

# Lessons of the floods

*In Part 1 of a series, Richard Freeman proposes employing the nation's youths through the paradigm of the Army Corps of Engineers.*

The surging floodwater of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, which has cut a path of destruction through the midwestern states through which they flow, has in a cruel way raised two urgent questions: First, how long will the United States suicidally neglect its infrastructure, at the cost of incurring tens of billions of dollars in preventable damage? Second, who will rebuild the infrastructure and homes and businesses in the Midwest, and shouldn't these workers, whoever they are, tackle the other parts of the national infrastructure deficit, which now totals cumulatively \$4-5 trillion? Will the flood, and not just its pictures of displaced people, but its long-term tragic consequences, have taught America enough to act?

These interrelated questions pose one additional question. Does America have a paradigm, or can it construct a paradigm from its experiences, which will guide it should it decide to tackle the infrastructure problem?

The flood has started to trigger a national debate on these questions. The most vocal part of this debate, so far, centers on the National Service proposal of President Bill Clinton, which, as *EIR* goes to press, is expected to pass the Congress and be signed into law. The National Service is supposed to be an employer for younger people so that they can perform service to this country, in a useful area, in lieu of military service, which will also generate monetary credits which they can then apply to paying for a college education.

This article will examine the National Service proposal, and consider whether it can be, or is even designed to be, an agency that will employ youths in infrastructure building. Next, it will look at youth and young adult unemployment, which is a condition crying out for correction, and which a proper National Service proposal should address. The government officially admits that 2.973 million of those in the age-range of 16 to 24 years old are unemployed. The real number is much higher. Yet even the official figure represents a whopping 14.7% of those in the labor force in the 16-24 age bracket. The official number of young unemployed is a one-third of the total number of 8.858 million unemployed people million that the U.S. government admits to.

Finally, in our conclusion in Part 2, we will examine the paradigms that the nation can use in infrastructure building. The Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s, but significantly improved, is one such experience. But above all, the greatest infrastructure-building agency in American history,

and perhaps in world history, is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Perhaps an education-work program for a CCC can be designed by the Army Corps for the nation's young, who are not only out of work and abysmally educated, but are being lost to the rock-sex-drug counterculture. The Army Corps was to a significant degree built on the curriculum of the famous Ecole Polytechnique of France of Lazare Carnot and Gaspard Monge. The Corps of Engineers' brilliant history is synonymous with the development of the American System of National Economy. However, that history has been buried, for the most part, by the dedicated enemies of the United States, the cult worshippers of the Adam Smith school of rentier-finance usury.

## **Infrastructure negatively demonstrated**

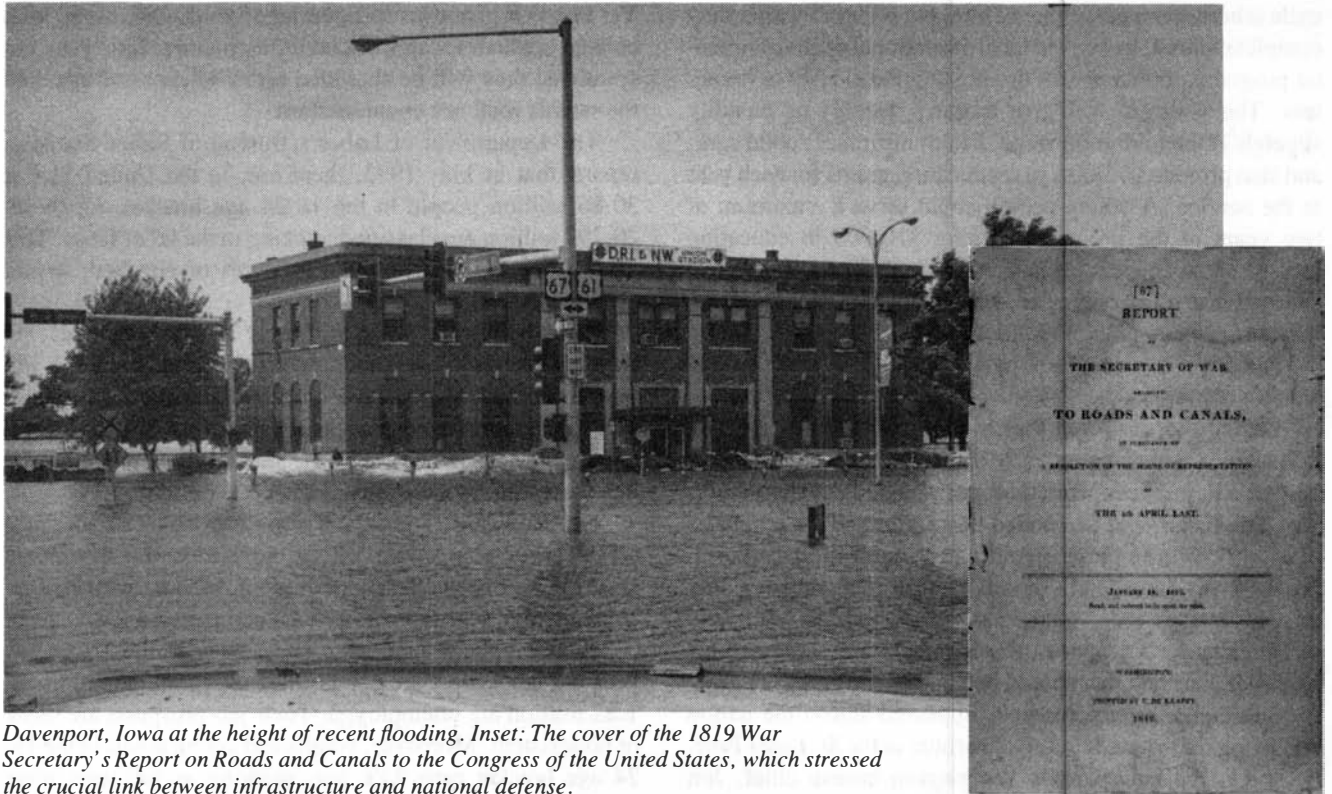
It should be emphasized, that after basic scientific and technological discovery, infrastructure is the most essential element required for the functioning of an economy. Infrastructure makes the alterations of nature, with respect to water management, energy generation, transportation, as well as education and health services, which drive forward the development of an educated work force, and of manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and construction. If the expenditures for maintenance and improvement of infrastructure are not made or are sacrificed to short-sighted budget-cutting, the real physical economy's productivity plummets, its output contracts, and the overall loss is enormously greater than the chiseled, unmet expenses of maintenance and improvement. The Mississippi-Missouri flood of 1993 demonstrates this principle with a vengeance.

