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FROM MOTHERS’ PENSIONS TO AID TO DEPENDENT CHILDREN IN THE GREAT PLAINS
THE COURSE FROM CHARITY TO ENTITLEMENT

R. ALTON LEE

The most important third-party movement in American history emerged out of the social and economic chaos brewing in the Great Plains in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The maelstrom, labeled Populism, contained a powerful, indeed a truly revolutionary message—that man was his brother’s keeper. This concept proved to have consistent influence in America, dating from the Populists, through the Progressives and the New Deal depression era, to the Great Society of the 1960s. Henry Loucks of South Dakota, one-time president of the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union and chairman of the Populist convention in Omaha in 1891, labeled his group’s primary functions as being social, educational, financial, and political. He constantly emphasized that maintaining the principles of Populism was more important than gaining political office, and he was successful in this struggle for several elections by pursuing a policy in opposition to fusion with the Democrats.1

Loucks lost control in 1896, though, when the Populists insisted on collaborating with the Democrats. This unity failed to coalesce sufficiently, and William Jennings Bryan led his party to a narrow defeat, sparking the downfall of the Populist Party. Many of the more radical members joined the Socialist Party while the majority returned to their previous political allegiances. The Progressive movement arose out of the ashes of Populism, and its leaders proceeded to enact many of the agrarian reforms the People’s Party had advocated.2

A sea change in the evolution of public policy toward the poor emerged around the turn of the century. The ancient concept,

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emphasized by the biblical injunction that “the poor always ye will have with you” (John 12:8), convinced man over the centuries that the poor were lazy or incapable, and if they could not support themselves, they would have to be confined to poor farms or poorhouses, out of public sight, and survive on philanthropy or perish. Slowly, Progressives began to empathize with the children of mothers who had lost their breadwinner husbands through desertion or death in the factory system and needed monetary assistance to feed their sometimes quite numerous progeny. The family financial condition was not the fault of the mother or the children, Progressives argued, and it was in the long-term interest of society that the offspring be educated and nourished by a loving mother who should always be available to care for them. The Progressive movement subsequently spawned numerous reforms that the Populists had originated or would have supported. These included promulgation of child labor laws that established maximum hours, prohibited hazardous work conditions, and prevented poor children from being apprenticed to clean public restrooms in order to survive. In addition, most states imposed standards of maximum hours and minimum wages for working women, and “Mothers’ Pensions,” part of the new social welfare policy that became a precursor of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) of the Social Security Act of 1935. The impact of these changes is still felt today in the continuing debate over the role of government in the health and welfare of the people.

EARLY CHANGES

The change began with interest in war orphans dating from the Civil War. A belief in treating children differently from adults resulted in campaigns to remove orphans from almshouses and place them in kinder institutions. Schools, such as Mercer in Pennsylvania, were established for the purpose of educating destitute children of slain Union soldiers. Ohio also provided food and shelter for their Civil War orphans. A national law in 1862 provided pensions for widows, orphans, and other dependents of slain soldiers. Then the growth of urbanization and alterations in the attitudes of disaffected rural components, along with dissatisfaction with orphanages and objections to institutional regimentation, further affected this postwar thinking. Different groups of reformers tried various approaches to solving the problem of broken or poverty-stricken homes. Some states developed foster home programs to remove children from orphanages. The handling of problem children led to the creation of juvenile courts. The failure to protect children in the workplace initiated the development of child labor laws and compulsory education provisions. By the turn of the century most of these efforts focused on preserving the family. Reformers believed children should attend school and receive nutritious meals, which meant preserving and supporting the home. The mother should maintain her home to provide these benefits for her children. In addition, many juvenile judges had concluded that the children who became “bad” did so because their working mothers did not have the time to supervise or care for them. Many reformers saw mothers’ pension plans as the embodiment of social insurance principles. As the Industrial Revolution made child labor less vital to the northern capitalist, the home and childhood came to be seen increasingly as a separate stage in the life cycle. The development of the whole child became more important. Reformers began to see that the growing numbers of poor single mothers and their children were becoming too great a burden for private charity or the old system of public assistance. A different approach was needed.

