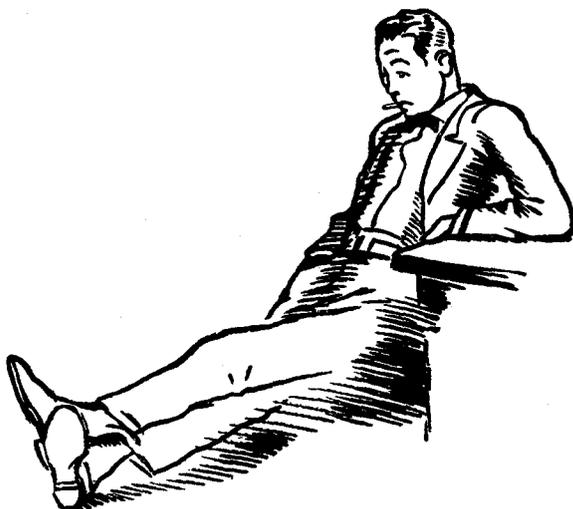


A. B., Unemployed

What Hope for the Graduates of 1931, 1932, 1933?



by **GEORGE WILLISON CONDIT**

IT is extremely annoying to be caricatured, as you may discover by asking a traveling salesman about his morals, a plumber about his propensity for forgetting tools, or a professor about his absent-mindedness. Equally indignant will be the young college graduate when you ask him if he thinks "the world owes him a living." He will hastily and very likely savagely repudiate the suggestion.

I used to do that too. I was wont to assert on the least provocation that the world owes neither me nor any other diploma-possessor a single thing. I thought, and it may still be true, that probably some highly paid, eighth-grade-educated columnist invented the phrase. That was while I was still in school and felt safe in my own self-confidence and secure in my own inherent ability. Now, though, I am beginning to wonder.

In this, our now famous depression that started during the autumn of the last year of the turbulent twenties and will end only when God and Mammon see fit, the overeducated were destined to suffer along with the undereducated. I say "destined" advisedly. College-training-is-the-thing was insidiously chanted to boys and girls of the impressionable age. We were urged in books, magazines, newspapers, over the radio, to get more and more book-

learning. "That's something no one can take away from you," we were told, and also, more surreptitiously, "It will mean a lot to you in dollars and cents later on."

The propaganda had results. The Joneses had sent their children to college, and so our parents began to scrawl figures on newspaper edges and to study their bank books. Education was beginning to be listed as a tangible asset in the family financial statement. And we, neglecting our high school English literature, clandestinely practiced certain collegiate mannerisms, dreamed absurd dreams about fraternity or sorority life, junior proms (we were too naïve to know anything about passout checks), football as no high school could commercialize it. We went to college.

Well, the mannerisms became our manners — worse luck — and we got the fraternity whirl, the proms, and the football. But there were a few of us who discovered, to our own amazement, that they weren't quite enough. Thrown into a more or less cultural environment, we became restless. Wistfully, but very secretly, we longed to have more than the thin veneer of education that was being slapped onto us in mass-production quantities.

We had been urged to specialize in everything from orthopedics and chiropody in

medicine to personnel work and efficiency study in factory management. Most of our business-men fathers considered a straight arts course pure tommy-rot. It wasn't practical; what could you do with it after you had it (except teach — and who wants to teach)? It didn't get you anywhere; it didn't pay anything. That was its most scarlet sin. So the great majority of students took either professional or specialized work: accountancy, personnel work, industrial management, marketing, finance, advertising, journalism, home economics, and so on. No jacks-of-all-trades, we — but masters of one. Yet we were restless.

Restlessness leads to war, and many of us found that in this war we were our own worst enemies. A certain few "dangerous" members of the faculty, teaching elective courses, slowly undermined our complacent attitudes and firmly intrenched fresh points of view. These newly won, strangely precious, idealistic social beliefs were at variance with most of the things taught in the specialized fields for which we were training. "Give ten reasons why selling short is an economic and social benefit." "Is advertising an economic waste? Give reasons for your answer." And only one answer was correct!

