of the New Deal, they criticized a majority of the particular initiatives of the Roosevelt program.

A better understanding of the clergymen's responses can be gained by considering the issues in four specific groupings. The first group includes government programs aimed at particular sectors of the American population; the second group concerns the repeal of Prohibition, a "moral" issue; the third group focuses on perceived governmental abuses; and the fourth group touches on foreign policy. Tables 4 through 7 summarize the Nebraska clergy's positions on these subjects by presenting the number and percent of clergymen commenting on each issue and the percent of these comments which could be considered favorable.

The New Deal aimed to restore the American socio-economic system to

normal operating order and particularly to provide immediate aid to those suffering from the Great Depression. The Nebraska clergymen who wrote to FDR commented on six specific topics relating to governmental programs attempting to implement these goals: social security, public works programs, relief programs, agricultural policies (especially the Agricultural Adjustment Act), the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Recovery Administration. Table 4 indicates that the clergymen had quite different perceptions of these issues, strongly favoring four but strongly disapproving two.

Social security was by far the most important of the fourteen issues, being mentioned by nearly two-thirds of the clergymen. It was an extremely popular program and elicited a ninety percent approval rating. Clearly the clergy deemed its potential beneficiaries (particularly children, the aged, and the disabled) worthy of solicitude. These groups often represented the clergymen's parishioners hardest hit by the Depression. The ministerial approval closely followed public opinion. Between 1936 and 1940 repeated surveys showed that over ninety percent of the

citizenry supported social security and old age pensions.<sup>13</sup>

A Lutheran minister in Kearney referred to the Social Security Act as "the greatest step forward our country has ever taken in that direction."<sup>14</sup> An Albion minister stated that the social security legislation was "not merely visionary but is the common sense solution to a problem tackled squarely as it appeared."<sup>15</sup> Despite overwhelming support for the social security legislation, positive reaction to it was not unanimous. The Reverend William J. Petter in Plattsmouth pointedly asserted: "I do not think the Government of any country owes its people a living."<sup>16</sup>

Nearly one-third of the Nebraska clergymen referred to the New Deal's public works programs and three-fourths of those expressed support. Most of the favorable comments focused on the provision of aid to and regained dignity for the participants, rather than on the broader economic impact of the projects. A minister in Falls City pointed out that the government was doing a great deal of work along the Missouri River and that "our people have benefited greatly by this work."<sup>17</sup> Gretna's Homer L. Dickerson simply stated, "We are in sympathy with . . . many features of the Works Program."<sup>18</sup> To be sure, the works programs drew negative comments. A Methodist minister in Riverdale informed the president that "most of the government [works] projects have left the poor about where they found them."<sup>19</sup>

The majority views expressed by the Nebraska clergy on public relief programs were quite different from the majority views expressed on public works programs. One-fourth of the clergymen mentioned relief programs, ranking them fifth in overall importance. But relief was unpopular; two-thirds of the clergymen who commented on it disapproved. Evidently most of these churchmen were imbued with a strong work ethic. They believed that the dole would make people lose

Table 3  
**OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARD FDR AND THE NEW DEAL**

	Number of Clergy	Percentage
Very Unfavorable	2	1%
Unfavorable	37	23%
Neutral	33	20%
Favorable	83	51%
Very Favorable	8	5%

Table 4  
**CLERGY PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENTAL AID POLICIES**

Issue	Number Citing	Percent Citing	Percent Favorable
Social Security	103	63%	90%
Agriculture Policies	59	34%	34%
Public Works	47	29%	74%
Relief Programs	41	25%	32%
Civilian Conservation Corps	11	7%	82%
National Recovery Administration	11	7%	64%



Unloading molasses meal relief fodder, state fair grounds, Lincoln. (NSHS-F293-698) . . . (bottom) Commodity distribution at Columbus. (NSHS-F293-881)



Table 5  
CLERGY PERCEPTIONS OF MORAL ISSUES

Issue	Number Citing	Percent Citing	Percent Favorable
Repeal of Prohibition	65	40%	3%

Table 6  
CLERGY PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT ABUSE

Issue	Number Citing	Percent Citing	Percent Favorable
Bureaucracy/Corruption	28	17%	0
Budgets and Debt	16	10%	0%
Taxes	14	9%	7%
Constitutionality	6	4%	0%