Women reformers who led this movement sought both uplift for “the unfortunate” and a role for themselves either as “objects of gratitude or figures of authority.” Unlike their male counterparts, female reformers “needed to be legitimated for their public sphere activism” by gaining both “respect and status.” As Jane Addams explained the settlement house movement in 1892, women had “a subjective necessity” for their reform activities. The awareness
of cruelty to children in the 1870s led to “placing out” children in foster care. By the turn of the century, this concern had evolved into a desire to help retrieve these children from institutions and to assist their mothers in caring for them.7

THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

Societal leaders saw a definite need to help widows with children who had lost their breadwinner through death, desertion, permanent disability, prison, or other circumstances. This extension of social insurance principles spread like “wildfire,” as reformers, influenced by the newly emerging public philosophy, quickly coalesced around the movement and pressed it to enactment in state legislatures. “It promised to be cheap and morally uplifting, while raising no specter of dissolute male misfits lining up for their monthly liquor money.” Besides, the pension costs were quite similar to the outlay of breaking up families and institutionalizing the children. The movement received a great stimulus from President Theodore Roosevelt’s White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children in 1909.8

Roosevelt opened his conference by presenting the economic plight of these “widows.” He offered the goal of helping the mother to “keep her own home and keep the children in it, that is the best thing possible for the child.” The question of whether to make this assistance available from public or private sources, he left up to the conferees. Their legacy of fourteen points proved to be the foundation of several future reforms, including the highly important Children’s Bureau, created within the Department of Labor, and Mothers’ Pensions.9

Reformers initially had high hopes for the Children’s Bureau, but Congress chronically underfunded it and the agency seldom functioned as expected. Congress charged it with investigating “all matters pertaining to the welfare” of children of all classes, “but [it] only infrequently met expectations” because of the lack of financial support. It had an annual budget of $25,640 to support its staff—a chief, an assistant, a statistician, two special agents, and nine clerks—and thus was limited in choosing its investigations. Julia Lathrop, the first chief, therefore focused her bureau’s activities on infant mortality and birth registration.10

Reformers increasingly concluded that poverty often was caused by inequities in society, not by personal defects of the poor, and that their situation was not the result of laziness but of business cycles or other explainable phenomenon beyond their control. As they had done with other aspects of society, reformers began analyzing poverty scientifically and insisting its eradication should be approached through expansion of public welfare, which could command the mobilization of the entire community. Public welfare should be professionalized and the trained professional worker’s expertise brought to bear to attack the source of poverty through scientific social action. Families should not be broken up because of poverty alone. The destitute mother, President Roosevelt had asserted, should be assisted in keeping her family together, by whatever means.11

Some critics viewed Mothers’ Pensions as a design to “forestall disturbances among unemployed and poorly paid workers during times of economic distress and to maintain a large supply of low-paid workers during times of prosperity.” Two social work historians saw the conflict as “a contest between two concepts of social control: traditional laissez-faire self-help and the second by the emerging concept of preventive child-saving, which sought to eliminate child labor and child prostitution and improve nutritional and educational opportunities, and preserve families intact.” “Worthy widows” might be assisted in maintaining their homes and caring for their children with regular financial support. Most of these programs required the mother to be “a fit person, physically, mentally, and morally” to raise her children properly. Mothers subsequently discovered, among other things, this entailed attending church regularly. Many states that offered Mothers’ Pensions did so because of a communal guilt feeling of responsibility for
the husband's death on the job or his failure to earn sufficient wages to provide for his family, or because his death was due to preventable accident. Most of these state laws gave counties the choice of deciding whether or not to participate. Most of the states in the Great Plains, at least at the beginning, tended to charge their county courts with administering these programs.12

