

Generalities or Generalship?

GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT as Democratic nominee for President has "made scores of vague promises, but always with safeguarding reservations," has "discussed vaguely" the origins of economic adversity, and "even more vaguely" what he would like to do after better times return, but "has maintained complete silence on the one question that is of supreme importance to every family in the land"—how to win the war against the depression. Thus spoke Mr. Ogden L. Mills, United States Secretary of the Treasury, at Chicago the other night.

And while the words were in his mouth, the Governor of New York, Mr. Roosevelt, supplied fresh illustration of them in an address at Albany on unemployment relief. "Without offering specific proposals and dealing only with the broad issues involved," is the way one Democratic newspaper begins its summary of what the Governor said.

Where President Hoover has met economic recession with a whole program of specific and concrete moves to loosen credit, foster employment and afford relief, Mr. Roosevelt looks back over the scene with the advantage of hindsight and purports to tell what he would do differently. And yet how much differently?

"The primary duty rests on the community, through local government and private agencies, to take care of the relief of unemployment," he begins. Is not this exactly what President Hoover has been preaching from the beginning of the emergency relief work?

But "the obligation extends to the Federal Government itself if and when it becomes apparent that states and communities are unable to take care of the necessary relief work." This was explicitly recognized by President Hoover in February, 1931, and in the general relief appropriation bill he signed last spring.

Mr. Roosevelt protests because the National Government did not step in earlier to aid; but would he have had it intervene before it appeared—according to his own rule—that state and local means were overtaxed?

Mr. Roosevelt expresses his favor for public works as an aid to employment under certain circumstances. Governments should set up a long-range reserve of funds for this purpose. Agreed. The principal bill to this effect is the work of a Republican Senator, and in part the outgrowth of the Conference on Recent Economic Changes which Mr. Hoover sponsored when Secretary of Commerce. But the building of such a reserve must begin in times of ampler revenues.

As to the kind of construction to be encouraged immediately, the Governor indorses those which are "self-sustaining." Lexicographers and accountants may now debate in what way these differ from the "self-liquidating" works which Mr. Hoover approves and for which his Reconstruction Finance Corporation is lending money. Mr. Roosevelt deplores the Treasury deficit which prevents larger constructive appropriations; yet he has said no word in criticism of "pork barrel" and bonus proposals that would have made that condition worse.

Governor Roosevelt, it is true, declares for state systems of compulsory unemployment insurance and for federally coordinated state employment offices—projects which might be more enthusiastically considered but are not impossible under a Hoover administration. Finally, he supports child labor regulation, as does President Hoover, and indorses child welfare work—of which probably no more comprehensive agency exists than the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection.

If Governor Roosevelt wishes to convince the American people that he should displace President Hoover he ought either to prove that he has a superior set of general policies for the conduct of the nation or is prepared to apply existing policies by a better set of concrete methods than those of the Administration. On virtually every major question except the tariff Governor Roosevelt has adopted substantially the policies already in effect.

For the classroom tactician discussing a military problem, generalities may suffice. For the man in the field opposing an enemy, only generalship will answer. President Hoover has shown himself a conspicuously able commander in the battle against economic chaos. Which does the American people want, generalities or generalship?