

1935

Your Future and Your Nation

Rexford Guy Tugwell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq>

Recommended Citation

Tugwell, Rexford Guy. "Your Future and Your Nation." *New Mexico Quarterly* 5, 3 (1935). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol5/iss3/4>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Quarterly by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Your Future and Your Nation

By REXFORD GUY TUGWELL*

YOU WHO are graduating now from college have reached your commencement at a time of crisis. Your country in the years just ahead will be deciding in what sense of the word it is a nation; and whether it shall control the exploitation of human beings and of natural resources or whether it shall succumb to the anarchic economic forces which are loosed in the absence of those controls. If this crisis were war, as the last great one was, you would be required to serve actively in one way or another and you would have to live out the rest of your lives in the kind of world determined by its consequences. Constitutional crises may seem to you less dramatic and problems of conservation less immediate, than actual war with its call to training, its movement to the scene of conflict, its dangers and its hardships. But they are just as serious, just as full of consequence for future years; and the obligation to participate in them is even greater. Your physical aid would be wanted in war; it is your spiritual aid which is wanted now.

The issue we face is not one which is new. It has been awaiting an answer for many years. Meanwhile we have temporized on the advice of those who said that our governance lay in a flexible constitution. It has now become obvious that the flexibility of which we heard was an imputed attribute of the judicial mind. They were poor prophets who said that the powers of the union would always be sufficient to control an industry which threw its iron body across the country, to require of it decency, the duties of service, and co-operative efforts to lift our levels of living. They have turned out not to exist when we need them most. And the question before our people, the only question worth discussing now, is whether we shall once for

* Commencement address by Dr. R. G. Tugwell, Under Secretary of Agriculture, at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, June 10, 1935.

all say that national questions shall have national solutions. Considerations, such as party politics, or regional aggrandizement, or power and place for any man or group of men are perhaps tolerable when the issues of day-to-day legislation or administration are involved. I ask you to regard what I say now as something apart from these; and something, too, about which we can be deadly serious. No man ever kept his temper or his sense of humor in an earthquake. It would be incredible effrontery if he did. And this is no time to be casual or humorous about the state of the nation. The social system into which you have thought you might grow, the economic arrangements from which you have expected employment and opportunity, the modern fact of nationality, itself, have suddenly been called in question. We are exposed to dangers of internal strife. And all of us are called on to do our part.

You have learned from your books and your teachers, from your experience of life and work what this modern world is like. You know about its drawing together, the shortening of time and space. You know about industry and labor; how the demand for shoes and clothes in your region keeps the factories going in New England; how your wool and your cattle are of consequence to the South; how the labor conditions which cause a strike in Detroit set you afoot in New Mexico; how the markets for goods and securities affect the living of every citizen. This is the familiar stuff of life to you. You have expected that there would always be sufficient wisdom among statesmen to see that citizens everywhere had protection when their livings and their liberties were in jeopardy. When farmers suffer from the long grind of low prices for their products they have come to believe that there is a remedy against this man-made fate. Growers of wheat in Kansas or growers of cotton in Mississippi no longer expect to trust State action to secure higher prices in New York or Massachusetts. Nor is State action expected by workers and by citizens gen-

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [135

erally to protect their common interests; the belief is that the generalizing and equitable hand of the Federal Government will adjust and conciliate, securing to each his liberty and to each group its rights, because only the Federal government reaches from source to market of goods and from the furnishing to the sale of services.

Economists invariably regard demand as the beginning of what grows to be a cycle of consumption, production, exchange and distribution. When conditions in Chicago are such that demand is stopped, production, wherever it may take place, is also stopped. If production stops, raw materials must cease to move from every part of the country, exchange is interrupted, and there are no goods and services to be distributed. And if there is no distribution there can be no demand because there is no income with which to buy. These processes occur in these times on a gigantic scale. The economic structure is a far-flung and delicate network of interrelationships held together by customs which have grown more complex and more sensitive as time has passed. No thread of this network can be touched anywhere without causing the whole fabric to quiver even at its outmost frontiers.