Table 7  
CLERGY PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES

Issue	Number Citing	Percent Citing	Percent Favorable
Munitions Embargo	14	9%	93%
Armaments Expenditures	14	9%	7%
Recognition of Russia	4	2%	0%

their initiative and that easy government money would encourage laziness. An Episcopalian (Father Ernest J. Secker) in Omaha succinctly wrote: "There is a feeling that if there is too much relief afforded that people will lose their initiative."<sup>20</sup> A Baptist in Adams stated that "the acceptance of relief must be discouraged."<sup>21</sup>

One third of the clergy commenting on relief were acutely aware that government handouts had prevented many Americans from starving; they favored temporary relief measures for moral and humanitarian reasons. Representing these views was a minister in Murray who wrote: "The former relief program saved many people from the 'bread line.'"<sup>22</sup>

The New Deal directed much attention to problems associated with agriculture. Because Nebraska was a highly rural state, it was not surprising that fully one-third of the ministers commented upon one or more of the New Deal's agricultural programs, making these programs rank third in

importance. Two-thirds of these respondents were critical of the government's efforts. The majority of the writers could not fathom the morality or economic efficacy of killing pigs and plowing under crops when widespread hunger and even starvation stalked America. Representing those who disliked the president's agricultural efforts was a pastor in Chadron who wrote, "The willful burning and destroying [sic] of crops is, to say the least, sinful; and the paying of cash money to farmers to refrain from producing is . . . detrimental to a just social program."<sup>23</sup> Yet a Catholic father (Arthur A. Huebsch) serving in the small town of Bee wrote that "the farmers in this southeastern quarter of Nebraska . . . are well up, thanks to the AAA."<sup>24</sup>

The Civilian Conservation Corps, a program to put unemployed young men to work to conserve the nation's natural resources, received the attention of a small portion of the Nebraska clergy. The combination of the CCC's employment of young men who otherwise

could not find jobs, of massive and effective conservation programs, and of an agency that was well administered caused it to receive an approval rating of eighty-two percent, third highest of all the issues. Methodist minister Otto A. Quaife in Giltner reported that "these programs are very worthy," and added, "The young unmarried men of our community are being quite well provided for through the CCC program."<sup>25</sup>

The National Recovery Administration, designed to provide temporary government regulation of the nation's businesses in order to speed national economic recovery, drew comments from seven percent of the clergymen, with nearly two-thirds of those approving. Even though the NRA had been declared unconstitutional and had been disbanded, some clergymen were sorry the program had ended. A Congregational minister in Fremont told the president that "your effort to restore purchasing power to the people was business and industry's only salvation."<sup>26</sup> A Lutheran minister in Falls City expressed a contrary position when he wrote:

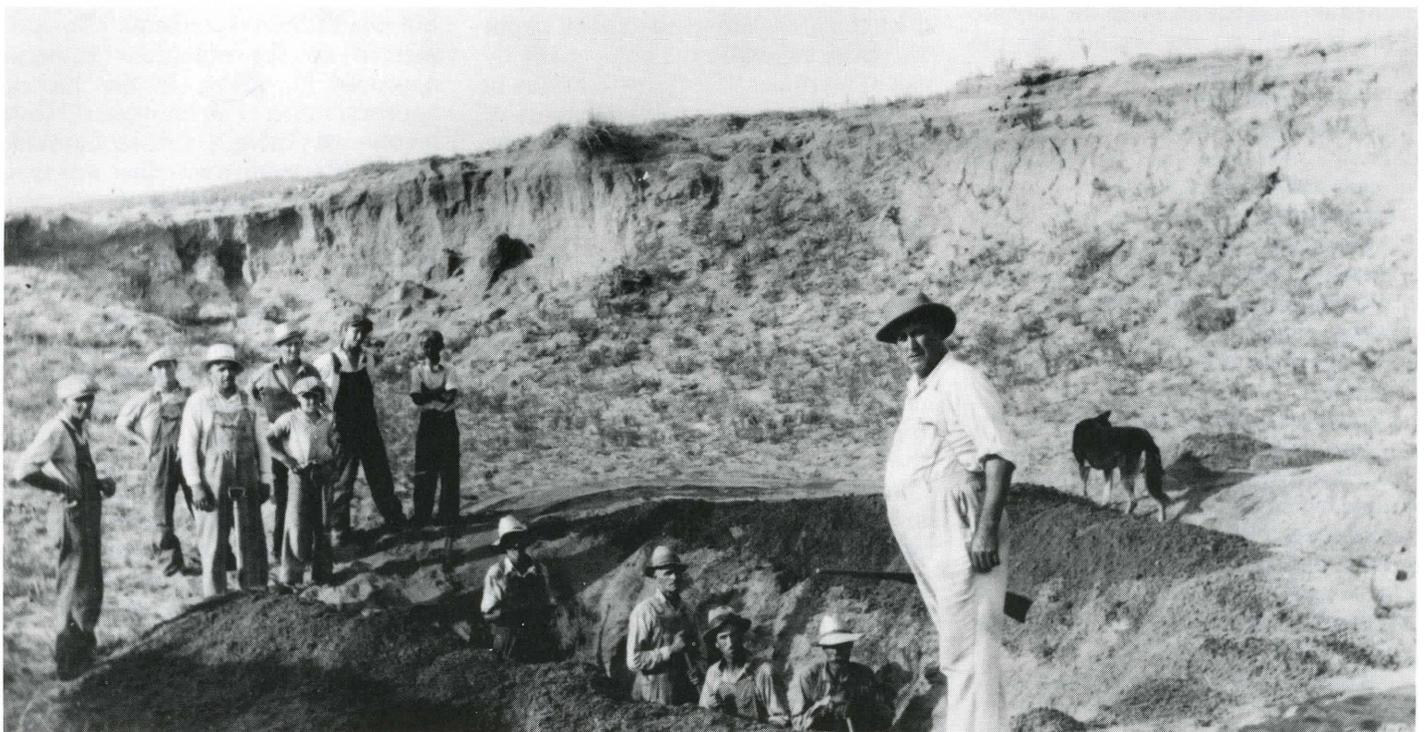
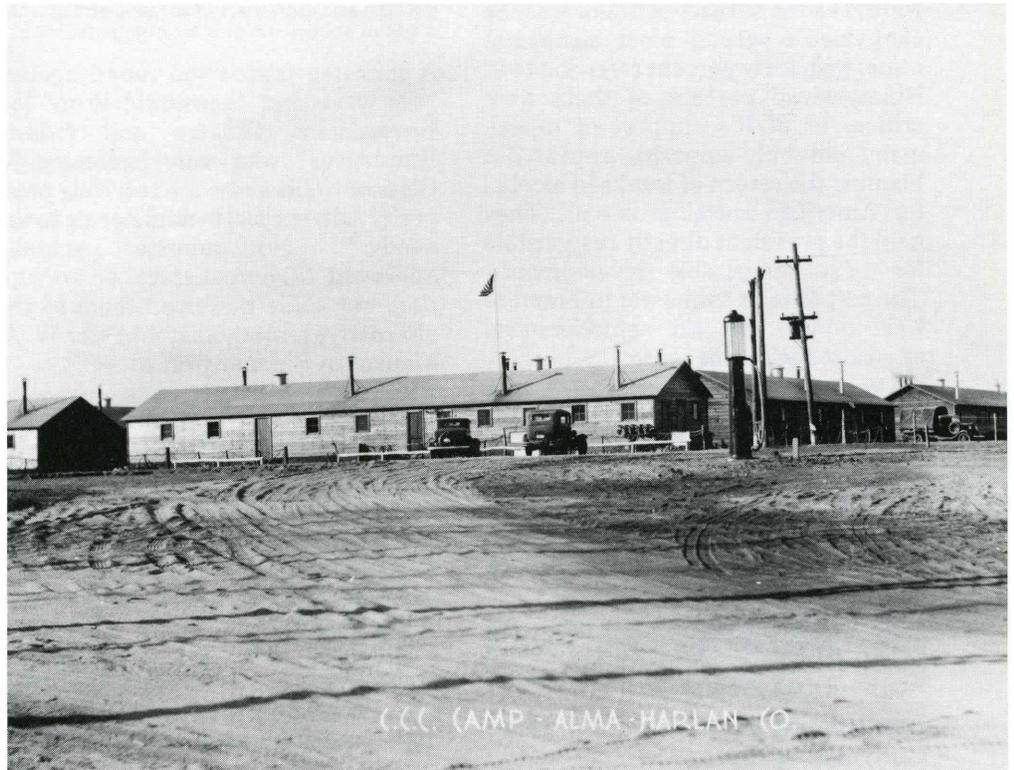
I denounced and predicted the collapse of the N.R.A. . . . because it presupposed a moral condition which did not exist, and attempted by law to enforce a relationship among men which can be effective only when inspired and motivated by the Spirit of God.<sup>27</sup>

