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FROM THE ARCHIVES

"A Dead Battery" Aubrey Williams' Undated Auto-Biographical Account of His Work with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal

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The New Deal transformed the involvement of the Federal Government in the distribution of relief to persons left destitute due to economic depressions. So dominant is the New Deal in historical presentations of the efforts to end the Great Depression, many social workers assume that before the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his assignment of Harry Hopkins as the Director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), there was no Federal involvement in the distribution of relief. Actually, the seeds for many of the innovations credited to Roosevelt and Hopkins were planted by social workers assisting the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) with relief loans made to the states late in the Hoover Administration.

"Federal loans became available to the states following passage of the Emergency Relief and Construction Act in July of 1932" (Venturini, 2003, p. 55). This legislation authorized that loans could be made to the states, through the RFC, to provide relief payments to their citizens who were left destitute by the Depression. States who borrowed money used future federal highway funds as collateral in the event they were unable to pay their loans. Governors were able to receive loans, provided they could show that a need existed for their respective states. Because RFC officials and state Governors were inexperienced in the matter of relief, officials with the American Public Welfare Association (APWA) were asked to advise those who requested assistance on how to establish relief offices and properly spend the money (Venturini, 2003).

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