But those other few teachers — the insurgents — and the things they taught! How could an alert boy being trained to be the most virulent type of super-salesman, or a clever embryo advertising agent, or a canny financier (probably promoting some semi-professional campus activity in his spare time, even then) — how could any of them be expected to condone or reconcile themselves to a new social order that might threaten their own professions?

Fortunately most of the professors under whom we studied still bowed low to their patron saint and golden idol, Big Business, and so comparatively few of us were disturbed by qualms. But those of us who had qualms had them bad.

THE SERPENT ENTERS PARADISE

OUR JUNIOR year had almost flitted by before we fully realized that a very disturbing situation existed outside the cloistered walls of our college. We who laboriously studied that sacrosanct financial institution, the Federal Reserve System, had been taught that all of

the former panics (or in more modern terms, economic depressions) were caused by an inelasticity of credit, inadequate banking facilities, and one or two other causes that we usually forgot to put down on our exam papers. The advent of the Federal Reserve System, they had told us, marked the absolute end of all business disturbances. Yet here they were; the prices of stocks and bonds were tobagganing, there was an undercurrent of frantic excitement. The newspapers tried to repress themselves like a thin-lipped schoolteacher, but by so doing they only furnished a stiff breeze to help spread the conflagration. Big streamers in the papers frightened people by announcing that Henry Ford and President Hoover would quickly restore conditions.

If conditions would soon be better, a few of us expostulated, why then were our parents paring down our monthly allowances? We slyly sent them the optimistic clippings. The economies applied only to those of us whose family income depended on the rise or fall of stocks and bonds. Sons or daughters of non-speculative merchants, doctors, retailers, farmers, dentists, skilled laborers, were oblivious of gathering storm clouds. Meanwhile those of us who received cuts in our allowances — cuts which made haberdashers and fraternity treasurers begin to have their worries — were told that it was only temporary and that within two months things would be better than ever.

Many college students dropped quietly out of college at the end of the winter quarter in 1929. Others began to take an interest in the employment departments of the Y. M. C. A. or the Y. W. C. A. in order to find part-time work. The depression was on.

By the time I had reached my senior year, in the autumn of 1930, we began to feel certain reverberations in the classrooms. Our prosperity-bred professors in economics began to qualify their former ironclad statements. Professors in the commerce college of the university commenced to ridicule the Rotarian attitudes in business. A growing number of educators on our own and on other campuses began to deplore openly the vast number of future Babbits who could not be counted upon to help raise the standards of business, or to purge it of its economic holocausts. Flag-waving, the high protective tariff, high pressure salesmanship, Red-baiting, ceased to be popular on the

campus. Already America was at the threshold of a new era and almost the first to feel it were the college students. Almost overnight we were taught a more idealistic philosophy, an awakened appreciation of culture; some of us even started to read poetry on our own volition, and became slightly skeptical toward the purely materialistic, pre-1929 philosophy of life and success.

When spring came, those of us who were graduating began to query and speculate among ourselves about jobs. In normal years there would have been a good assortment of representatives from large corporations visiting our college. After talking with the dean they would leisurely interview and select for their organization a certain number of seniors who would be graduating in June. For a time it seemed as if not even one were going to visit the campus. One representative finally did appear, and as soon as we heard of his arrival one hundred and fifty seniors stampeded into the secretary's office for an interview. He departed after having tentatively employed one man.

As the last few weeks rolled along, many of us had borrowed from banks, relatives, established fraternity brothers, the dean's office, even from our churches (those of us who attended). The most common question asked and the one most frequently evaded was, "Hi, Jim" — or "Hello, Mary" — "Have you got a job yet after you get out?" Already it was pricking our pride to think that we couldn't land a job with the ease of two years ago. We didn't know that six million people were unemployed and that thousands were making runs on building and loan companies, banks, while others were dumping their farm produce at pitiful prices. We didn't realize that people were already starving. And if we had known, it wouldn't have alleviated the situation, or our embarrassment.

COMMENCEMENT — OF WHAT?

