American habit; and in the strength of great hope we must all shoulder our common load.

**QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION**

1. According to Roosevelt, what were the differences between the Republican and Democratic parties? In what ways were those differences pertinent in the current era?

2. Roosevelt observed that "equality of opportunity as we have known it no longer exists." Why was that so? What had provided equality of opportunity during the previous century?

3. Why had the "day of enlightened administration" arrived? What did Roosevelt believe was the government's proper function in the economy?

**DOCUMENT 24–2**

**Working People's Letters to New Dealers**

President Roosevelt expressed sympathy for the plight of working people during the Great Depression. That sympathy, heard by millions in Roosevelt's fireside chats and frequent press conferences, helped to shape efforts to provide relief, to restore employment, and to regulate wages, hours, and working conditions. Feeling they had a friend in the White House, thousands of American working people wrote the president and other New Dealers, especially Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. Those letters, excerpted here, illustrated the hard times many Americans continued to face long after the New Deal was under way.

**Letter to Frances Perkins, January 27, 1935**

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Dear Miss Perkins:

Please allow me to state some of the facts concerning our wages paid in the Tobacco factories first I want to call your attention to the firm I am working for, The Brown & Williamson Co; We make 40 hours a week and we don't average $10.00 per week for semi skilled labor in my department where the plug tobacco is manufactured we that are doing semi skilled labor make less than those doing common labor. [They make around $12.00 per week while we make from $7.00 to $10.00 and maybe some few of us might make $13.00 once and a while. Now how can we be considered in the President's spending program when we don't make enough to live on and pay our just and honest debts. Please take notice Meat advanced from 6 cents to 16 cents sugar from 5 to 6 cents flour has almost doubled and house rent and every thing but our wages the idea of men young and middle age making less than $2.00 while we are piling up millions for the firms we work

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and the sad part of it is the majority are afraid to make an outcry about conditions. Now I think our great trouble lies in the fact that no [body] ever investigates our working conditions and the greatest portion of us are colored people and I think every body hates a colored man. How can we support a family of 7 or 8 send our children to school and teach them citizenship when capitalist choke us and make criminals out of some of us that might be a bit weak. Now Miss Perkins just think about our condition how hard it is to come up to the American Standard of living on less than $10.00 for 40 hours work and 7 or 8 in family or it seems that my race of people are not considered in the American Standard of living. Now most of my people are afraid to complain because some few years ago the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. discharged every one that joined a union they were trying to organize here and for reason you can't find any union workers in the R. J. Reynolds firm among the colored people. It seems that some investigations should be made. Now how can we pay our debts educate our children and if we have to call a doctor we don't have the money to pay him for his visit. How can we get a square deal as our case is continued to be pushed aside. Please consider these facts Miss Perkins We are up against a hard proposition.

O. G.

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Letter to Frances Perkins, March 29, 1935

Brooklyn, New York

Dear Miss Perkins:

Reading about you as I do I have come to the understanding, that you are a fair and impartial observer of labor conditions in the United States. Well, I'll have to get a load off my chest, and tell you of the labor conditions in a place which is laughingly called a factory. We work in a Woolstock Concern. We handle discarded rags. We work, ten hours a day for six days. In the grime and dirt of a nation. We go home tired and sick — dirty — disgusted — with the world in general, work — work all day, low pay — average wage sixteen dollars. Tired in the train going home, sitting at the dinner table, too tired to even wash ourselves, what for — to keep body and soul together not to depend on charity. What of N.R.A.? What of everything? We handle diseased rags all day. Tuberculosis roaming loose, unsanitary conditions — slaves — the depression! I'm even tired as I write this letter, a letter of hope. What am I? I am young — I am twenty, a high school education — no recreation — no fun. Pardon ma'am — but I want to live! Do you deny me that right? As an American citizen I ask you, what — what must we do? Please investigate this matter. I sleep now, yes ma'am with a prayer on my lips, hoping against hope — that you will better our conditions. I'll sign my name, but if my boss finds out — well — Give us a new deal, Miss Perkins...

