

HODDING CARTER, EDITOR  
*THE DAILY COURIER*, HAMMOND, LOUISIANA  
“HOW COME HUEY LONG? 1. BOGEYMAN”

Taken from: *New Republic*, 13 February 1935, 11–15.

---

Under the spreading loblolly pine tree, the village skeptic stands pretty much alone, and very quiet in his skepticism. Apart from him, his fellow villagers and their country kinsmen look and listen. The Louisiana sun beats down impartially upon them and upon the red-haired, stentorian-voiced exhorter, whose blue shirt is soaked with perspiration. His flailing, prophetically extended arms are raised in benediction, with a swift detour to wipe the sweat from his face. His voice, amplified through the loudspeaker on the sound truck, trembles with histrionic emotion.

"All of you that ain't got four suits of clothes, raise your hands," he bellows.

Five hundred pairs of arms shoot skyward.

"I thought so—I thought so, brethren. Now if you ain't got three suits of clothes, raise your hands."

Again a thousand arms reach to the sky.

"Just like I knew brethren. Oh blessed are the poor, but what a row they have to hoe. Now all of you that ain't got two suits of clothes, raise your hands."

"Not even two suits of clothes. Oh my brethren, J. P. Morgan has two suits of clothes. He has a hundred times two suits of clothes. And that ain't all. Now all of you all that ain't got even one suit of clothes—one single suit of clothes that the pants match the coat—raise your hands."

Once more the thousand hands are raised, and a shout almost like a thanksgiving comes from the mass of suitless listeners who are living in the word-paradise and under the paralyzing dictatorship of Huey P. Long.

The coat-and-pants speaker is Gerald L. K. Smith—the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith—high priest and prophet of Senator Long's Share Our Wealth movement. When he concludes his two-hour speech against Wall Street and the assorted opponents of Huey Long, there will be five hundred new members of the society. Five hundred gaunt, grinning farmers and small-town ne'er-do-wells will file beside the sound truck and sign the cards that automatically make them members of the National Share Our Wealth Society of Huey Long.

Huey has more than Wall Street on the run in Louisiana, and the legislative travesties by which he has complete his complete dictatorship are costing a pretty penny, though not at the direct expense of his fellow wealth-sharers; for theirs is not the eventual day of reckoning in a state where business is terrorized and where the public debt of nearly \$150,000,000 is the third greatest in the union. Huey Long is now the sole dispenser of boons and headaches in the Louisiana duchy. For a righteous Share Our Wealth member, things are rosy. Huey has reduced the automobile licenses, especially for farmers. He has ordained a two-thousand-dollar homestead exemption, provided, of course, that other taxes bring in revenue to keep the machine wheels greased. He has granted a two-year debt moratorium—federal obligations excluded—and as judges of whether individual moratoria should be granted he has appointed loyal legislators in direct opposition to the state Constitution. The one-dollar poll tax is a thing of the past. Add all that to paved roads, free schoolbooks and a continual taxation harrying of the Standard Oil and the public utilities, with imminent though yet unrealized rate reductions, and you get a pretty good idea of why the doctrine of wealth sharing has taken hold among the poor whites, who constitute the majority of Louisiana's electorate.

Through such benefaction, Huey claims to have “Mr. Roosevelt’s depression” on the run in Louisiana. He has managed to obtain such powers as were never before won by an politician in the United States. For, at the present time, Huey Long has sole control of fixing assessments in the state. He can decide, through his own state bar association, created by the legislature, who shall and who shall not be a practicing member of the Louisiana bar. Through an ironically named Civil Service Commission, he can remove, and already has removed, elected or appointed officials of political subdivisions of the state, both municipal and parish. The State Supreme Court, his by a consistent four-to—three margin, can legalize anything he has enacted, and his secret state police force, its identity and numbers known only to the administration, can take you out of your home whenever it likes and hold you incommunicado on whatever charge may be necessary.

