

A MESSAGE TO THE WHITE COLLAR CLASS



By ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

ANY number of people are asking me, day after day, what group in this country is hardest hit in a period of crisis such as the present.

Of course, from my point of view every group in the country is affected by a period of crisis. There are two groups, however, that in some ways at least, may be considered rather fortunate. These groups are, first, management and investment.

There is increased industrial production. They may be anxious about the needs in the future of a change in production from defense materials back to normal needs, but business is going on. There is mental anxiety and unrest which causes people to seek diversion to a greater extent than in normal times, and this frequently costs money which adds to the pick-up in general business. Therefore, this group finds that in many ways, in spite of restrictions on profits and taxes, they are busy and making some money.

Secondly, the group which may have been out of work for a long time, but which has skills, is getting back into jobs. Some young people who can be trained in skills of different kinds, are finding it easier to get jobs than they have for some years past. This is not, of course, universally true, but these two groups can be considered in general to be at present better off. Their problems are in the future.

One group is perhaps more adversely affected now than any other. This is the middle-income, or what is called, the white collar group. Occasionally people say "middle-class," but I have a great objection to that term because I do not consider that in this country, we have any such thing as classes. We have groups of people who earn their living on different income levels, but with us education and a general standard of taste wipe out what in other countries might be considered classes, and make us here one group of people, able because of our varying earning capacity, to have more or less of the material things of life.

Mrs Roosevelt

This group, however, of medium income, constitutes a large part of our population and in times of crisis like the present, it faces certain hazards. Salaries go up more slowly in comparison with the cost of living. This group usually has less protection through organization. They have considered themselves in the past, frequently, as being in the professional group which did not always approve or need to belong to a labor organization. As a result, the skilled and even, sometimes, the unskilled worker gets more consideration and often better pay more quickly than does the army of white collar workers.

Very often these white collar workers are expected to dress more expensively than are the people in the skilled and unskilled working groups. They may have spent longer on their education and have borrowed money to complete it and, therefore, start with certain financial obligations which have to be paid off. They often do not feel that they have a right to take advantage of certain government or charitable facilities which the lower income group is often forced, by circumstances, to accept. For instance, they rarely take advantage of free clinics or free care in a hospital. They probably would not be permitted to do so, even if they were willing to accept the sense of stigma which is attached, unfortunately, to the acceptance of any charity.

In this group we might well include people in small businesses which they run themselves, or with one or two employees. It is harder for them to borrow money. They are subject to the careless ways which some customers have of forgetting to pay their bills and have to carry the accounts on their books in the hope that they will eventually get paid. Some people never pay, and other people pay when it happens to be convenient. The small employer finds it difficult to comply with many of the laws which government has made, very often with the co-operation of big business and of labor interests. These "little" people have so little representation in any group meetings because they are not organized, and yet when all is said and done, they carry on, in the country as a whole, a great part of the work which makes the wheels go round in the small towns and villages and even in some sections of the big cities.

In this group we frequently find people whose ambitions are frustrated and who burden themselves unwisely and unfairly to try to give their children more sometimes than is wise for their future.

In addition this is the group where "keeping up with the Joneses" is more prevalent than in any other group in the country. In the high income group there are a few people who worry about what the neighbors think or do, but not very many. That is one of the freedoms which money may give. In the low income group,

Mrs Roosevelt

"keeping up with the Joneses" can simply not be achieved and so is not attempted, but in the in-between group, many subterfuges are resorted to and many things are said, so the neighbors may be fooled.

Sometimes I think if we could learn that it is the realities of life and not material appearances which really matter, it would make life easier for this middle-income group.

On the whole this group attracts little attention because they make no splurge, they do not appeal to one's sympathy because of dire need, and yet they are a very vital part of the life of the nation. We should give them more thought and I hope that this period of crisis, which is changing so much in the world, will perhaps bring us all more closely together and will, therefore, make the problem of the middle-income group of importance to us all.

"PIC"

COVERING THE ENTIRE
FIELD OF ENTERTAINMENT
JUNE 24, 1941
VOL. IX, No. 13