

The Bonus Army ^[1]

In 1922, a Hearst newspaper truck from New York City delivered a petition to the Capitol bearing more than one million signatures in support of a bonus for World War I veterans. Momentum had been building for several years for the federal government to compensate servicemen for the difference they lost between pay in the military versus their civilian jobs. The document simply read: "We respectfully petition Congress to pass the soldiers' bonus act without further delay, and also to levy a sales tax to obtain the money to pay the bonus.

After heated debate, Congress passed a bonus, but President Warren Harding vetoed it. In May 1924, Congress again passed a bonus, and this time overrode the veto of President Calvin Coolidge. The payment -- which provided veterans \$1.25 per day for service overseas and \$1 per day for domestic service -- was deferred by the law until 1945.

The issue was reopened in the early 1930s, when out-of-work veterans suffering the effects of the Great Depression marched on Washington to demand an immediate payment of their bonus. This "Bonus Army" consisted of some 15,000 to 20,000 World War I veterans from across the country. They arrived in the capital in June 1932 and set up camp on the Mall.

Six futile weeks of lobbying Congress raised government fears of riots. On July 28, cavalry, infantry, tank troops and a mounted machine gun squadron commanded by General Douglas MacArthur and Major Dwight Eisenhower dispersed veterans and their families with bayonets and tear gas. MacArthur was convinced that the men were communists, despite his commanders' repeated reports to the contrary. According to journalist and eyewitness Joseph C. Harsch, "This was not a revolutionary situation. This was a bunch of people in great distress wanting help.... These were simply veterans from World War I who were out of luck, out of money, and wanted to get their bonus -- and they needed the money at that moment."

Public opinion denounced President Herbert Hoover for the resulting bloodshed. Audiences in movie theaters booed newsreel footage of soldiers expelling the Bonus Army from their camps. One woman wrote the editor of the *Washington Daily News*, "I voted for Herbert Hoover in 1928. God forgive me and keep me alive at least until the polls open!" Hoover, already deeply unpopular, would lose the election that fall to Franklin Roosevelt in a landslide.

- 1. Quoted in Thomas Craughwell, "#6: Hoover's Attack on the Bonus Army (Top 10 Mistakes by U.S. Presidents)," *Encyclopedia Britannica Blog*

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NEGRO **RANK and FILE** **WHITE**

VETERANS

MARCH TO WASHINGTON

TO ARRIVE AT OPENING OF CONGRESS

DECEMBER 5th, 1932

TO DEMAND

CASH PAYMENT of BONUS

**MARCH TO BE LED BY
RANK AND FILE VETERANS**

Again the veterans are going to march to Washington, to demand immediate full cash payment of the Bonus! This time we will have fighting leadership that won't sell us out. Why are we going to march? Let's see.

**A WINTER OF HUNGER
FACES THE VETERANS**

Cold, brutal winter is now on us. Over a million and a half unemployed veterans are hungry; hundreds of thousands of us have no shelter. And there will be more of us in that fix by the time winter comes.

Those of us who still have some work have suffered wage cuts, and the stagger plan, and face more wage cuts.

**INTEREST CHARGES
WIPE OUT BONUS BY 1945**

In 1945 there will be no Bonus for the rank and file veteran. The balance is now being eaten up by the compound interest charged by the government to all who borrowed the fifty percent of the Adjusted Service Certificate. In 1945 there will be only about \$30 to \$60 for the great majority of the veterans entitled to the Bonus. **WE MUST FIGHT FOR THE BONUS NOW!**

**THE ENEMIES OF THE BONUS
ARE UNITED AGAINST US**

The Republican, Democratic and Socialist Parties are all united in the fight against the payment of the balance due the veterans on the Bonus. They get the full support of the boss press, and the liberal writers, too.

Waters, the Hoke Smiths, the Deak Carters and other former leaders of the B. E. F. are fighting the rank and file veterans who are putting up a fight for the immediate payment of the Bonus.

The newly elected commander Johnson has had recent correspondence with Hoover and will not fight for the Bonus. General Glassford and the Hoover government are again preparing to prevent the veterans from making direct demands on Congress.

These fakery are all lined up with the enemies of the Bonus to prevent the rank and file of the veterans from uniting their mass power to march to Washington and again demand the immediate payment of the Bonus and fight against cutting of the disability allowance.

**RANK AND FILE VETERANS,
MARCH TO WASHINGTON!**

All Veterans March to Washington!

Veterans' organizations, elect Bonus Marchers. All rank and file veterans, including employed and unemployed veterans, should elect delegated Bonus Marchers. Veterans from shops, mills, mines, factories and farms should be elected. Bonus marchers should be elected from the veteran membership in labor, fraternal and social organizations.

**ELECT CITY RANK AND
FILE COMMITTEES**

City rank and file committees representing the various groups and organizations of veterans should meet to carry out the program of Central Rank and File Committee elected by the Cleveland Conference of the Rank and File Veterans. (Sept. 22-26.)

**HEROES IN 1917;
THEY CALL US "CRIMINALS" NOW**

In 1917 the government appealed to the masses: "Shall we be more tender with our dollars than with the lives of our sons?" (Second Liberty Bond poster, 1917.)

And now, in 1932: "The bonus marchers are criminals." (Statement of President Hoover.)

Neither then nor now did the Wall Street government care about the welfare of the soldier, "the lives of our sons."

Billions went to the billionaires who in 1917 made huge profits from the war, and today the billionaires go to the same crowd. The Congress that refused to give the starving veterans the bonus gave through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation four and a half billion dollars for the bankers, the railroads and other big corporations.

We got the bullets and the gas in 1917. Many of us were maimed and crippled for life. In 1932 we get the bullets and gas of the police, as we did in Washington, and of the troops, which Hoover called out against us.

Because we were demanding the Bonus so that we and our families could have something to eat, the President of the United States orders the army to gas and bayonet us, to burn our meagre belongings and to drive our wives and children out into the dark of the night.

[18]

The organizers of the "Bonus Army" published this broadside to explain their purpose and recruit marchers.



[19]

Bonus marchers battle with police in Washington, D.C.

3 January 2018

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