The quest for mothers' aid, or welfare to help raise children, raised questions that still dominate present welfare policy discussions. How can single mothers be helped without encouraging single motherhood? Who was deserving? Who should also be required to work? What if the mother and children could not survive on the small pension and the pitiful wages she could earn? Did this pension entitle the state to police the recipients' behavior? What is the difference between an entitlement and charity? Does this welfare entitle the state to inspect the home? Should the recipients bear the stigma of poor relief? Could this pension be considered wages for the mothers' efforts to raise citizens for the state? Would these pensions ultimately subvert women's fallacy of dependence upon men?13

**Mother's Pensions Promoted**

No one wanted to make pensions too easy for recipients to acquire. The usually meager stipend forced many widows into another marriage or into peripheral areas of the economy. At least one-third of them were forced to seek employment. They cleaned houses, took in washing, and did various types of sewing, areas typically considered “woman's work.” Reformers warned that maintaining these jobs of breadwinner as well as being a mother was “more than the average woman could bear.” If the situation continued, “the home crumbles” and “the physical and moral well-being of the mother and the children is impaired and seriously menaced,” according to a popular magazine. “Even a poor home,” said another, “offers a better chance for the child's development than an excellent institution.” Usually the widow was the recipient of sympathy, as she had no control over the death of her husband. None but the unfeeling viewed these pensions as a dole but rather saw them as a payment for services.14

Two major women's organizations, the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Congress of Mothers, gave inestimable assistance to the movement. These groups were supported by a sense of “woman's influence in an emerging industrial system that created a new social hierarchy, new social conditions, and altered values.” Using their increasing leisure time and newfound Victorian mores, women sought to impose on society the values of home, family, and chastity that they had long defended. These associations also condemned comics, cigarettes, intemperance, and motion pictures, because they contributed to the depravity of the poor and of recent immigrants.15

Even more than the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Congress of Women strove to promote the pension movement, endorsing the concept at its annual convention in 1911, two years after Roosevelt's summons. In cooperation with their local clubs, their Parent-Teacher Association (PTAs) held “study” sessions, presented bills to legislatures on the subject, and lobbied for their reforms. Members of the National Consumers League, who were younger, better educated, and had a higher social status, also supported women’s and children’s social legislation, including Mothers' Pensions. They formed special leagues or other support groups to lobby for improvements. Individuals such as Rabbi Stephen Wise lent their considerable prestige and influence to promote the legislation.16

The *Delineator*, edited by novelist Theodore Dreiser, was a popular magazine for women, published by the makers of Butterick fashions. It was sold both through subscriptions and in stores across the country along with Butterick patterns for women's dresses. The magazine featured fashion, literature, and civic affairs and was the third-largest women's magazine in the nation, with a circulation of almost one
million. Editor Dreiser was most interested in popular reforms and eagerly supported the concept of Mothers’ Pensions.  

Journalist William Hard assumed control of the magazine’s policy column in 1911 and changed its emphasis from children’s rights to legal rights of mothers. He established a new organization in the April 1912 issue called the Home League that was designed to activate women politically. In August 1912 he began a campaign to enact pension laws for mothers in the remaining states that were without them. Here he described the Mothers’ Pensions then in existence, using as a bad example the story of an ironworker killed on the job and a judge in the process of committing the widow’s seven children to various institutions. The following month he urged women to join the Home League, and through the Delineator he would keep them posted on how the reform was faring in their state as well as how they could assist the movement. His campaign continued through 1913 when other journals, such as Good Housekeeping and Colliers, took up the cause, as well as the Hearst chain of newspapers, led by Phoebe Hearst, who became a major leader of the reform.  

The Mothers’ Pensions movement went hand in hand with the suffrage effort. The legislatures that approved the pension program also endorsed women’s protective labor legislation, child labor laws, and compulsory education. In turn, the franchise for women gave impetus to these reforms. Although full women’s suffrage was not granted until 1919 in both Kansas and South Dakota, as Mark Leff observes, “the second decade of the twentieth century may have marked the height of political influence for women.” It was in this decade that much women’s and children’s protective legislation was enacted, in addition to national Prohibition. In fact, women’s groups “exerted a powerful influence” on these reforms.  