Table 5 shows that the Nebraska clergy, as their calling would suggest, were concerned about moral issues — especially the repeal of Prohibition. Many Protestant leaders and their organizations had a long tradition of opposition to alcohol, and over the years some major denominations, including Methodists and Baptists, had established committees and commissions to oppose the consumption of liquor. Most pietistic groups were zealous in their condemnation of "drinking." However, ritualistic denominations, such as Roman Catholics, generally resisted prohibitory laws.

When Prohibition was ended, there was a great outburst from the clergy. In

Clergymen and FDR

CCC camp at Alma. (NSHS-F293-2956) . . . (bottom) Burial in Holt County of livestock purchased and condemned by the government. (NSHS-F293-328)



Nebraska the subject of liquor was the clergymen's second most significant issue, with forty percent referring to it. Ninety-seven percent of them were critical of FDR's support of repeal, many not only opposing repeal but blaming the return of legalized alcohol for American social problems. They held the president directly responsible for these undesirable developments. The response of a minister in Fremont was typical of the emotionalism associated with this issue:

You have done one thing which many of us deeply regret and find a source of constant disappointment. I refer to your position of leadership in bringing back upon our people the legalized liquor traffic with all its attendant evils, human suffering, sorrow and sin.<sup>28</sup>

Pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Omaha, the Reverend H. M. Wyrick had similar sentiments:

All the demoralizing influences of an unregulated legalized liquor traffic have reappeared, with an increase in bootlegging and drunkenness among men, women and young people.<sup>29</sup>

Representing the faculty of Creighton University, a Roman Catholic institution, Father Francis B. Cassilly expressed a contrary view: "You have remedied in great measure the terrible evils brought on the country by the crazy laws of prohibition."<sup>30</sup>

This moral ire inspired intense opposition against what many religious leaders perceived as governmental abuses and excesses. On the four issues of bureaucracy and corruption, larger government budgets and debt, excessive taxation, and perceived violations of the Constitution, the Nebraska clergy were strong in their opposition, as indicated by the data in Table 6.

Concerns about bureaucracy/corruption caused that issue to be ranked sixth in importance among the fourteen issues which the Nebraska clergymen mentioned. They praised specific programs but criticized their excessive costs and inept administration. A Methodist minister from Arapahoe expressed these concerns:

A great deal of the money of the public works program is and will be used to pay salaries that are out of proportion to either the worth or ability of

the men who draw them. And much of that is the result of politics which is far from pure.<sup>31</sup>

A minister from Otoe railed against "the vast and increasing army [of] Government Officers and federal Employees" who were becoming "a Class of Nobles, who are receiving prosperity salaries [sic] in ministering to the needy."<sup>32</sup> No minister actually approved of bureaucracy or corruption, but some preferred them to the alternatives. Methodist minister W. A. Mansur in Bloomington wrote:

While some waste and graft may accompany the situation, I believe some waste and graft are better than wholesale starvation.<sup>33</sup>

Despite Roosevelt's promise in his 1932 presidential campaign to balance the nation's budget, the New Deal programs drained the national treasury and plunged the nation deeper into debt. Ten percent of the clergymen commented upon the government's policy in regard to budgets and debt, and all were critical of the trend toward unbalanced budgets and a burdensome national debt. Dr. Harry George Miller in Grand Island reported that thousands of farmers in the Great Plains states "are quite critical about the large expenditures being made by our Government."<sup>34</sup> G. Irwin Friday in Lewiston said that many members of his congregation "are alarmed at the rapid increase of the national debt."<sup>35</sup>

Because government spending was producing massive deficits, the New Dealers proposed new taxes to help pay some expenses. Ninety-three percent of the Nebraskans who commented on the taxation policies were critical. Lutheran minister A. Hafermann in Syracuse was concerned about the nation's well-being when he praised the works programs but then wrote that "much of this work cannot go on indefinitely because then the public will be too heavily taxed."<sup>36</sup> A Bruning minister was concerned about poor citizens: "Our poor people will toil and suffer under the tax burdens for generations to come."<sup>37</sup>

