two first prove a point which can be equally well argued in abstract intellectual terms.

To say this is by no means to say that these dramatists should have written otherwise. The only culture or "ideology" which they could have taken for granted was one whose vitality was already exhausted, and their choice was probably limited to a choice between mere conventionality and the sort of pioneering work which they chose to do. The time was out of joint; but, as an artist, any one of them might have been forgiven for exclaiming, "Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right." It was the necessity for doing just that which made it necessary for even Ibsen, surely the greatest of the group, to spend much of his time either in the effort to establish his premises or in the composition of works bound to lose their interest as soon as they should have accomplished their purpose.

Though he never, as far as I know, made any public profession of the fact, it is evident that Shaw came to realize at last that his pioneering work had been finished. However backward society may have continued to be, and however superficial the acceptance of "advanced ideas" may have remained, audiences were, nevertheless, ready to accept plays written from the Shawian point of view. The next step was obviously to abandon the effort to propagandize these ideas and actually to write the plays which their acceptance made possible. To Shaw's credit it must be said that from "Saint Joan" on that is exactly what he attempted to do. Perhaps most of the later plays were not very good. Perhaps they were conspicuously less successful in achieving their purpose than the early ones had been in achieving a different purpose. But the intention was admirable. The premises of a newer drama had been established and, logically, the next task of the dramatist was to create that drama.

Next week I shall discuss what the premises of the new drama were and also to what extent the American playwrights of the decade just past succeeded in building a significant literature upon them.

Roosevelt's Hollow Triumph

By PAUL W. WARD

WASHINGTON, August 29

The first session of the Seventy-fourth Congress—which would have ended August 24 instead of two days later had not the President of the United States been caught trying to work both sides of the street in the cotton business—added at least a dozen items to Franklin D. Roosevelt's already long list of lost opportunities, hacked several cubits from his public stature, and left in its wake no clear-cut issues of its own devising to dominate the 1936 campaign.

All the victories it gave Roosevelt were empty ones, judged by the New Deal's pretensions, and the fault for that lies in him. As President—though the Constitution deny it—he is the nation's chief legislator, and as President, he is leader of a party that had more than a two-thirds' majority in both houses of Congress. In addition, he had at his command the biggest bangle-bag of patronage in history, and on top of that he had the blessing of the American people, bestowed in overwhelming fashion at the polls just two months before the session began. He was in position, therefore, to push through Congress anything he wanted and in whatever form he wanted it.

What use did he make of that power? What did he obtain from the Congress besides a peace-time record total of more than $10,000,000,000 in appropriations, nearly a tenth of which was dedicated to the anomalous purpose of implementing his "friendly-neighbor" policy by building the army and navy to unprecedented size? In the coming months you will be told over and over again that he wielded his power with almost fiendish skill and that Congress granted him every wish—for it is plain that he plans to make success his campaign issue. Each bill he asked for and received will be listed, but only by name, for on closer examination the hollowness of each will be patent.

What he got was a works program that already is a shambles, a social-security bill that is little more than a compulsory-savings device imposed upon the poor and a dead weight upon the capitalist economy he seeks to buoy up, a tax bill that can be called nothing less than disgraceful, and a banking bill that, completely evading the need for fundamental reforms in the banking structure of the nation, vests in a demonstrably irresponsible Administration vast powers for doing evil and only the most tenuous ones for doing good. Attempts also will be made to chalk up to his credit the Wagner labor-disputes bill, which had to be forced upon him, and the mandatory neutrality resolution, which he openly fought, only to reverse his position when it became apparent that the populace interpreted his stand as one opposed to neutrality per se and that he therefore was endangering his chances of reelection. Subsequently he demonstrated in his protest note to Russia, a document into which he himself is understood to have inserted the "most serious consequences" threat, that proponents of the mandatory resolution were sound in their distrust of his ability to handle foreign relations with a circumspect regard for the dangerous delicacy of the present international situation and no regard whatever for the screams of William Randolph Hearst.