The price of wheat for Kansas is determined in central markets like Chicago; the demand for shoes is also partly fixed there since farmers spend their wheat money for shoes, as well as other things. But the wages of workers in shoe factories are also determined partly by what Kansas farmers can pay. So close and so delicate are these relationships and so intimately concerned with the welfare of farmers, of workers, and of citizens generally, that mismanagement or selfish withholding anywhere in the system constitutes an intolerable interruption. All these processes were once automatic in the sense that they were governed by competition; but competition was only good so long as it existed. When monopoly began to intrude, when labor began to unionize, when markets came to be controlled, interference

to restore the smooth flow of the process had to be resorted to.

The system became more and more vulnerable to this kind of interference, too, as the scale widened, as relationships became more interwoven and delicate, as markets became more determinant, and as financial controls were tightened. Long ago we began to suppress monopoly; but this did not preclude large-scale operations, the control of prices or the centralized management of credits. And these were the forces which had to be made to function in the general interest. The government long ago entered these fields in one way or another because it had to. This was, of course, resented by those who, if the government did not do these things, could manage them for their own profit. No one objects to others' profits provided the getting of them is consistent with the other purposes of the economic system. And only to that extent, and very reluctantly, has regulation been approved. But the system has so obviously required co-operation, it has so obviously extended itself over wide areas and with such intricate relationships, that governmental bodies have been forced forward in the protection of vociferous injured interests.

In this process, so familiar, so obvious to even the casual student of economics, the tendency has been to follow where the system itself led. The system grew because it became more efficient as it grew, and government had to follow or to resign itself to impotence. The issue now is whether that impotence was intended to be imposed on us by our ancestors, and whether, if it was, we are to be bound by their intention.

The existence of all the world to which your thinking and your expectations have become adjusted is now doubted. You have either to unlearn all that has seemed to you so obvious or you have to require that it shall actually come into being. For both you and your teachers have assumed too much. Because it seemed to you sensible and obvious

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [137

you have come to think that powers exist which, when in times of crises they were required, could be called upon to establish recovery from depression by correcting inequities in the system of prices, by preventing the diminution of purchasing power, by enlarging the production of goods and by protecting the weak against the strong. You have thought that Congress might do these things and you may or may not have understood that its power to do so necessarily rested on constructive extensions of the constitution. You are sufficiently familiar with the fact that the constitution was written in a time when commerce in the modern sense did not exist. And if you have considered the foundation for Federal regulation at all you have thought, perhaps, that reasonable interpretation had permitted us to grow naturally and easily into the system with which you were familiar. This is exactly what did happen. And because of this reasonableness and easy growth, and because of the optimism of liberal lawyers it was thought to be sufficient.

But some years ago, roughly about the time of the Great War, perhaps somewhat because of it, there began in this nation an industrial revolution whose profound significance is being registered in our present crisis. It increased the tempo of economic change, it precipitated the depression, and it proved to move too fast for the accommodation of judicial theory. First we found ourselves in economic ruins and now we find ourselves deprived of effective means for reconstruction. The instrument which, more than any other, was the cause of all these difficulties and later dissensions was scientific management. The idea was an invention of Frederick W. Taylor. It consisted of the injection into industrial processes of careful measurement, precision of arrangement, and analysis of materials and motions. Applied by enthusiasts as it was, it came, in conjunction with the cheapening of power and the improvement of the machines, close to making work in the old sense obsolete. It was put at the service of an industry which was operated

by independent businesses seeking profits both by higher prices and by lowered costs. Startlingly lowered costs resulted from scientific management; and at the same time, for various other reasons, and by various other inventions, more perfect ways of controlling and maintaining prices were invented. Paradoxically we came into possession all at once of a perfected instrument for raising the level of living by increased production and of another equally perfect one for preventing that increase by segregating the gains for a small group in favored controlling positions. The reasonable thing to do in such a situation is either to reverse the technical trend toward large scale and private control or to accept it and turn it definitely toward social uses. That can be done. We can have the efficiency of large operations; and this efficiency can be used to raise the levels of living.

Throughout the decade of the twenties scientific management was coming into its own. Costs of producing things were steadily being lowered; precision became a fetish; we learned to arrange various materials so that they converged on an assembly line in just the wanted amounts at exactly the required intervals; we found new sources of power, we went on inventing new materials and machines. All this might have resulted in higher wages or lower prices and so in a market which expanded as fast as did our capacity to produce. But neither happened. Our domestic market did expand somewhat, but not because consumers had higher incomes, only because they were able to borrow beyond their incomes. We devised a clever way, also, of expanding foreign markets which was similar. We loaned our creditors the money with which to buy our goods; and we loaned them far more than was warranted by their capacity to pay.