The constitutionality of New Deal measures concerned six of the Ne-

braska clergy, all of whom were critical. Among these who opposed the New Deal's apparently unconstitutional approach to solving the nation's problems was the Reverend Ben F. Wyland, pastor of the First Plymouth Congregational Church in Lincoln, who wrote:

The attitude of your administration toward Parliamentary and Constitutional Government is under serious question by thoughtful people. Just or unjust, there is grave fear that we are leaving behind us parliamentary and constitutional forms.<sup>38</sup>

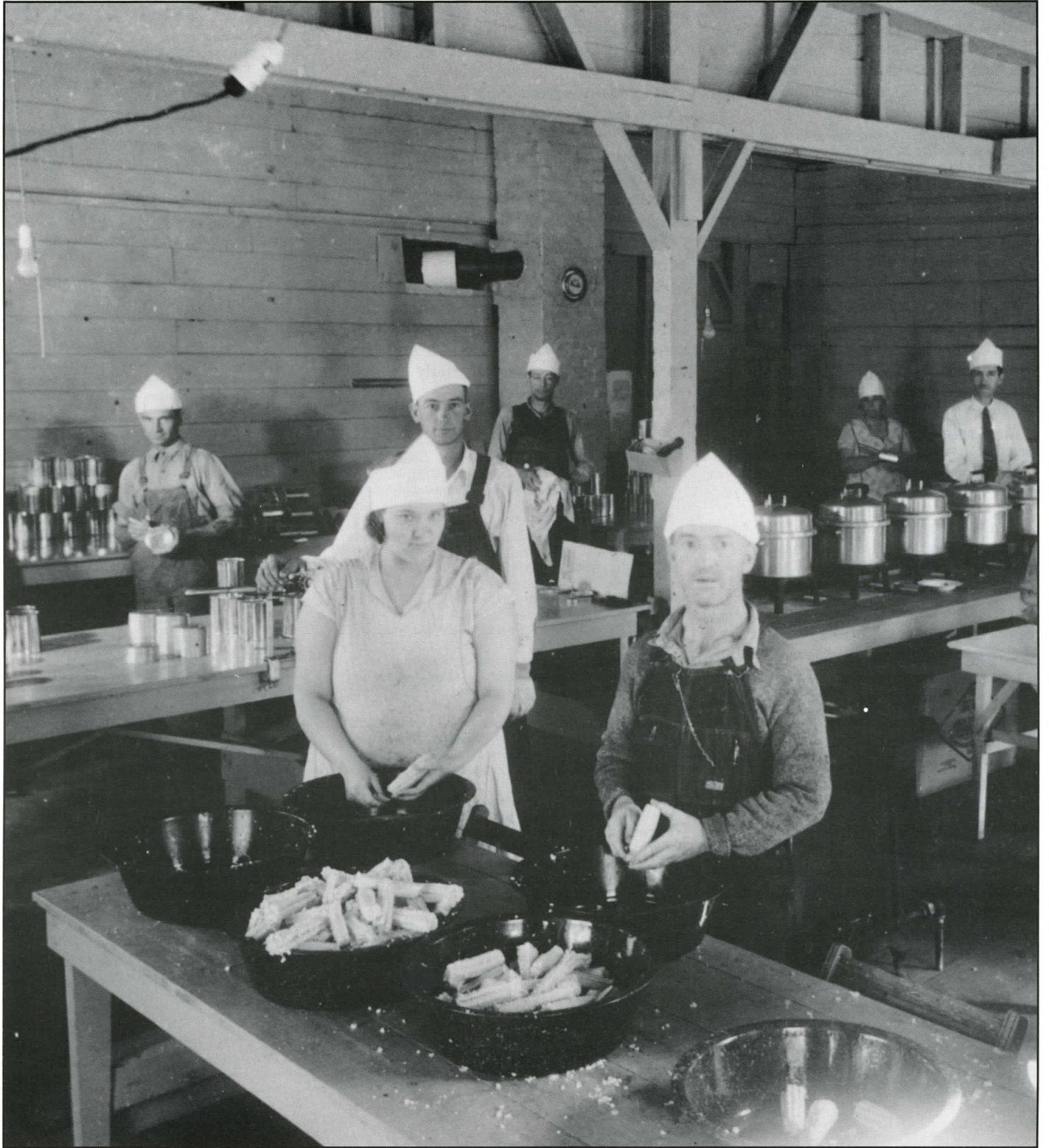
A Presbyterian minister in Humboldt was more direct:

The problems now confronting our nation require a leader who is imbued with an unalterable belief in the adequacy of our Constitution and the precepts of Christianity.<sup>39</sup>

A number of Nebraska clergymen showed interest in foreign affairs. Fourteen discussed Roosevelt's munitions embargo in the Italian-Ethiopian war, while fourteen (not always the same individuals) mentioned the nation's arms expenditures. The munitions embargo attracted attention because it was imposed during the same week that most of the clergy were receiving their letters from President Roosevelt. All but one of the respondents who commented on the munitions embargo approved it, giving it the highest approval rating of all fourteen subjects mentioned [Table 7]. Omaha Lutheran Otto D. Hermann's response was typical: "Everyone approves of your neutrality stand and hopes Britain will not maneuver us into plucking chestnuts for her again."<sup>40</sup> The clergymen were unhappy with the government's armament expenditures. A Congregational minister from Weeping Water wrote: "I deplore . . . the dangerous road along which you have led us in the huge appropriations for [the] army and navy."<sup>41</sup> When it appeared that Roosevelt intended to spend a billion dollars for military purposes, an Omaha Congregationalist wrote, "A peace-loving people are aghast at your attitude, Mr. President."<sup>42</sup>

*Canning center at South Sioux City, one of seven such relief projects in Nebraska. (NSHS-F293-308)*

Clergymen and FDR



Clergymen who referred to the munitions embargo and arms expenditures often related them to the general themes of neutrality and peace. Leroy N. Blough, a Methodist minister in Lincoln, wrote:

We are for peace. We commend you for efforts toward neutrality in case of war, but we do not approve of the vast expenditures for war purposes which you are permitting to be made.<sup>43</sup>

Four ministers commented upon the Roosevelt administration's decision to extend diplomatic recognition to Russia, all of these religious leaders disapproving. Andrew Olsen, "pastor, author, world traveller, and economist," who lived in Sutherland, confessed that he had never heard "any commendation for the recognition of Russia."<sup>44</sup> A Lincoln minister reported a discernible trend:

Since the recognition of the Soviets by our Country, Communism is spreading fast . . . and is . . . one of the greatest danger[s] in America.<sup>45</sup>

Underlying these foreign policy comments were anti-communism sentiments militating against diplomatic relations with the USSR, and a pacifism causing support for the arms embargo and opposition to increased defense spending and war. More important, the small number of respondents concerned with foreign affairs indicated that immediate economic problems were more significant to the clergymen and to their flocks than issues that affected them indirectly.

Nebraska clergymen displayed a remarkable consensus about the New Deal. They realized that the grave economic and social disruptions accompanying the Depression called for the government to take radical remedial actions. They strongly supported several key elements in the New

Deal which attacked the Depression at the local level and helped the recovery of many destitute Americans. These clergymen, however, were far from blind or unthinking New Deal loyalists. They deplored policies which they perceived as promoting personal immorality (the repeal of Prohibition), "easy money" from the dole, official immorality (corruption and war-mongering), and mismanagement (financial irresponsibility and bureaucratism). They supported the New Deal but not without significant reservations. Nebraska clergymen of the 1930s were pragmatic and undoc-trinaire about the New Deal and the role of government in the daily lives of individual Americans.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Maurice L. Farrell, ed., *The Dow Jones Averages, 1885-1970* (New York, 1972); William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1931-1940* (New York, 1963), 1ff.; Frank Freidel, *The New Deal in Historical Perspective* (Washington, 1959), 1ff.; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Cambridge, 1957), 248-56.

<sup>2</sup>A slightly edited version of this letter is printed in Samuel I. Rosenman, comp., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Thirteen vols., New York, 1938-50), vol. IV, 370.

<sup>3</sup>Organized by states, these letters are housed in eighty-one archival boxes in the Clergy File, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>4</sup>For information on Roosevelt's association with and membership in the Protestant Episcopal Church, as well as his religious thought, see Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Apprenticeship* (Boston, 1952), 20, 81ff.; James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956), 29, 237, 452ff.; Rex G. Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt: A Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Garden City, NY, 1957), 30-33, 502; Thomas H. Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought: The Social and Political Ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1958), 3-11, 24.