WITH THE COMING of June and commencement most of us didn't allow ourselves to speculate. Of course we would get a job. It might not be much at first — but we would get *something*. Why, we were trained! Of course the world didn't owe us a living, but surely it would be anxious to take advantage of our services. So we held our farewell parties,

drank terrible gin and paid exorbitant prices for it. We filed beneath a summer sun in the final dénouement of our college careers. School was over and we choked down all Victorian emotions.

Unless my experiences since that sixteenth day of June, 1931, have been unusual (and I have no reason to believe that they have been, after having talked with other graduates), America's class of 1931 has been undergoing a very enlightening introduction to the outside world.

At first it seemed as if we were running up against individual cases; business executives who were the exception rather than the rule. In time, though, we found that they were representatives of the new order. They were as fearsome and excitable as chased guinea hens. They didn't even care to take our applications. Many of them looked as if they were getting rid of a hangover and were in desperate need of a pick-me-up.

I had been trained for advertising in college. I made what I thought to be some bang-up layouts in my advertising labs. I put them neatly into a portfolio and practically forced department store advertising managers and agency executives to finger their way through them. Impressed? Interested? Encouraging? Not in the least. Just bored. One thing, though — they did have leisure time and so they were perfectly willing to kill a little of it by talking with me.

"Not bad, not bad," they told me in such a way that invariably I received the opposite impression, "but if we *were* hiring anyone at the present time, we could choose from a dozen men, college trained, who have had ten to fifteen years' experience." That seemed, I must admit, sound. But wasn't there an answer somewhere?

I gave them what I thought was an answer. "But you see," I said, "I can't offer experience because I have been in the process of training. I have spent the last four years being taught how to do advertising layouts. Now I want a chance to put those years into practice."

"Business isn't college," they replied, mouth-ing truisms expertly. "Now here we have to have men with experience."

"But how can I get experience if I can't get a job? Don't I have to start somewhere?" I asked them humbly, patiently.

Yes, they agreed, I would have to start somewhere — but not necessarily with them.

After a few weeks I left my portfolio at home and started to look for work for which I hadn't been trained — not advertising work, but any kind of work. A job — any job. I made out applications for all kinds of employment — clerical work, bookkeeping, clerking in a grocery store, soda jerking, work in a bakery, a creamery, a gas station. "Oh, so you graduated from college last year. But what experience have you had? What did you do during the summers? Humpff! I see. Worked in a boys' camp. Well, there is nothing open now. You might leave your name and address if you like."

My friends and acquaintances began to wonder what was the matter with me. A college graduate surely shouldn't have any difficulty getting work. In the mornings I caught myself looking in the mirror to see if I could detect any indications of weakness in my face. A year ago I possessed unbounded confidence in myself.

I am still unemployed.

THE RIGHT TO A JOB

IT SEEMED to me then and it seems to me now that we college graduates have been tricked. They satiated us with the propaganda that a thorough educational training was one of the most important things in the world. We weren't allowed to be carpenters, bakers, mechanics, machinists, plumbers, farmers, and mere housewives. We were seduced into thinking that such work was too lowly and menial for us to do. They convinced us that we should have special training. So we spent sixteen, or if we wished to have more initials after our names, seventeen, eighteen, or twenty years in schoolrooms. Not being educated, but being trained. Not being taught to think, but being trained to remember!

It would have been infinitely better for many of us if we had used half those years getting experience and wages in some trade instead of being social parasites.

Of course it is very probable that we should have been unemployed at the present time — many of us, anyway. We might have been living off the community chest with thousands of other people; or else seeing our possibly large-sized families starving. But if we hadn't been duped by those same executives who are

now turning their shoulders on college graduates; if we hadn't been inveigled into attending college — we could at least have been *qualified* to work. We would have been *experienced* in our trade.