This point was recognized early on in the country's history with regard to the development of the Mississippi and all water management. On Jan. 14, 1819, U.S. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, in a "Report on Roads and Canals to the Congress of the United States," stated:

"A judicious system of roads and canals, constructed for the convenience of commerce and the transportation of the mail only, *without any reference to military operations*, is itself among the most efficient means 'for the more complete defense of the United States' " (emphasis added).

On Feb. 6, 1816, the committee in the Senate appointed by the President on roads and canals, issued a report which included this formulation:

"That a view of the extent of territory, the number and



Davenport, Iowa at the height of recent flooding. Inset: The cover of the 1819 War Secretary's Report on Roads and Canals to the Congress of the United States, which stressed the crucial link between infrastructure and national defense.

magnitude of navigable lakes, rivers, and bays; the variety of climate, and consequent diversity of productions embraced by the United States, cannot fail to impose the conviction, that a capacity exists in this country to maintain an internal commerce. The variety of productions peculiar to the several parts, invites to the prosecution of a most interesting kind. . . . Any practicable scheme, therefore, for the improvement of roads and inland navigation . . . has strong claims to the . . . aid of a government constituted to promote the general welfare."

Granted, not all damage from a catastrophe can be prevented. But frequently, much of it can be. The Mississippi River itself, its ports and harbors, the river's depth, its flood plain, its system of diversionary escarpments, and their development and improvement over the last 175 years, at the hands of the best infrastructure-building agency in America, the Army Corps of Engineers, is proof positive that much damage from catastrophes can be prevented or minimized. Had this extraordinary flood of today occurred 50 years ago, before the Corps instituted certain improvements, the level of the damage and loss of life could have been 30-50 times greater. Yet, on the other hand, if over the last 10 years, because of "budget-balancing ideology," had the Congress not nickel-and-dimed the Army Corps and the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) to death, and instead spent even as little as \$2-4 billion more than it did on further improvements on the Mississippi River system flood control and

navigation plan, such as expanded water diversion programs and a mandatory standardized levee system, perhaps one-third to four-fifths of the current damage could have been avoided! The book, *The History of Public Works in the United States* reports that, according to Army Corps of Engineers documentation, between the end of World War II and the mid-1970s, \$8 billion was spent on flood control, resulting in \$40 billion in damages that were prevented, a return of \$5 in damages spared for every \$1 spent.

### The Clinton National Service initiative

Since inauguration, President William J. Clinton has advocated a National Service plan defining work projects for youths. This plan, embodied in the National Service Trust Act of 1993, is expected to pass the Congress sometime before Aug. 6. The advocates of the plan state that it is intended to be a domestic version of the Peace Corps, instituted during the Kennedy era, in which young people went to countries in the developing world to help those countries.