To the taxpaying and articulate opposition, all this has a decidedly unpleasant sound. But there’s nothing to be done about it, unless the federal government’s actions for income-tax evasion eventually include Huey along with his four right-hand bowers now under indictment, and unless such indictments result in blanket conviction. Federal interference, plus a newly formed and partly secret Square Deal Association, is about the only significant and tangible menace to the continued reign of the Kingfish.

Asked to define the difference between misery and poverty, a Louisiana college student once answered that “misery was when you had a pain and poverty was when you didn’t have anything.” He thus effected a very definite split between these two afflictions. According to this definition, the Share Our Wealth plan does much the same thing with misery and poverty. It deftly inflicts misery upon the political scoffers in the rural bailiwicks and makes of poverty a rallying point, political land economic, about which Huey Long can work toward a national goal that is by no means so hazy as are his wealth-sharing nostrums for making everybody prosperous.

For although the Share Our Wealth program is excessively simple, its simplicity does not imply clarity. There are two focal objectives. One is to “give every man, woman and child in the United States five thousand dollars,” with a home, a job, a radio and an automobile to boot for every family. The other is to prohibit great fortunes by restricting the amount of money any man may have or bequeath. The manner in which the second objective can be attained is obvious. Huey has never been averse to excessive taxation so long as the tax is not placed directly upon the rural and small-town voter. But he has not made clear the manner in which he will obtain the five thousand dollars a head. A graduated, confiscatory tax on the rich will do it, he says. Statisticians say otherwise. Yet the probable method is not a cause for worry among his disciples.

The organization of a Share Our Wealth club is as pleasingly effortless as its promised benefits. a prospective member has only to obtain, free of charge, a membership card, following one of the reverend Gerald’s rousing meetings. There are no dues-strings attached, no matter what the newspapers say. Blazoned across the card is the caption “Share Our Wealth Society—Every Man a King.” One merely has to fill in one’s name, or have one’s friend oblige in case the ability to write is lacking as it often is, and one’s address, age, and the names and addresses of other prospective members. And just think—this card will be filed in Senator Huey Long’s offices in Washington, DC! We’ll be on the inside track when the great day arrives. Moreover, each member has the opportunity of being president or secretary of a Share Our Wealth club. There are no treasurers as yet. These high offices can be attained through persuading two or three others in one’s neighborhood to fill out cards and send them to Washington. by getting these members, a man can become president of the club thus formed, for as Brother Smith opines, a Share Our Wealth club has much of the Biblical in it: “Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Besides, says Huey, the Gideons had but two men when they organized, and “Three Tailors of Tooley Street drew the Magna Carta of England.”

On Sundays and holidays the members can hold Share our Wealth parades, with American flags and slightly contradictory banners bearing the slogan “Every Man a King.” The presidents of the neighborhood locals can vie with each other in making speeches that are earnest if imperfect replicas of Reverend Smith’s evangelistic pronouncements or Huey’s signed messages in his roaring weekly, *The American Progress*. In between times, they can improve the shining hour by reading, learning and inwardly digesting the countless *Progress* stories describing the horror of the concentration of wealth. Also, when one of the many Louisiana elections for everything from coroner to Governor come up, they can satisfy themselves by questioning the candidates as to their opinion on the Share Our Wealth program. The independent or anti-Long candidate in the country precincts thus can be placed in a distressing dilemma. If he is so foolhardy as to answer “poppycock” he can kiss a large and solid block of votes good-bye. If he endorses the plan, grudgingly or even enthusiastically, he is still viewed with skepticism, for an alert wealth-sharer will point out that since he is fighting Huey, his wealth-sharing support is only a vote-getting scheme—why, he’s a demagogue, that’s what he is.