He obtained what amounts to a complete vindication from Congress of his agricultural program through amendments designed to safeguard the AAA from court attack, but in the process that riches-through-scarcity device was converted from an emergency to a permanent program, and the plainly unconstitutional and anti-social Bankhead (cotton) and Kerr-Smith (tobacco) compulsory-control acts were made a part of the organic Adjustment Act. Furthermore, under sectional pressure and with the help of that great champion of states' rights, individualism, the Constitution, and windbaggery, William E. Borah, there was inserted in the Adjustment Act the Bailey-Warren scheme for curtailing potato production so that the price of this staple may be pushed upward as the price of pork—"the
workingman's meat"—has been pushed upward. Meanwhile, in the face of continued opposition from publishers fearful that honest advertising cannot also be lucrative, Roosevelt deftly dropped out the back window the pure-food-and-drug bill, which might at least have caused quality to keep abreast of prices in their rise.

Refusing to take a firm stand in the matter of revising the NRA so that it would stand some chance of fulfilling its pretensions, he asked only that its life be extended two years and then left Congress to flounder in a morass of conflicting instructions from the White House until the Supreme Court's decision in the Schechter case was handed down. Whereupon, after assuring labor leaders that he would fight not only the implications of the court's decision but also its immediate consequences, he threw in the sponge, ran, and kept on running—pausing only to toss a few reassurances to industrialists that the NRA's death had not revived the anti-trust laws—until the eve of Congress's adjournment. Then, cautiously, he turned back, hoping to restore himself to the good graces of those who had damned him for his flight—and also to double his reassurances to the industrialists—by suggesting that certain Congressional committees attempt this fall to devise a plan for saving "such social and economic advantages as were gained" from the NRA.

Meanwhile, under pressure from a labor and industry lobby, he had pushed through Congress the economically indefensible Guffey coal-stabilization bill, an elaboration of the NRA bituminous coal code with a punitive tax added for enforcement purposes, but had refused to back legislation for federal regulation of the oil industry, though it was urged in the public interest by a member of his Cabinet, Secretary Ickes. As a result, according to competent observers, there is in the making another wasteful orgy of oil production in which crude prices will be beaten down, independent companies will be forced through the financial wringer by the Rockefeller, Mellon, and Sinclair interests, and oil stocks will be sent crashing—all to the end that insiders may reap fat profits on the rebound which will follow the consequent revival of agitation for federal regulation.

By facing both ways at once Roosevelt also brought about the death of legislative efforts to instil some measure of decency into the merchant-marine subsidies, though he had proclaimed loudly his intention of putting an end to the scandalous situation there existing. On the other hand, prodded by the stupendous sincerity and zeal of Norris in the Senate and the uncompromising militancy of Maverick in the House, he stood firm on the TVA and won a pluperfect victory in the fight to strengthen this best of New Deal measures.

Then, a whole flock of his chickens suddenly having come home to roost, he led the Congress into one of the most nauseous demonstrations of political chicanery and selfish sectionalism that ever provided the grand finale for a Congressional session. Snared by his own price-boasting theories, he found himself under intense pressure from Southern Congressmen to continue the federal loans to planters by which he had pegged the price of cotton at twelve cents. Simultaneously, he found himself under equally intense pressure from textile manufacturers and from middlemen, whose profits depend on volume, to remove the price peg. Wallace, Davis, and other Agricultural Department officials joined in privately urging the latter course upon him from a third viewpoint—the public interest. But the political price of adopting that course was more than Roosevelt was willing to pay and, characteristically, he resorted to compromise.

Just forty-eight hours before Congress was scheduled to adjourn he announced his plan. There would be a continuance of the cotton loan—at nine cents, however, instead of twelve—but the growers would be "assured" of getting at least twelve cents through a federal bounty representing the difference between that figure and the average price at which they actually sold their cotton. This bounty was, in effect, an export subsidy, for it was explained that by lowering the actual selling price of cotton it was hoped to increase exports of the staple; it mattered little to Mr. Roosevelt that on the previous day a Cabinet committee including Wallace and Hull had emphatically rejected the textile industry's plea for an export subsidy for cotton goods on the ground that it would produce retaliatory measures by other countries.

