

Republican Perspective

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by Ed Manning

The Forgotten Man

“Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy, its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery.” Winston Churchill

To many Democrats and Progressives, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) administration's New Deal is the Holy Grail of central planning and federal government largesse. To be sure, the Great Depression required FDR to act since average citizens were destitute. Some historians are now of the opinion however, that some of FDR's actions actually extended the depression for years.

Amity Shlaes, a visiting senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and syndicated columnist for Bloomberg & Forbes, writes a new history of the Great Depression in "The Forgotten Man." She shows how FDR and well intentioned bureaucrats placed massive burdens on the country that offset many benefits of New Deal programs. She contends that their policies extended the Great Depression to 1940.

A little known New Deal program was the Resettlement Administration (RA). The RA was established by FDR by Executive Order and headed by Rex Tugwell. Tugwell was a Columbia University economist and under-Secretary of Agriculture. Tugwell was part of a progressive group to visit Stalin's Soviet Union in 1927 and thought U.S. agriculture could be improved by foreign study.

The goal of the RA was to help needy families and to improve land use. It retired submarginal land, moved farmers, and built new communities. One such community was in Casa Grande, AZ.

The bureaucrats of the RA were convinced that the plight of the individual farmer could be improved through a *collective* effort. Casa Grande was initially developed into 2-acre plots but the central planners believed that title and ownership of land was of little use to a farmer scraping to get by. Tugwell's philosophy was that a large cooperative would take advantage of economy of scale - one tractor for all.

So farmers would share the land and the fruits of their labor while living in government built pastel colored houses. In addition, poultry co-ops were also required. In August 1937, the RA found what they believed to be a competent manager for Casa Grande in Robert Faul. He was a homesteader and ran the Arizona Turkey Growers Association. The RA believed that Faul could implement the full benefits of an agricultural cooperative.

As the saying goes, hope springs eternal. In January 1929, Faul quit in a rage and likened the project to the Soviets. The resettled farmers also had similar views. Factions formed as the basic seed of farming was missing - the farmer and his *own* land. Neighboring towns "kidded the settlers about being 'reds' when they met them in the gasoline stations, over the counters and in barber shops," wrote a social scientist who later documented the period.

The resettled farmers felt demeaned. "You know how it feels when first one person then another asks you if you're sick and tells you you look pretty bad? After a while you begin to think you're sick as hell and maybe going to die. Well, that's what happened to Casa Grande."

When it came to the poultry co-ops one farmer offered: "But the thing I can't figure out is how a man tells his own chickens apart, runnin' them all together like they do here." The squabbling amongst the farmers continued and the *collective* experiment eventually ended.

Nearly 50 years before the Great Depression, a Yale philosopher, W.G. Sumner presented a lecture against the progressives of his day. He warned that well intentioned progressives often coerced average citizens into funding dubious social projects. He wrote: "As soon as A observes something which seems to him to be wrong, from which X is suffering, A talks it over with B, and A & B then propose to get a law passed to remedy the evil and help X. Their law always proposes to determine...what A, B & C shall do for X." But what about C? What was wrong was the law, and the indenturing C to the cause. C was the forgotten man, the man who paid, "the man who never is thought of."

Just be skeptical of Progressive promises since you will be the forgotten man or woman who pays the freight with your hard earned dollars.