This policy of expanding production but not income had its fated consequence in 1929. And we then began to examine with frightened haste the possible causes for calamity in

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [139

the midst of prosperity. We had not lost our power, our machines, or our science of management. Our factories were just where they had been; our workers as skillful as ever—but everything was paralysed. Those who might buy were everywhere burdened with the debts of past buying. The treasuries of corporations were loaded with sterile profits—sterile because corporations consume surplus only in preparation for enlarged production. As we surveyed the wreck we could see that the gains of those immensely prosperous years had gone for purposes other than enlarging the needed market for goods, and that the paralysis was largely induced by the failure of prices to reach such an adjustment that the general distribution of goods could occur. Surpluses of goods began to pile up, especially in agriculture where production ordinarily goes on regardless of markets or prices. But in other industries the failure of buying power was met by shutting down. And our magnificent plant came to a standstill. It could produce few goods because the ability to acquire them was restricted.

Formerly such crises were met by gradual readjustment. Bankruptcy cared for debts; prices were lowered to meet lowered incomes; surpluses found their own markets in time. In this crisis government was called on as it always must be in emergencies. But it was called on first to prevent bankruptcy rather than to readjust prices so that production might begin again. This error was at least partially corrected by the A.A.A., which moved to restore buying power to the farmers. And the NRA, though it was not used to correct industrial price inequities directly, at least moved to prevent the burden of depression from falling on the workers whose buying power was indispensable to recovery; furthermore the Emergency Relief Administration, taking as its rule the President's announced policy that no American should go hungry began at least a partial restoration of buying power.

The economic measures most needed for a quick and permanent recovery were debt adjustment and equalization of prices and working conditions throughout the whole economy of the nation. The depression did not occur in Georgia or Montana or Pennsylvania. It struck the nation everywhere with equal and cataclysmic force. It was obvious that national measures and only those could be of any help. This was a time for testing the Federal powers; the distress was great, the need immediate. The President could not wait for years of debate. He knew that millions were threatened with the loss of their homes and their livings; and he moved with a courage and skill which was everywhere applauded to bring the government into the people's service. He had a way out and he took it. And he saved the nation. Americans have not forgotten how true this is. In two years they cannot forget.

It seems now that his efforts were not well regarded by those who had formerly found it possible to use governmental powers in their own ways. And it seems that he leaned too heavily on the assumption that institutions are the instruments of human need. The formerly privileged now applaud the strict constructionists. And between them they seek to prevent the use of the only sufficient powers available for recovery from this depression or for prevention of the next one.

Aside from this presently disputed field of commerce which is so important to the integration of the industrial system, there are some other matters which are open again to question. We have been learning, in the years just past, to think in terms of a national land problem. Is it wrong to think of our greatest asset in this generalized social way? It seems to me impossible to secure the foundations of life for our successors in any other way. Drought, flood, and disaster know no local divisions. Is it improper for a foresighted Federal government to take measures for relief and even for prevention? You have not thought it wrong in this

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [141]

region to develop a national drought relief administration or to develop a grazing and land conservation policy. How would this State and this Southwest region control the cultivation of surplus acres or prevent the destructive overgrazing of your rangelands except as it was done co-operatively? There is a kind of *Gresham's law* in these matters. The worst practices triumph temporarily over the best if they are brought into competition. This kind of agricultural *laissez faire* has already reduced the productivity of hundreds of millions of acres of crop and grazing land and has strewn once productive areas with hopeless rural slums. The supporting hand of a co-operative government is needed to repair the past damage from these causes and to prevent more of it in future. Farmers who see a hope of rehabilitation see no threat to their liberties in this kind of help.

No region of the country has benefited more from the long development of Federal planning and control than has the Southwest; none needs it more in the future. The temporary tragedies of drought and flood have approached your land. The stony abandoned pastures of New England and the wasted infertile areas scattered through the South are instances of the longer and slower disasters which somehow you must escape. That soil, out of which the ancient culture of the Pueblos grew and upon which the Spanish founded a genuine civilization has to be protected from now on by strenuous measures if your present civilization is not to be undermined. For temporary tragedies relief: for permanent ones prevention: to these policies the government must remain committed.