Undoubtedly, the Share Our Wealth program is the most brilliantly conceived of all of Huey Long’s many political brain children. Its appeal is unanswerable on the stump. Its clever employment of truth and half-truth as a foundation for its promises of plenty for the poor and its criticism of unrestricted wealth for the wealthy make the odds pretty high against the supporters of things-as-they-are, or even the sincere but less munificent economic trail blazers. No one questions Brother Smith’s declaration that millions are unemployed, near starvation and dependent on New Deal doles. There is no rebuttal to this statement that America is a land of plenty, with enough supplies to feed, goods to clothe and building materials to house in comfort every man, woman and child. Though his figures may be a few billions out of the way, no one denies that a tremendous amount of the nation’s wealth is in the hands of a few, while the many “ain’t got even one suit of clothes.”

Of course, there is nothing new if the human fundamentals to which Huey and the Reverend appeal, or in the economic reforms they advocate. Class consciousness, envy of wealth and a desire for the creature comforts of life are strong in every nation in every age. This is especially true of the poor whites of the South, those near-disenfranchised, lethargic and doomed relics of a ruinous agricultural system. Old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, a balance supply and demand, wealth spread—these have been the war cries of modern economists long before the New Deal was supposed to begin its attack on Big Business. But where the student of economics presents his suggestions through an impersonal, systematic theory, whose appeal is primarily to the rational, Huey and his high priest strike home to the emotions, the hates and the desires, the superstitions of the under-privileged poor-white class.

Reverend Smith, who, next to Huey Long and Mississippi’s [Senator Theodore] Bilbo, is probably the most talented rabble rouser in the South, can in an instant switch his mighty voice from piteously picturing Christ on the Cross to calling the local anti-Long leaders a “bunch of dirty, thieving drunkards.” Escorted by force from one parish by a determined group of anti-administrationists, with the heeded warning not to turn up again, he bobs up in the next parish with a vitriolic attack on his “persecutors” and proceeds upon his Christian way, describing the wife of a former Governor, who fought Long until her recent death, as “two jumps ahead of the insane asylum,” and calling upon any hostile member in the crowd to “shoot me while I stand here helpless,” his arms outstretched as though pinned to a cross and his sound truck surrounded by vigilant state police in plainclothes and uniform.

Reverend Smith has not confined his political and economic proselytizing to Louisiana alone. He has gone into Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, preaching Share Our Wealth and organizing societies. Weekly *The American Progress* reports thousands of new members. Huey and the Reverend Smith claim that there are now five million members in the United States. Divide this assertion by five or ten, and you still have a sizable—and in Louisiana a distinctly militant—group of zealots. The *American Progress* keeps hammering away at concentrated wealth, the chain stores, the national administration and the assorted opposition to Huey’s rule in Louisiana. Under senatorial frank, Huey floods the

nation with similar masterpieces, whose literary and ethical level is but slightly higher than those that The Progress presents for fifty cents a year—and don't bother about paying, we deduct printing expenses from the payrolls. Every person in the United States who can read, and many who can't, know at least vaguely who Huey Long is and what he is driving at.

“Wall Street and its newspapers, and the radio liars say this is a scheme to make money for your friend, Huey Long,” shouts Reverend Smith. “They'd kill him if they could, my brethren. And they're going to have to kill him to keep him from helping you. As God is my judge, the only way they will keep Huey Long from the White House is to kill him. But when they do, his great work will go marching on. Share, brothers, share, and don't let those white-livered skunks laugh at you.”

Huey Long in the White House. A preposterous belly-laugh. An impossible irony of democracy. But not to these people. Four years ago Louisiana was plastered with signs, “The White House in 1940.” Huey has discouraged such statements. They like him in Arkansas, as Mrs. Caraway can attest. They like him and his ilk in Mississippi, which has just presented Bilbo to the Senate. Whether or not the stars continue to fall on Alabama, the rednecks will worship the man who can outrant and outsmart a [Alabama Governor David] Graves or a [Alabama Senator James] Heflin. They flocked to listen to him in the Dakotas when he stumped for Roosevelt.

Despite his assertions and attacks upon the present administration, it cannot be predicted that Huey Long will run for President in 1936. Certainly, it cannot now be foreseen that he would have an outside chance for election. But if the electoral college is abolished and the depression isn't, stranger political disasters could befall a tragically ignorant people groping for surety.