<sup>5</sup>The total number of members in the eight religious bodies was 473,540. The breakdown was: Roman Catholics, 154,136; Lutherans,

142,828; Methodists, 86,588; Presbyterians, 34,704; Baptists, 22,551; Congregationalists, 21,378; Episcopalians, 10,256; Jews, 696. See United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies, 1936*. Vol. I. *Summary and Detailed Tables* (Washington, 1941), 244-46.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>7</sup>See Richard M. Scammon, comp. and ed., *America at the Polls, A Handbook of American Presidential Election Statistics, 1920-1964* (Pittsburgh, 1965), 7, 9.

<sup>8</sup>See *Presidential Elections Since 1789* (Washington, 1975), 90.

<sup>9</sup>J. O'Sullivan to FDR, Oct. 2, 1935, Nebraska Clergy File, Roosevelt Library. (All subsequent letters referred to in this essay are in the Nebraska Clergy File.)

<sup>10</sup>David H. Wice to FDR, Oct. 23, 1935.

<sup>11</sup>C. E. Root to FDR, Sept. 28, 1935.

<sup>12</sup>The seven statistically insignificant items were: child labor laws, regulation of public utilities, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Roosevelt's stand against the veterans' bonus, bank closing laws, the devaluation of the dollar, and the United States taken off the gold standard.

<sup>13</sup>Rita James Simon, *Public Opinion in America, 1936-1970* (Chicago, 1974), 25, 27.

<sup>14</sup>E. Potratz to FDR, Sept. 30, 1935.

<sup>15</sup>J. H. Beckmann to FDR, Oct. 23, 1935.

<sup>16</sup>William J. Petter to FDR, Oct. 8, 1935.

<sup>17</sup>Victor Moeller to FDR, Oct. 2, 1935.

<sup>18</sup>Homer L. Dickerson to FDR, Oct. 10, 1935.

<sup>19</sup>John B. Roe to FDR, Sept. 28, 1935.

<sup>20</sup>Ernest J. Secker to FDR, Sept. 27, 1935.

<sup>21</sup>W. E. Christensen to FDR, Oct. 8, 1935.

<sup>22</sup>C. Loyd Shurbert to FDR, Oct. 7, 1935.

<sup>23</sup>A. Pierce Waltz to FDR, Oct. 4, 1935.

<sup>24</sup>Arthur A. Huebsch to FDR, Oct. 14, 1935.

<sup>25</sup>Otto A. Quaife to FDR, Sept. 27, 1935.

<sup>26</sup>Chas. R. Lichte to FDR, Oct. 3, 1935.

<sup>27</sup>H. Hoadts to FDR, Oct. 10, 1935.

<sup>28</sup>William Park to FDR, Sept. 26, 1935.

<sup>29</sup>H. M. Wyrick to FDR, Oct. 7, 1935.

<sup>30</sup>Francis B. Cassilly and others to FDR, Sept. 30, 1935.

<sup>31</sup>George M. Seick to FDR, Oct. 9, 1935.

<sup>32</sup>Charles P. Lang to FDR, Sept. 30, 1935.

<sup>33</sup>W. A. Mansur to FDR, Oct. 4, 1935.

<sup>34</sup>Harry George Miller to FDR, Oct. 10, 1935.

<sup>35</sup>G. Irwin Friday to FDR, Oct. 10, 1935.

<sup>36</sup>A. Hafermann to FDR, Oct. 17, 1935.

<sup>37</sup>W. H. Merrill to FDR, Oct. 1, 1935.

<sup>38</sup>Ben F. Wyland to FDR, Oct. 1, 1935.

<sup>39</sup>Theo Shepard to FDR, Oct. 17, 1935.

<sup>40</sup>Otto D. Herrmann to FDR, Oct. 11, 1935.

<sup>41</sup>Louis Wilson to FDR, Oct. 12, 1935.

<sup>42</sup>Louis Hieb to FDR, Oct. 23, 1935.

<sup>43</sup>Leroy N. Blough to FDR, Oct. 1, 1935.

<sup>44</sup>Andrew Olsen to FDR, Oct. 9, 1935.

<sup>45</sup>A. Fuenning to FDR, Oct. 2, 1935.