I regard as fortunate the recent reversal of policy which will give the Navajos a new weapon in their old struggle with nature. The individualistic pattern in which it was sought to cast their problems was certainly unsuitable to a people with a strong sense of tribal and communal responsibility. They are now freed from those pressures which have created disastrous crises for them as they have

for their neighbors; the destruction of resources which threatened their civilization, may still be averted. They can now begin the arduous work of becoming once more themselves in their own ways. That, after all, is what all of us want. You yourselves have unique capacities. Other regions lack the Spanish strain which runs through your heritage. The early Spaniards had a kind of wisdom which it might be well for us to recover. They began by enslaving and destroying the native populations. But they gradually discovered better ways of perfecting laws which provided for indirect administration, with generous group autonomy, reserving to the Crown the guardianship of Indian life and lands, and forbidding the alienation of Indian lands except by the Crown itself. In New Mexico the result was the perpetuation of the Pueblo civilizations, with their lands, their languages and their civic, cultural, and religious systems. Mexico, even today, carries forward the Spanish technique as a matter of course. We of the United States can do far worse than follow the tolerance and forbearance of the Spanish administrators.

More important than this problem of inter-racial tolerance is the example of the Spanish administrators in building up the agricultural resources of the New World, including the American Southwest. On this tradition you can safely rely in approaching your present problems. There are those who think of the age of the conquistadores as one of pure romance; others think of it as a period when "merciless tyrants, bigoted inquisitors, and insatiable gold-hunters waded across the length and breadth of America through oceans of blood, burning, plundering and giving no good thing in return for the rich harvest of gold and silver that they reaped." Both of these views are incorrect, as everyone in the Southwest, who is familiar with the vestiges of that colorful past, realizes. From the outset of the Conquest the Spaniards began the great task of transplanting their culture to the New World and of course the basic element of that culture was the art of farming.

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [143]

From the first efforts were made to transplant agriculture in a very practical manner. In 1524 Cortez wrote his sovereign asking him to give orders that no ship should sail to America without bringing its cargo of plants and seeds. Said Cortez, "I have also explained to Your Caesarian Majesty the need for plants of all kinds; for every species of agriculture may flourish here; but nothing has been so far provided, and I again pray Your Majesty to order a provision from the Casa de Contratacion at Seville, so that no ship be allowed to sail without bringing a certain number of plants which would favor the population and prosperity of the country." Columbus on his second voyage brought animals for breeding purposes and seeds and slips and plants. This example was followed by subsequent explorers and conquistadores and the domestic pig, sheep, dog, goat, rabbit, and horse, were among some of the animals imported. As early as 1495, jacks, jennets, mares, cattle, pigs, sheep, rice, millet, farm laborers and gardeners, millwrights and blacksmiths, were brought. Wheat, grapes, olives, sugar cane, date palms, figs, pomegranates, were transported to the New World, as well as apples, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, quinces, mulberries, oranges, limes, and lemons, all before the year of the first English settlement in North America.

Not only did Spain bring in plants and seeds from the mother country but from the other countries of the Old World and one great authority has said that during the time of colonization no European power was spending more on agriculture than Spain. I should like here to say something about other contributions made by Spain in mining, in institutions of government, in religion, in exploration, but at best I should be rephrasing knowledge common to you all. The Spanish built the first cities, schools, and churches. They brought the first printing presses and made the first books. They wrote the first dictionary, history, and geography. They transplanted here some of the best attributes of the Old World civilization generations before the

Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock and three Spanish universities in the New World were rounding out a century of cultured existence before Harvard College was founded.

Upon this long tradition you are right to lean; it sets your region apart; it makes available to all of us a cultural heritage of immense richness. It is in this connection that I should like to pay tribute to a great conquistador of the spiritual frontier, a man who, with a Harvard education and a New England background, found a congenial atmosphere in New Mexico and who made himself so much a part of your life as to provide the most convincing evidence that here you have the resources for a moral reconstruction of our life. Knowing Bronson Cutting as I did, I was always aware that part of his strength and fineness had its source in your Southwest. He represented the aspirations which are common to American progressives; but these had a reference always to the sun and the soil of this country here. We think of the LaFollettes and Wisconsin together, as we think of Norris and Nebraska. The same relationship existed between Cutting and New Mexico. His contributions to our economic and political life had, as a consequence, this double reference also. He worked for and with this University and especially for the San Jose Training School which, under the University, is furnishing educational privileges to your Spanish Americans. He was interested, as a scholar might be, in developing the full story of the Southwest tradition. Its glamour fascinated him; he drew close to its inner meaning.