Announcement of the plan brought screams from cotton-state Senators, including two of Roosevelt's own legislative field marshals, "Cotton Ed" Smith and Byrnes of South Carolina. Standing shoulder to shoulder with George of Georgia, they swore on the floor of the Senate that Roosevelt had promised all three faithfully that if the Bankhead act were reenacted—as it was—he would continue the twelve-cent loan, and on the strength of his pledge they had assured the cotton industry, merchants, brokers, mill men, and bankers that it would be safe for them to make commitments on the twelve-cent basis. For weeks they had been issuing public assurances of that kind each time the cotton market sagged. Loudly now they damned the White House for breach of faith and for failure to consult Members of Congress from the cotton-growing states before advancing the new plan, which, they said, could bring only ruin in its wake. The plan itself was fraudulent, they argued, in that it would not assure the growers a twelve-cent return. It would, they said, work especial hardship on the thousands of tenant farmers and share-croppers who, receiving not cash but commissary credits for their crops, would not be sellers within the meaning of the plan and therefore would not receive the bounty. (Incidentally, the Bankhead tenant-farmer bill, which was to have been the Administration's remedy for the cruelties its crop-control program had worked among share-croppers, was allowed to die in the House.) It soon appeared, however, that the ruin these Senators most feared was their own political ruin; privately they predicted their own defeats in the 1936 elections if the plan were not abandoned. Their places would be taken, they said, by such gentility as Talmage of Georgia and Cole Blease of South Carolina, and Huey Long would run Joe Robinson, the majority leader, not only out of the Senate but also out of Arkansas.

With Robinson's aid they turned upon the White House and blocked adjournment by attaching to the third deficiency bill—carrying the social-security, labor board, railroad pensions, and similar appropriations—a rider calling for a mandatory twelve-cent loan on cotton. To force support from grain-state Senators, they also tacked on a provision for a mandatory ninety-cent loan on wheat, although
September 11, 1935] The Nation 295

a price of $1 or better seems assured on wheat and the provision could have only the psychological effect of making its opponents appear to be foes of the wheat farmers. The show grew more noxious as leaders refused to let the loan riders come to a vote in the House. On the surface, their position was that of a tyrannical little clique defying democratic process. Actually, the riders had little chance in the House, where the populous industrial states have proportionately much greater representation than in the Senate. But what really dictated the stand of the House leaders was the terror of cotton-state Congressmen; they were afraid to vote on the issue.

Adjournment was blocked and the issue hung fire over Sunday. On Monday Roosevelt dissuaded the advice of the AAA’s experts, yielded to political expediency, and made a deal with the cotton-state Senators. Stuffing it down the throats of his non-partisan advisers, he revised his cotton plan, boosted the loan to ten cents, and put the bounty on a basis where, if the immense administrative difficulties ever can be overcome, the planters will be assured a net return of twelve cents for their cotton, that is, the landlords will get twelve cents, but not the share-croppers. In return for his surrender, the third deficiency bill was to be cleaned of its riders and sped through Congress, and both houses were to adjourn. That part of the deal was never consummated.

Huay Long, seizing the opportunity to grab the adjournment headlines, broke it up with a filibuster. Bidding for the political strength that goes to any man who can demonstrate eminence in Congress, no matter how attained, and posing as one determined to prevent the Democratic majority in both houses from selling out the wheat farmers by letting the trick wheat-loan amendment die, he held the floor until Congress automatically adjourned at midnight. He was aided by Administration Senators and by Vice-President Garner, who snatched at the opportunity to smash the Kingfish by firing at him questions designed to make it appear that he alone was killing the third deficiency bill with its social-security and railroad-pension appropriations, though until that afternoon, when Roosevelt willed, they themselves had been willing to see it die. Until the clock struck twelve, they peppered Huay with adjurations on the plight in which he was leaving “crippled children,” “widowed mothers,” “the blind,” and “the aged.”

In the days that followed immediately upon adjournment the White House took up the fight to bring the Kingfish to the political guillotine by the same spurious device. Ostentatiously Roosevelt held conferences on how to get around the financial tangle produced by the third deficiency bill’s death. Strangely enough, a way was quickly found to finance everything but the social-security program. The impasse there was well advertised, with emphasis laid upon the fact that the appropriation involved amounted to $76,000,000. No mention was made of the fact that FERA funds were readily available to meet any distress—and, for that matter, any other need—caused by the appropriation’s death, and Roosevelt as cautiously dodged questions designed to bring out that no appreciable part of the fund would have been expended before Congress reconvenes in January, had it been made available.