The Clinton proposal is scaled down from its original dimensions. It currently authorizes spending \$1.5 billion spending over three years, starting with \$300 million the first year. The program will work through a newly created Corporation for National Service, which combines the functions of the Commission on National and Community Service and ACTION, and re-authorizes support for the tiny Civilian Community Corps. It will hire 25,000 students of college or

trade schools per year, either before, but preferably after they complete school, to work in local educational or environmental programs, police work, or assisting the elderly or homeless. The program will give training, weekly or monthly stipends at the minimum wage, health insurance, child care, and also provide \$5,000 a year education grants for each year in the service. A young person could serve a maximum of two years in the program, earning \$10,000 in education grants. Thus, by definition, the National Service plan is an alternative to military service, which helps pay for education, for those already going to school.

Already, the program has generated a considerable amount of national discussion.

During the third and fourth weeks of July, as cresting floodwaters struck his state, Minnesota Sen. David Durenberger, a Republican, called for passage of the National Service Trust plan, and demanded that an immediate emphasis of its work be in employing youths in cleaning up and rebuilding the areas damaged by floods. While appearing at a July 20 whistle-stop press conference in St. Louis, when told of Durenberger's proposal, President Clinton expressed his approval, and said that should be done.

Subsequently, articles have appeared across the nation endorsing that view. In a July 23 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the newspaper's Washington bureau chief, Jon Sawyer wrote, "For Eli Segal, the man who heads President Bill Clinton's office of national service, the great flood of 1993 couldn't have come at a better time." That same day, the *Post-Dispatch* carried an opinion column by James Pinkerton of the Washington, D.C.-based Manhattan Institute, entitled, "Project for Teens Flood Control." Pinkerton wrote, "Let's hire inner-city teen-agers to repair the damage and prevent future damage."

*EIR's* discussion with the President's Office of National Service indicates a good degree of flexibility in how and what areas it could employ youths.

However, unless it is radically changed, as presently proposed and constituted, the National Service is undermined by three devastating flaws. First, it is a program for the college and trade school student, mostly the college student, and it is not at all, and does not purport to be, a program for the growing army of the unemployed.

Second, it has a bias in favor of the post-industrial society. It decidedly pushes for the creation of service sector jobs, combined with wasteful environmentalism.

Third, even by its own standards and objectives, the National Service plan is scanty, offering just 25,000 jobs to young people per year. This is a minute percentage of those attending college, and an even smaller percentage of those youths and young adults in the 16- to 24-year-old age range.

## Mass youth unemployment

For the moment, the Clinton National Service is turning its back on almost all unemployed youths and young adults.

Yet this is a gigantic untapped labor pool who, along with college graduates, can work on infrastructure. If they are not employed they will be shredded up by idleness, drugs, and the satanic rock-sex counterculture.

The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in May 1993, there are, in the United States, 30.86 million people in the 16-24 age bracket. Of these, 20.293 million are classified as being in the labor force. This labor force is then classified in terms of enrolled, or not enrolled in school.

**Enrolled:** Some 7.376 million of 16 to 24 year olds, are enrolled in either high school, college, or trade school; 1.153 million of these students are classified as either full-time or part-time unemployed. For the most part, these jobs are not luxuries. They are needed by the students to help their families make ends meet, or to pay the costs of college.

**Not Enrolled:** Some 12.917 million 16 to 24 year olds are not enrolled in school. This group's education attainment level ranges from high school dropout, to those who graduated from high school, to those who completed a few years of college, to college graduate. Thus, 64% of the 16- to 24-year-old labor force are not enrolled in school, and of these, 1.82 million are unemployed. Their job prospects are bleak or nonexistent. Moreover, youths and young adults in the 16-24 age bracket earn 34% less working as full-time wage and salary workers than the national average for full-time workers, a gap that is getting wider over the years. These younger people end up in lowering paying jobs, and right now, 1.82 million can't even get the lower paying jobs.

The combined unemployment level of young people in the 16- to 24-year-old age group is a staggering 2.973 million. *The official unemployment rate for this age bracket is 14.7% and is even higher, 30.2%, for blacks in this age bracket.* But the official unemployment figures are cooked and unreliable. This news service has devised a method to determine the actual unemployment for the entire labor force, after uncovering hidden unemployment (see page 11 for the August chart of this monthly feature). That method reveals that the real level of unemployment for those in the 16- to 24-year-old age bracket is closer to at least 5.5 million youths and young adults.