The pension movement specifically began in 1911 with the enactment of two programs, one in Illinois and the other in Missouri. Juvenile court judge E. E. Porterfield of Jackson County persuaded the Missouri legislature to enact the law for Kansas City. A few months later, juvenile court judge Merritt W. Pinckney convinced the Illinois legislature to establish a broad program that was later limited to widows and citizens, eliminating guardians and recent immigrants from the program. Then a few settlement house women, such as Jane Addams, Julie Lathrop, and Edith and Grace Abbott, took up the cause. While 1912 was an off year for many state legislatures, Nebraska and South Dakota created a mothers’ pension program during that session. The floodgates opened in 1914 when forty-two legislatures convened, twenty-seven of them considered the legislation, and seventeen enacted some form of the scheme, including Kansas and North Dakota in 1915. Almost all these plans established maximum pensions per child, defined a “proper person” in order to be an eligible mother, and required proof of “extreme poverty.” Normally, during the early twentieth century, it took two decades for twenty states to adopt a Progressive innovation, but forty states enacted Mothers’ Pensions in less than one decade, with Roosevelt’s 1909 White House conference on children having a positive impact on the movement.  

In 1913 Nebraska took the route of amending its law on juvenile courts to permit the granting of Mothers’ Pensions. The state passed a new law in 1915 allowing mothers to petition county courts for assistance if she was “a proper person” but unable to care for her children. The children would remain under her guardianship and she would be paid no more than ten dollars a month for each child. The law used “person” to include fathers and guardians of “dependent and neglected children.” In 1915 North Dakota enacted such a law as part of its Nonpartisan League program, giving mothers of children under fourteen no more than fifteen dollars each month. The mother must be a “fit” person and a resident of the county for one year, and she had to apply to the county court for inclusion in the plan. South Dakota passed its law in 1913. The county courts there would administer the law covering children under age fourteen. The act was amended in 1915 to include divorced mothers. Both laws provided for fifteen dollars monthly
for each child under fourteen. If there were more than one child, the measure required seven dollars for each younger child. The mother was allowed to work a maximum of one day per week. She must be a "proper" person "morally, physically, and mentally," and after a careful examination of the home, a report would be made to the court. A closer look at the legislative process in enacting the program in Kansas illustrates what took place in most of the Great Plains agrarian states in establishing these social justice plans.21

First, Progressive Republicans in Kansas inserted a plank in their 1912 platform. Subsequently, on January 13, 1915, House Bill 2 was introduced in the House of Representatives. One month later it was "completely revised" to read:

To provide for the partial support of mothers whose husbands are dead or who have become permanently incapacitated for work by reason of physical or mental infirmity, or confined in prisons or hospitals when such mothers have children under fourteen years of age, and are citizens of the United States of America, and residents of the county in which application for relief is made, and providing for the probationary institution, care, and supervision of the family for whose benefit such support is provided, and provide for funds therefor.22

Sixty-six Republicans, joined by nine Progressives, provided Governor Arthur Capper with "a substantial majority" in the lower house, and they passed and forwarded this bill to the forty-member senate, which the Democrats controlled by twenty-one to nineteen. The Democrats in the upper house opposed Capper's program of economy in government, and they substantially revised and expanded the measure to include:

The board of county commissioners may in their discretion allow and pay to poor persons who may become chargeable as paupers and who are of mature years and sound mind, and how from their general character will probably be benefited thereby, and also the parents of idiots, and of children otherwise helpless, requiring the attention of their parents, and are unable to provide for said children themselves, such annual allowance as will not exceed the charge of their allowance in the ordinary mode, the said board taking the usual amount of charges in like cases as the rule for making such allowance, . . . any child or children under the age of sixteen years . . . the mother being a widow, divorced . . . or abandoned . . . and bona fide resident of the county . . . and of good moral character and a fit person . . . and is financially unable to support such child or children.