Yours hoping,

J. G.

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1N.R.A.: Here, the National Recovery Administration.
Letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 23, 1936

Paris, Texas

Dear President now that we have had a land Slide and done just what was best for our country & I will Say more done the only thing that could of bin done to Save this Country I do believe you Will Strain a point to help the ones who helped you mostly & that is the Working Class of People I am not smart or I would be in a different line of work & better up in ever way yet I will Know you are the one & only President that ever helped a Working Class of People I have Writen you several letters & have always received a answer from Some of you officials clerks or Some one & I will know you have to much to think about to answer a little man letter like my Self yet I will Say I and thousands of men just like me were in the fight for you & I for one will go down for you any day I am a White Man American age, 47 married wife 2 children in high School am a Finishing room foreman I mean a Working foreman & am in a furniture Factory here in Paris Texas where there is 175 to 200 Working & when the NRA came in I was Proud to See my fellow workmen Rec 30 Per hour in Place of 8 cents to 20 cents Per hour yet the NRA did not make any allowance for Skilled labor or foreman unless they rec as much as 35.00 [dollars] Per Week & very few Furniture Makers rec Such a Price I have bin with this firm for 25 years & they have Surly reaped the harvest . . . I can't see for my life President why a man must toil & work his life out in Such factories 10 long hours ever day except Sunday for a small sum of 15 cents to 35 cents per hour & pay the high cost of honest & deason living expenses is there any way in the world to help this one class of Laboring People just a little I admit this class of Working People should form a union but ever time it talked the big boy owners say we will close down then it is more releaf workers to take care of more expence to our Government and more trouble to you what we need is a law passed to shorten our hours at a living & let live scal & take more men off the Government expense & put them in the factories & get things to running normal but if a co cuts hours & then tells Foreman shove & push them & keeps putting out as much with short hours & driving the men like convicts it will never help a bit you have had your load & I well know it but please see if something can be done to help this one Class of Working People the factories are a man killer not venealed or kept up just a bunch of Republickins Grafters 90/100 of them Please help us some way I Pray to God for relief. I am a christian . . . and a truthful man & have not told you wrong & am for you to the end.

Letter to Frances Perkins, July 27, 1937

Plaquemine, Louisiana

Dear Miss Perkins:

I am writing to you because I think you are pretty square to the average laboring man. but I am wondering if anyone has told you of the cruel and terrible condition that exist in this part of the country or the so called sugar cane belt in Louisiana. I am sure that it hasn't made any progress or improvement since slavery days and to many people here that toil the soil or saw mills as laboring men I am sure slavery days were much better for the black slaves had their meals for sure three times a day and medical attention at that. but if an
American nowadays had that much he is a communist I am speaking of the labor not the ones that the government give a sugar bounty too but the real forgotten people for the ones the government give the sugar bounty too are the ones that really don't need it for those same people that has drawn the sugar bonus for two years has never gave an extra penny to their white and black slaves labor. I will now make an effort to give you the idea of the terrible inhuman condition.

I will first give you the idea of the sugar cane tenants and plantations poor laboring people. The bell rings at 2 A.M. in the morning when all should really be sleeping at rest. They work in the summer until 9 or 10 A.M. the reason they knock them off from the heat is not because of killing the labor from heat but they are afraid it kills the mule not the slave. Their wages runs from go 90¢ to $1.10 per day. Their average days per week runs from three to four days a week in other words people that are living in so called United States have to live on the about $4.00 per week standing of living in a so called American Community which is way below the Chinese standard of living for the Chinese at least have a cheaper food and clothing living but here one has to pay dear for food and clothing because these sugar cane slave owners not only give inhuman wages but the ones that work for them have to buy to their stores, which sells from 50 per cent to 60 per cent higher than the stores in town still these same people that are worst than the old time slave owners or yelling and hollering for more sugar protection, why should they get more when they don't pay their white and black slaves more. It is true they give the white and black slaves a place to live on. But Miss Perkins if you were to see these places they live on you'd swear that this is not our so call rich America with it high standing of living for I am sure that the lowest places in China or Mexico or Africa has better places to live in. These Southern Senators which are backed by the big shots will tell you it is cheaper to live in the South but have you investigated their living condition. Sometimes I don't wonder why some of these people don't be really communism but they are true Americans only they are living in such a low standing of living that one wouldn't believe they are living in the good old U.S.A.

Now regarding the saw mills of this town and other towns in this section but most particular this town they pay slightly more than the plantation but they get it back by charging more for food & clothing which they have to buy in their stores.

I am writing you this hoping that you will try to read it and understand the situation which if you think is not true you can send an investigator in this section of Louisiana that has American freedom of speech for some hasn't that speech in our so called free America....