## An alternative: a recovery program

Despite all its limitations, President Clinton's National Service Plan has created a golden, historic moment, generating national discussion and planting the idea that alternative conceptions to handle national employment are in order. America has historical paradigms of what it can do to bring about national service. Better still, it can create full employment for both the younger and older portions of the work force in job occupations in the productive side of the economy. This full employment program can have a youth component. But rather than creating, as the National Service Trust would do, a domestic peace corps that attends to destructive

environmentalism, and some useful functions on a very limited scale, this program would physically transform both urban and rural areas alike, upgrade the educational and medical care section of the economy, and create the basis for a renaissance. In particular, it would infuse the science and technological content back into the high schools and colleges, as well as job-training programs.

Such a paradigmatic program is based on overall economic recovery strategy, which has been reported on before in this magazine. It centers around *EIR* founding editor and economist Lyndon LaRouche's plan for federalizing the Federal Reserve System into a Third National Bank. Such a bank would generate \$800 billion in credit—not debt—at low interest rates in infrastructure building projects, and the productive sides of the economy that would supply that infrastructure with capital goods machinery, raw materials, etc. It would also develop “soft” infrastructure, such as education and health care. Three million jobs would be created in the infrastructure section of the economy, and 3 million more in the productive economy that supplies infrastructure.

But as a youth component, for those youths and young adults who either are not employed by the recovery program, or whose cognitive powers have been damaged, or are not equal to the technological requirements of today's economy—which means millions of young people—a combined work and skills-training education program could be run under the rubric of a revived Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). If the skills-training and education of such a program, as well as the work assignments of the CCC, were placed under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a total transformation of these youths might be effected.

## The CCCs

In an open letter to Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, entitled “Saving Our Children: Reintroducing Classical Education to the Secondary Classroom,” on July 26, 1985, Lyndon LaRouche declared:

“The time has come for a national youth rehabilitation program better than the CCCs of the 1930s. It is past time to match the lost generation of demoralized youths, with the needs of freshwater management and other major elements of a wasting national basic economic infrastructure. Had we our wits about us, we would enlarge the assignment of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to include a work-education program, through which credibility of upward mobility provided the motivating environment for remedial secondary education.”

A program better than the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) could work for youths and young adults. A little background will help. On March 31, 1933, Congress passed the enabling legislation creating the CCC. The program was run by the departments of the Army and Labor, and the National Forest Service. The Corps admitted men, 18-25, who were unmarried. To show how quickly the government can move when the idea

of an emergency is impressed upon it by the population, by the middle of June 1933, less than three months after the enabling legislation passed, 1,300 CCC camps were established and by the end of July, over 300,000 young men were sent into the woods. Over the next few years, over 2.5 million young men passed through the camps. Historian Arthur Schlesinger described how the camps functioned:

“They planted trees, made reservoirs and fish ponds, built check dams, dug diversion ditches, raised bridges and fire towers, fought blister rust and pine-twig blight and the Dutch elm disease, restored historic battlefields, cleared beaches and camping grounds, and in a multitude of ways protected and improved parks, forests, watersheds, and recreational areas.”

The CCCs assisted in building a “shelter-belt” to break wind, snow, and dust in a 100-mile-wide zone stretching along the 100th meridian from Canada to Abilene, Texas, as part of a barrier against a new eruption of the dust bowl. They planted a wind break of 200,000 trees.

One participant described the work: “Here they teach them how to pour concrete and lay stones and drive trucks, and if a boy wants to go out and get a job after he's been in the C's, he'll know how to work.” The CCC also had its own significant problems, which verged on the dangerous. It attempted to preach, without great success, a proto-environmentalist, back-to-nature outlook, and more strongly, a folksy fascist ideology, in keeping with the Mussolini-like outlook of the National Recovery Act. It lacked a serious science and engineering component to educate the young men in the camps and thus, to seriously advance their knowledge and their skills.

The parallel Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) for adults—which did not work on a work-camp basis—built highways, buildings, airports, immense dams, city transit systems, schools, hospitals and so forth.

To make the CCCs better, the anti-scientific ideology of the CCCs of the 1930s would have to be eliminated, and the minimum wage and some of the health and child-care provisions of the Clinton national service should be instituted. But the most important improvement would be to instill science and engineering and genuine knowledge to those who are enrolled. The CCCs would have to be a real work-education program. To give that real content, the CCCs should be placed under the enlarged assignment of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. If the original core curriculum of the Corps of Engineers, based in significant measure on the Ecole Polytechnique curriculum, were used, teaching constructive geometry and the science needed for every from of infrastructure building, then progress would be made. The CCC member would not only get education and skills training but first experience in infrastructure work, providing for lifetime skills. Several million youths and young adults could be passed through such a program.

*In Part 2: The Army Corps of Engineers model.*