If we hadn't been venerated with American culture! If we were more, or even less, than partly educated, we wouldn't be condescending toward those who go from door to door asking for an opportunity to earn a dime or a quarter — and we wouldn't feel inferior to those who are steadily employed at worth-while jobs. There wouldn't be a veritable cancer inside of us eating away at our pride, our self-confidence, our self-respect. We would have been married by this time, and not holding off at arm's length (painfully) any serious thought of Mary Smith who is now at home with her parents after having graduated last year and not finding a school in which to teach. Most likely we shouldn't be seeing the last vestiges of our former faith in creator, country, and capitalism break off in little chunks and float away from us.

At times of late it seems to me that a world, an American world, that so cleverly duped and tricked, so foolishly coddled us from four to eight years too long, *does* owe us — not only college graduates but everyone else — a little something. Not a living (that would be beyond all industrial rhyme and competitive reason), but let us say a reason for living; enough security so that we can know that we have at least a *chance* of winning.

Until recently — to a Mr. Fess now — such a claim would have been considered treasonable and dangerous. I realize that if such a concept were carried out to its logical conclusion, there would tend to be an undermining of the confidence in the divinity of the profit and loss statements; and in time even mergers might seem to be a little short of miracles sent straight from heaven. But since the classes of 1931 and 1932 and 1933 evidently must accept their fate as victims of a misplaced educational theory — just as older people have been victims of erroneous economic theories — we ought, I think, at least to demand that henceforth, whether the world becomes richer or poorer, in social sickness and in health, college training shall be such as to be no less helpful in getting a job than four years spent in any other endeavor.

We Need a Labor Party—Now!

by PAUL HUTCHINSON

I

FOR THE SAKE of its own health, the United States needs a fighting Labor party, and needs it now. The nation is stumbling into a Presidential election in which its policies for the next four years will largely be determined. It approaches this choice without comprehension of the issues involved or the vital character of the decisions to be made. It is, in plain words, walking blindfolded into a political and economic buzz saw. These blinding bandages have been placed, and are being kept, across the nation's eyes by two decadent political parties, largely officered by a horde of professional manipulators whose main interest is in holding power for the sake of the revenue power yields. In order to whip away the bandages, to substitute genuine choice for the mockery of our present trifling between "ins" and "outs," to open the way of intelligent political action to the American public, there is an overwhelming need of an aggressive Labor party, defiantly committed to the substitution of the paramount rights of the worker for the present supremacy of the rights of property and profit.

Consider the situation in the United States to-day. Consider it, not from the standpoint of any ninety standard stocks or forty Dow-Jones bonds, but from the standpoint of the plain people for whom Abraham Lincoln claimed that the government exists. Where do the people stand? Even in the days of Coolidge prosperity, their condition was nothing to compel hosannas. Going on the rough and ready principle that a house should cost no more than double a family's annual income, and that rent should not absorb more than a fifth of current earnings, even in the boom days two-thirds of all American families found that a house costing more than \$3500 or renting for more than \$25 a month was out of

their reach! And to-day? Somewhere between 8,300,000 and 10,500,000 (it is a measure of the indifference of the present political order that God only knows the actual figures) of the Americans who were earning wages five years ago are now totally out of work. Another 10,000,000 are working only part time. You will search long before you find many in the remaining working population who have not suffered a wage cut of some sort.

That's where the workers of America are to-day!

And their outlook is not much better. As I write, the newspapers are once more trying to cheer the public up with "just around the corner" predictions. But the business thermometer on the cover of *The Business Week* shows another drop this week (March 9) to below the 58° level — the lowest so far. The spokesman of the American Federation of Labor told a Congressional committee yesterday (March 10) that all the reports gathered by his organization indicate that there will be no important improvement in employment conditions before the end of this year, and probably not in 1933. The most optimistic forecasters — the Dr. Kleins and the Secretary Lamonts and the Roger Babsons who are trying to turn the tide toward the reelection of Mr. Hoover — are now talking about nothing more roseate than "a long, slow improvement."

In all probability, the working masses of this nation must go to the polls next November with at least a quarter of their number entirely without work, with another quarter having only a few days of work a week or a few hours a day, and with the whole group staggering under the new burdens imposed by reduced incomes, increased taxes, and by the mounting debts that millions have accumulated in their effort to keep soul and body together during