But above and beyond that his interests flowered out until they became identified with those of his nation as a whole. He was aware of nationality, possessively aware of it, and determined, as few men I know have been, to defend the right of the government to intervene when the livings and the liberties of Americans were in jeopardy. The last evening I spent with him in Washington was thus divided between our common enthusiasm for the Southwest and a learned interpretation he made for me of the pending legis-

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [145]

lation for the reform of the Federal Reserve System. The Governor of the Board, at whose home we were, confided to me afterward his astonishment at the profound understanding of a layman. It had not surprised me. It was a part of a legislative duty, a national duty and it was simply being met in the careful and serious way which we had learned to expect from Bronson Cutting.

It is appropriate that your legislators should combine their local and national interest in this way, just as it is appropriate that this institution should do so. This University has made and is making contributions of which American scholarship is rightly proud in archaeology and in a rewriting of the history of the past, a past which stretches backward for more than ten centuries. As this new organized knowledge is made available by study in the field, in the library, and in the laboratory, we shall have a new appreciation of the men who first strode with mighty steps across the pages of history in New Spain. But the University and the educated men whom it has trained can never be content to look backward. They are looking forward. The problems of land use, of Indian welfare, of preserving the heritage of aboriginal culture and civilization are the tasks of the present and future, to be based on a knowledge of the past. This institution and this generation of students and graduates, aided by trained technical and intellectual achievement, have a responsibility, a responsibility for securing the future New Mexico from the disasters which follow the destruction of the soil, from keeping the people of a proud and virile race from extermination by inappropriate controls.

Centering your interest as it is right for you to do in the issues which are meaningful for your own Southwest, you are required, also, to expand those interests to include issues which are national. Neither the culture of your Indian people nor of the descendants of the Spanish pioneers belongs to you alone. The rest of us would refuse you that monopoly even if you chose to enforce it. And on other than

cultural grounds, on economic and political ones, a rootedness in regional interests spreads up very quickly into the national air. You are part of this nation; and this nation is part of you. The interpenetration which has grown so intricate cannot be torn apart. It exists not alone for reasons of sentiment, but also because we are committed to it in practice. The question before us most vividly now is, whether for the protection of a fiction we ought to pretend that all this has not happened, that it is not really true. We have gone that tortuous way under the guidance of the lawyers, building an elaborate superstructure of institutions upon a foundation we could never clearly see but which we were told existed. This was the great error. Either we should not have allowed this interpretation to occur or we should have made sure that nothing could happen which would savagely tear it apart. I think we shall no longer be willing to move blindly forward in a fog of casuistry.

Now if ever your generation is required to assume the full stature of Americans, to regard not only your rootedness but also the sun, the air, the water, and the soil of your environment as a definition of your sphere of interest. You can make good the commitments of your tradition; you can protect them from the destructive forces of reaction; they will in turn provide you with the kind of a world for achievement which you have a right to expect. You can have a system of institution which is as modern as the concrete and steel of our architecture, as flexible and efficient as the science of factory management; and they can be turned to the uses of the liberty, democracy and good living which are the true canons of our traditions. But you cannot have these things by default. You will have to create them. And having created them you will have to stand by to protect and nurse them, and perhaps to recreate them, as conditions change again and again.

And so you have a responsibility which is larger than that of state or regional wisdom. We are all of us Ameri-

YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR NATION [147

cans; our deepest and truest impulses go out to the service of the Nation. I have tried to convey to you my profound uneasiness concerning the shaping of our immediate future. I have tried to say that this undramatic crisis is quite as great as one of war. I have said it, of course, in the hope that you might be stirred to genuine consideration of the policies we must now make and follow. It will be your future and your Nation. It is not too soon for your participation in a more than academic way. Your help is genuinely needed in this moment of choice.