This, then, was what he got from Congress—a string of what the sports writers call “moral victories” when they allude to defeats that might have been worse. One need not look far for the reason. The trouble lies largely in the fact that Roosevelt did not know what he wanted, and when Congress reconvened on January 3 he had ready for it only a lot of fulsome generalities. Months of conferring with his advisers had yielded no definite program, for he had not then—and has not yet—been able to decide what kind of a country we should have. He attempted to disguise his indecision and his lack of preparation by tackling one problem at a time and sending a separate message on each to Congress whenever the spirit moved him, but his plight early was made plain in his message that produced the $4,880,000,000 work-relief bill. Meanwhile, he had made a half-hearted attempt to obtain American participation in the World Court, and being uncertain as to whether it was worth the bother, had accepted defeat with a laugh.

His insincerity in this instance was to have a later sequel when, after vetoing the bonus bill, he erased the last vestige of his Economy Act by signing the Spanish-American war veterans’ pension measure. His lieutenants in Congress, as well as officials of the Veterans’ Bureau, had fought the bill, advancing logical arguments in support of their fight, which he himself had ordered. When the bill passed, he forgot the arguments.

His refusal to elaborate the work-relief bill by providing Congress with the details of what he planned to do with the gargantuan appropriation kept Congress embattled over the measure for approximately 100 days, or nearly half the session. That refusal was skilfully represented to the public at the time as a gallant fight to keep Congress from converting the bill into a pork-barrel measure. Subsequent events have shown he refused merely because he had no plan. The only theory behind the bill, it since has developed, was that Congress and big business might resist a huge appropriation for direct relief but would swallow one for something called “work.” Hand in hand with that theory went a Presidential conviction that in 1936, when his campaign battle cry must be something like “Keep on Succeeding with Me,” it would be embarrassing to have 4,000,000 families on “relief.” Ergo, the thing to do was to provide them with “work.” What matter it if this “work” were precisely what members of more than 2,000,000 of those families had been doing on “relief”? The name would be changed from “work” to “jobs”; instead of “relief” pay in proportion to their needs, the workers would receive a “security” wage; business men would be grateful for this undermining of wage rates in private employment; and when the “work” gave out the workers could be dumped back on the barbaric poor laws of the various states and the Roosevelt Administration would be rid of its chief budgetary dilemma.

If the “security” wage and relief issues rise up to plague him in the 1936 campaign—as they threaten to do—Roosevelt will strive to smother the clamor with apostrophes on his social-security program, which he regards as “monumental” but which, in reality, represents only another of his lost opportunities. Brought into being with great ballyhoo and laborious preparations, it comprises an ugly amalgam of social-insurance systems in the primitive form in which they were instituted in Europe years ago, which, despite subsequent improvements, never have produced security. In Roosevelt’s program, improvements will be difficult because
it relies upon supplementary legislation by the states. It represents a social point of view less enlightened than that of the Iron Chancellor, Bismarck, who forty years ago in Germany recognized that the state must bear some of the cost of social insurance; under Roosevelt, the worker must bear all.

There is good reason to believe that Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the measure dwindled rapidly between June, 1934, when he notified Congress he would have a great social-security program ready for it at the next session, and the date of its actual passage. The experts called in to draft the bill were sequestered, their findings and advice ignored. Even the council of industrialists, scholars, welfare workers, and A. F. of L. leaders who were asked to present the public as advisers took a too progressive view to suit the New Deal's creator, and so did his Cabinet committee, which, after paring down the advisory council's recommendations, found its own recommendations still further whittled by the President.

Next to the work-relief and the social-security bill stands the supplementary tax bill as a Rooseveltian lost opportunity. Though his Treasury Department bulged with statistical proof of the ghastly injustices in the existing tax system, he resorted to pure flimflam. He sent to Congress a resounding message, written, it is rumored, by Raymond Moley and designed solely to steal the thunder of Huey Long, Dr. Townsend, and other Share-the-Wealtbers without snaring any of the lighting. He had intended merely to have his message treated as subject matter for consideration at the next session of Congress and, in the meantime, to garner the political fruits of his noble sentiments, knowing full well that major legislation is religiously eschewed by Congress in an election year. But he misconceived, found himself compelled to order immediate action, and then plunged on into a performance so cheap and shoddy that it won the scorn of both those who hailed his tax message and those who should have been grateful for the subsequent collapse of his move to boost their taxes.