These Democratic legislators appeared ready and willing to require counties to support numerous groups of society's poor, by approving the measure 31 to 1, with 8 not voting. The measure went to conference, both houses approved the conference report, and Governor Capper signed the bill on March 24, 1915.23

The senate altered the house bill by moving control of the program from the county probate judges to the county commissioners. Pensions would be recommended by a board of men and women whose decisions required approval by the county commissioners. This would permit greater privacy than would be possible with the judges. The boards would be composed of three women, one chosen by the juvenile judge, one by the county commissioners, and one by the district judge. Both the judge of the juvenile court and the chairman of the county commissioners would be members and would serve without pay. Pensions started at ten dollars per child but could not exceed twenty-five dollars for any one family. If the mother proved to be an unfit person, the court could order the children to be removed from her custody. Adoption of this pension program required a majority vote in any county. Supporters of the measure insisted this requirement would "cripple" the program.24

ADMINISTERING THE LAW

Advocates were correct in their belief that opponents would cripple the law. It was one
thing for the legislature to be generous to the poor with county funds, but another to make sure that the counties actually followed through on support for mothers. Governor Capper was soon inundated with complaints from mothers, written on scraps of paper with a pencil, who had been refused pensions. As the legislative session of 1917 opened, the governor informed the legislators that “most of the counties refused to pay these pensions.” Capper therefore was compelled to ask them to revise the law and “make it compulsory upon the counties to pay.”

Not surprisingly, abuses occurred. In July 1917 the governor received a letter, written in pencil, from a Mrs. Cora Simpson. Her husband, she said, had deserted, leaving her with children ages twelve, ten, and seven. Capper referred the letter to the editor of the newspaper in the town where the woman lived, the Lawrence Journal World. The editor discovered Mrs. Simpson was black and her husband was formerly “a porter” in Waldham’s Barber Shop in Lawrence. The editor in turn forwarded the missive to the Social Service League. That organization’s president talked to Mrs. Simpson about the letter. She insisted that she did not write it, so he concluded the author was someone who hoped the governor would sympathize and “enclose money in his reply.”

County commissioners often discredited the program by listing its provisions in their “pauper” fund, thus humiliating the applicants. The governor’s secretary responded to one mother that obtaining a mothers’ pension “ought to be a roll of honor instead of a thing discreditable to the widows.” The secretary empathized with the widow, noting that if her county clerk would “do the right thing and list your name, with others securing pensions, it will remove all proceedings with the pauper class.” Changes obviously were needed.

A bill was introduced on January 22, 1917, and on February 7 the house of representatives accepted it by vote of 88 to 9, with 28 members abstaining. “A half dozen mothers’ pension bills” had been introduced in that senate, “and serious objection had been made to all.” Senator

Frank C. Price of Clark County drew up a bill that was “simplicity itself,” and March 5 of that session was devoted to mothers’ pension bills “by special order of the senate.” After considering the house measure and others, the upper body debated the Price bill, voting for several amendments before accepting the proposal. The senate changes came on March 8 when they were accepted by a vote of 27 to 11, with 2 abstaining, and the lower house accepted these changes. Governor Capper signed the bill into law that month. The statute amended the current requirement for commissioners to grant pensions to poor people by expanding it to mothers with children sixteen years and younger. The county commissioners would appoint three qualified women “to investigate any application” and make a recommendation to the commissioners, who would determine the amount of the pension up to a maximum of thirty dollars monthly. The program was now officially established in the Sunflower State.
Pensions before the Great Depression forced financial revisions in the system. In addition, the expenditures varied widely in those counties that offered them. The movement that spread like wildfire across the nation seemed to burn out quickly, and supporters appeared to vanish within months or a few years. The reformers appeared more concerned about enacting the program than in implementing it and seeking adequate financial support to continue it. The range of the state stipends in the Great Plains ran from highs of $22.93 in North Dakota and $21.78 in South Dakota to lows of $17.81 in Nebraska and $14.05 in Kansas. In Louisiana, by contrast, the per capita expenditure was three cents. This was the basic children's aid program, penuriously financed and highly criticized, that was in effect when the Great Depression struck.  