Thanking you for humanity sake.

R. J.

Letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 27, 1939

Detroit, Michigan

President Roosevelt
Dear Honorable Sir:

I am living in a city that should be one of the prized possessions of these United States of America but it isn't only to a small group of chiseling money mongers.

I and my husband are and have be we are proud of what our parents did progress. They were builders of our cou make the rich man richer and the poor a land of plenty. We have six growing pining for each other and our hearts nea all together.

We have tried so hard these past lost our car our insurance even my ding ring to buy groceries pay rent and worked in steel mills auto factories he could get. I worked at waitess janis my health is slowly ebbing. I was a wid my first husband died shortly after the rine chaser. I received a check for $1.00 me two lovely children. Why should di in this manner living in an attic room p out you go on the streets. Welfare has n far too many inefficient social worker survive or even help survive. We are the same position right here in Detroit build up vast fortunes and estates d They cheat the government out of taxes we get discouraged and take some grox time.

They have 40 to 100 room houses home while we are denied a small home Barbara Hutton has herself exploite pulled and the girls in her dime stores help provide for others out of it. I'll was have roast pork @ 13¢ per lb on Thanks country probably threw a lot out in t gent rich men including the Congressm pass some laws that will aid labor to ma cumulated their vast fortunes had it not bor men brought them.

We read with horror of the war ir the people into submission and right h a blockade. Do the intelligent men of this much longer. I alone hear a lot of get our men to fight another war to ma to labor and never appreciated where from. This country was founded on T brutal treatment the British gave them ing it so. We need men of wealth and make labor healthy and self supporting is head on to a good start. Even prison not prisoners....

A true American mother & family

M. Q. L.
I and my husband are and have been Americans for three generations and we are proud of what our parents did also our grandparents to help America progress. They were builders of our country not destroyers as is now going on to make the rich man richer and the poor man poorer in fact try and starve them in a land of plenty. We have six growing children that are all separated each one pining for each other and our hearts nearly broken because we cannot keep them all together.

We have tried so hard these past seven years we lost our furniture twice lost our car our insurance even my engagement ring and finally the wedding ring to buy groceries pay rent and for illness. Neither one of us are lazy he worked in steel mills auto factories painting dishwashing and anything he could get. I worked at waitress janitress selling to make a few dollars now my health is slowly ebbing. I was a widow when I married my present husband my first husband died shortly after the world war having served as a submarine chaser. I received a check for $1.00 for each day he served he died leaving me two lovely children. Why should descent American people be made suffer in this manner living in an attic room paying $5.00 per week and if its not paid out you go on the streets. Welfare has never solved these problems as there are far too many inefficient social workers also too much political graft for it to survive or even help survive. We are one family out of 100,000 that are in the same position right here in Detroit where the ones we labor for and help build up vast fortunes and estates do nothing but push us down farther. They cheat the government out of taxes hire foreign labor at lower rates and if we get discouraged and take some groceries to feed our family we must serve time.

They have 40 to 100 room houses with no children to make it even like a home while we are denied a small home and enough wages to provide for them. Barbara Hutton has herself exploited that she pays $650.00 to have one tooth pulled and the girls in her dime stores slave all week for $12 or $14 and must help provide for others out of it. I'll wager to say that the poor class were lucky to have roast pork @ 13¢ per lb on Thanksgiving Day while the rich people in this country probably threw away a lot out in there garbage cans. These so called intelligent rich men including the Congressmen and the Senators better wake up and pass some laws that will aid labor to make a living as they would have never accumulated their vast fortunes had it not been from the hard sweat that honest labor men brought them.

We read with horror of the war in Europe and of the blockade to starve the people into submission and right here in Detroit we have the same kind of a blockade. Do the intelligent men of America think we are going to stand for this much longer. I alone hear a lot of viewpoints and it will be very hard to get our men to fight another war to make more wealth for men that never had to labor and never appreciated where the real source of their wealth derived from. This country was founded on Thanksgiving day to get away from the brutal treatment the British gave them and us real true Americans intend keeping it so. We need men of wealth and men of intelligence but we also need to make labor healthy and self supporting or our nation will soon crumble and it is head on to a good start. Even prisoners will balk at an injustice and we are not prisoners. . .

A true American mother & family
M. Q. L.