In the midst of his abortive crawling to escape the issue which he himself had precipitated, he put on one of those episodes which explain his personal unpopularity among Congressional leaders. After instructing his legislative field marshals to attach his tax program to the nuisance-tax bill and push it through Congress within the week, he met the storm of protest this aroused by publicly and vehemently denying he had ordered such a course. He thereby made liars out of Senators Robinson and Harrison, who had announced his instructions on the White House steps. They writhed but kept silent. They are loyalists, if not New Dealers, and, besides, the experience was not new to them. As the men chiefly responsible for guiding Administration measures through the Senate, they had been balked more than once by the discovery that various of their colleagues had been given pictures of the President's attitude on vital questions quite different from the pictures Roosevelt himself had given them. Nor were they the only ones. Whereas Harrison was battered about in this fashion on the tax bill and the NRA extension bill, the choleric Carter Glass had been tossed about on the work-relief and banking bills; Wagner on the labor-disputes bill; Black and Copeland on the ship-subsidy bills; Clark, Schwellenbach, Pitman, and Bone on the munitions and neutrality bills—to mention only a few. Members of the House had had similarly bewildering and conflicting experiences.

Roosevelt is rather proud of his ability to send delegations from conflicting sides away persuaded that each has its complete sympathy and support. Blissfully he disregards the chaotic effect this little conceit has on the legislative process. It makes it easy for Old Dealers among the Democrats to throw monkey wrenches into the machinery and still claim to be supporting the President, and that factor is a vital one, for virtually all the key posts in the House and Senate are held, as a result of seniority, by hardened veterans from the most backward Southern states. Proclaiming their fidelity to the President's wishes, reactionary members of the majority whittled away the core of almost every major bill, while the ragtag and bobtail of both houses trotted at their heels and progressive members struggled to get Roosevelt to fight. When they succeeded at all, their success was short-lived. All the opposition had to do was to prolong the fight until it threatened to carry over into 1936 and create a campaign issue. Politicians themselves, they knew that Roosevelt was too much a politician to welcome any save fictitious issues in an election year.

Among the other memorable developments of the session just ended were the defeat of the anti-lynching bill at the hands of the men who are the Administration's stalwarts in the Senate; the death of the Tydings-McCormack disaffection bill, drafted by the War and Navy departments without objection from Roosevelt; the parallel death of that other monstrosity, the Kramer anti-sedition bill; and the lack of staunch Administration support for the Labor Department's bill to humanize the deportation laws and the consequent defeat of that measure. Organized labor is preparing to revive at the next session the Black thirty-hour-week bill, which was reported favorably in both houses but never reached a vote, and there is a similarly powerful movement along lines suggested by the O'Mahoney (A. F. of L.) bill, creating a federal incorporation law and licensing all industries moving goods across state lines. The railroad-pension bill was not passed until Roosevelt withdrew his opposition, maintained until his social-security program—with its relatively miserly pension system—had been passed and duly blessed.

At this writing Roosevelt has not yet acted on the revised Frazier-Lemke farm-mortgage moratorium act, which awaits his signature or veto. With mortgage-foreclosure riots again cropping out in the grain belt, this measure is part of a situation which seems certain to provide the chief bona fide issue of the 1936 campaign, one which may drastically alter the drift of American government. Agriculture once more is on the warpath, and only the Supreme Court can keep the peace. Out in Iowa farmers are building a $100,000 fund for a court attack against the protective tariff on constitutional grounds, in retaliation for industry's legal assaults, on similar grounds, against AAA processing taxes. If the Supreme Court agrees with numerous members of the lower judiciary and holds invalid not only the processing taxes but also the New Deal crop-control program in its entirety, it seems certain that the agrarian states will forget their states' rights shibboleths and clamor for constitutional reforms. To them the Supreme Court's verdict would mean: "No more benefit payments; no more price protection." There would be blood on the moon.
Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, L. P. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder’s express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.