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Apathy for the support of pensions was jarred by the reality of the depression and by demagogic proposals to solve current poverty. The Social Security Act of 1935 contained four parts, several of which had roots in the Progressive era. One part provided for Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which the Children's Bureau continued to press for. Eventually this law provided for a matching grant to state programs supervised by the Social Security Board. It was “a genuine improvement over mothers' pensions” because the monthly average benefit increased nationally from $22.51 in 1931 to $32.13 in 1939.  

As historian Linda Gordon expresses it, “mothers' aid influence did not just seep into ADC . . . it was actively transported there by a coherent network of welfare agitators” from the Progressive era. Many of the previous leaders increased their national influence during the New Deal, operating from the Children's Bureau in Frances Perkins's Department of Labor. When the depression struck, they were the “leading federal welfare promoters and—for better or for worse— their perspective determined the shape of ADC.”

Julia Lathrop and Grace Abbott were primarily responsible for bringing Mothers' Pensions into the Social Security program. ADC “only looked the same as mothers' aid; it focused on the child and failed to include any support for the mother.” In addition, federal funding was set at one-fourth, not one-third, of the total stipend. The discussions formulating ADC centered on the mother-child separation and also on the child as “having a unique claim on the state.” Another difference stemmed from the fact that by the 1930s, social work had been separated from social reform; settlement work had “settled into a mode less of reform advocacy and more of service provision.” While ADC was jointly funded by federal and state sources, little changed because both entities tended to be on the stingy side. ADC was viewed with suspicion because taxpayers continued to look upon dependent children with skepticism. A class double standard was also maintained. Women of higher education “supported careers, public sphere activism, and economic independence.” Mothers of ADC children were relegated to “domesticity and economic dependence upon men.”

Viewed through the long perspective of the development of social work, Mothers' Pensions was a phase between the nineteenth-century county poor commissioner and the New Deal's Aid to Dependent Children in the Great Plains. As Roy Lubove expressed it, the pension phase was an attempt “to transform the old archaic county agent office of coal and groceries into a real department of social service along the lines of the charity organization society.” Like many Progressive reforms, mothers' pensions were more diligently promoted as laws to be passed than as programs to be adequately funded. The strictures against helping families with unemployed but able-bodied fathers denied aid to many very needy families, so the program may also have increased the desertion rate among fathers. But more importantly, it helped alleviate the poverty of significant numbers of families. It also laid the foundation for welfare as a right or entitlement, not as a gift.
The Great Depression sorely tested these mothers' pension programs. Agricultural states, especially South Dakota, suffered a terrible second blow from devastating droughts that curtailed or halted most agricultural production during much of the 1930s. The Dirty Thirties witnessed the cessation of production of most crops on the High Plains, except Russian thistle, which served as meager forage for livestock.

The Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor conducted a survey in 1931 and found that twelve of twenty-two states with no mother's pension program gave some type of aid to poor families. This was also true for five of ten states that made no legal provision for aid when the father deserted. Thus, administrative discretion could be, and often was, made to work for these destitute families.34

OLD AGE SECURITY INSURANCE CHANGES

The Social Security Act came into being in August 1935 because New Dealers felt the need to lessen the political pressure from left-wing demagogues, such as Dr. Francis Townsend of California and Fr. Charles Coughlin of Detroit. The multidimensional law provided many routes to the modernization of social welfare. It improved the federal-state unemployment compensation program. It also assisted states' programs to help old people with monthly pensions. Also included were a tax on incomes to provide funds for retirement, or what became popularly known as Social Security, and a plan to assist states in relief of their destitute, blind, and children in need of support. The latter, which was the replacement for the mothers' pension program, became known as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC).

The national Social Security office notified the states that a single state agency must administer their program, and all assistance must consist of money payments, not goods. Kansas, like most other states, had no machinery to operate such a program, so Governor Alf Landon called a special session of the legislature in the summer of 1936, after “the [wheat] harvest,” as he put it, to propose two amendments to the state constitution to the voters. One made provision for the state to supplement the role of the county commissioners in providing relief for the needy. This change, many careful observers noted, was unnecessary because of an earlier state supreme court ruling that upheld the constitutional power of the state to provide needed relief, a ruling Landon and the Republicans wished to ignore. The other transformed the county commissioners into Boards of Social Welfare, which would be responsible for determining eligibility for relief assistance under a state office umbrella. Modern ADC, like Mothers' Pensions before it, suffered from a lack of popularity and support, and counties tended to economize by taking advantage of this lack of public sympathy for the “deserving poor.” Kansans expressed eagerness in ratifying these two amendments in the general election of 1936, although the legislature implemented the system in its next session, but the electorate consistently failed to finance it adequately.35

The New Deal also aided poor families through enactment of the food stamp plan in 1939. This idea came from grocers, both wholesale and retail, and those New Dealers concerned with helping poor people while also reducing agricultural surpluses. The law permitted wholesalers to purchase surplus commodities and sell them to grocers who retailed them to housewives, both rich and poor. “Relievers” could purchase orange stamps for one dollar each and receive free blue stamps worth 50 percent of the orange ones. These stamps could then be redeemed for food products, but not alcohol, tobacco, or “luxury” items. The plan sought both to provide purchasing power for people on relief and to increase agricultural income.36

CONCLUSIONS

The mothers' pension concept should have played a significant role in relief during the Progressive movement. The reform rapidly swept the nation, but for various reasons the concept of helping poor children failed to melt the hearts of taxpayers and never became pop-
ular or supported adequately. County commissioners seldom looked with favor on the idea, but it served to bridge the gap to the New Deal era when reformers enjoyed more sympathetic hearings. The county commissioners, under new titles, continued to frown on assisting poor children who had no financial support from their fathers. Under ADC, national sources provided only one-fourth, rather than the usual one-half, with a maximum of six dollars for the first child and four dollars each for additional children. It should be noted, however, that these dependent children were the unemployeds that were supposed to be cared for by the state, not the nation. 37

Inevitably, ADC took on the shortcomings of the previous Mothers' Pensions—low benefit levels, middle-class behavioral norms, discrimination along racial and class lines, and state variance of administration—even while it served as a stepping-stone in acclimating citizens and politicians to the concept of public welfare. Although the national Social Security office required national authorization, states could designate other direct responsibility and some took advantage of this outlet. Overall, though, there was a gradual upward shift from courts to state authority. Soon (1939) half the states required new “fitness” requirements of “a suitable family home,” often structured to fit their definition of behavioral requirements. Mothers' Pensions had supplied a bridge to the modern world of charity for children. 38

NOTES

2. Ibid., chap. 8.
6. Ibid., 397, 400.
15. Ibid., 408.
26. Capper Papers, 27-08-02-06, KSHS.

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27. Secretary to the Governor to "Mrs. A.M.B.,” October 26, 1916, Capper Papers, 27-08-01-06, box 3, folder 140, KSHS.


30. Ibid., 215. See pp. 210–16 for thorough discussion of ADC.


32. Ibid., 100, 101, 107.


35. Peter Fearon, Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole, and Rehabilitation (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 238–39. For the story of the amendment that permitted the state to play this role in relief, see R. Alton Lee, “[Not] a Thin Dime: Kansas Relief Politics in the Campaign of 1936,” The Historian 67 (Fall 2005): 474-88.


37. Fearon, Kansas in the Great Depression, 239.


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