

# Unemployment and Methods of Relief

A Report by Controller F. S. Spence

During a recent visit to some American cities, Controller F. S. Spence made an inquiry into unemployment and endeavored to ascertain what had been done towards meeting this difficult problem during last winter. He found that New York has an immense "Unemployment Problem," but the Municipal Council has done little to deal with the matter. Last year the Mayor appointed a large committee of prominent citizens to make a study of the question and the situation, and report recommendations. It was not in any sense a "relieving" or "work-supplying" committee, but only an inquiring body. An extensive investigation of selected areas, and an application of the results to the city at large, led to the conclusion that the total number of unemployed in January last was about 442,000.

## An Inter-Church Federation.

There was organized last year an Inter-Church-Federation Committee, with which the corporation had no official connection, and through this body employment was given to a great many persons. There does not seem to be available any complete report of exactly what was accomplished. The effort made was to find out where work was available, and to bring unemployed persons into contact with it, also to induce citizens to create as much work as possible and apply to the Federation for the help needed to perform it. Later on, the supervision of this Inter-Church-Federation Committee seems to have fallen into the hands of the secretary of the Mayor's Unemployment Committee, which has an office in the Municipal Building, where its investigations are still being conducted.

## A Municipal Lodging House.

The city operates a Municipal Lodging House, at which during winter time, out of work and homeless men and women may obtain lodging and food, somewhat on the plan of the Toronto House of Industry. The persons given shelter in this institution last winter ran as high as 3,000 per night, and averaged 2,700 for the season. In return for lodging and two meals, those cared for, are required to do a certain amount of work the following day, generally about four hours.

This work is all indoor work, serving in the institution and helping with fittings and repairs, such as painting benches, glazing sash and the like, as well as making and repairing clothing for inmates of civic institutions. The manager of this lodging house states that through the efforts of his staff permanent positions are secured for many persons and help is given to all towards attaining better conditions.

## A Public Employment Bureau.

The city operates a Public Employment Bureau, under the direction of Mr. Walter L. Sears, who is a specialist in this department. Nine branches are to be established in different parts of the city. The central office staff numbers thirteen, and the bureau is well organized. Its functions are simply to supply free the service ordinarily given by Intelligence Offices. This bureau was opened on November last and up until the end of June had filed 28,772 applications for work, about one-sixth of whom were women. It had received between four and five thousand calls from employers and had placed in positions 2,538 persons.

The rate of wages paid to municipal laborers in New York is \$2.50 per day of eight hours. This is higher than the general rate paid by contractors. Unskilled men work in the construction of the new subway for \$1.65 per day. All uniformed civic employes are required to pay for their own uniforms, which are supplied by contractors on an agreement with the city.

## No Appropriation for Relief.

There is no such thing in New York at any time, as a civic appropriation of money for either relief-work or outdoor relief. By law, the city is prohibited from spending money on outdoor relief. The civic service is practically controlled so far as regards appointments, by a Civil Service Commission and all applicants for positions must have passed the special commission. This rule applies to even corporation laborers, who cannot be listed for work without at least a medical examination, and any laborers required by any department are engaged upon certificate from the Civil Service Commission. Even in cases of emergency a department may only temporarily engage men for a period of not more than five days, reporting at once to the commission to whose approval this action is subject.

## Conditions in Philadelphia.

The situation in Philadelphia is much the same as in New York, excepting that the unemployment trouble does not seem to have been so acute. An estimate of the unemployed last winter put the number at 14,147, which it will be noted is very small. To deal with this problem, there was organized an Emergency Aid Committee of private citizens and representatives of different philanthropic organizations, many of them ladies.

To this committee the city gave a grant of \$100,000. A large amount in addition to this was raised by private contribution. The money was expended in paying persons who were employed to do certain public work, being placed for this purpose under direction of civic officials. They were paid at the rate of \$1.20 per day of five hours, and the city expressed its high appreciation of the value of the work done in this way. There was also organized a good deal of indoor employment, mainly in the way of preparing Red Cross supplies for use in the European war. For this work women were paid at the rate of 75c per day of five hours. The committee also acted as a sort of supervising committee for different societies, making case records, and giving advice, as is done in Toronto by the Social Service Commission. The committee, had however, no control over the organizations it advised, which were maintained entirely by

private funds. The committee also acted as an employment bureau, and managed in this way to be of service to several thousand people.

## Strict Civil Service Regulations.

Civic employment in the city of Philadelphia is governed as in other large cities, by strict civil service regulations. All appointments for positions, excepting the positions of heads of departments, must be made from the lists of persons duly examined and enrolled, and such properly appointed persons, if dismissed by department heads, have a right to appeal this action, and to have an investigation of their case. The civil service system seems to meet with the very warm approval of municipal representatives, municipal officials, and the public at large. Outside the school service in which 6,397 persons are engaged, the number of city officials in Philadelphia city and county is 12,437. The wage paid by the corporation for unskilled labor is \$2 per day.

## Unemployment At Boston.

A visit was also paid to the city of Boston and inquiry made into the situation there. The problem of unemployment last winter was met to some extent by an appropriation of \$200,000 of public money, to which a small amount was added by private subscription. This was expended under the direction of a special committee, organized by citizens, to whom the grant was made and was expended mainly in road-making and forestry.

A Free Employment Bureau is operated somewhat on the same plan as that of New York, but is entirely under State control. The State of Massachusetts has four free employment offices, located in the cities of Boston, Springfield, Fall River and Worcester. These institutions during the year 1914 found positions for 24,710 persons. The service is entirely free and includes dealing with farm workmen, domestics and young people, as well as with men and women seeking work of other kinds. It is in touch with various social organizations but does not directly give any kind of charity or relief. The number of employes applied for by persons needing them last year was 31,565.

## Women and Unemployment

The interim report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment, published last week, in which the members of that council of twelve make fourteen recommendations to the Government, is worthy of more than a casual reading. It has been dealt with in its general attitude towards unemployment on the Front Page of this issue; but there are three clauses which may well be regarded more closely by those especially interested in the woman worker. In the third recommendation, it is suggested that a system of employment offices be placed under a Provincial Commission, composed of eight members, two of whom shall be women. There are other features in this recommendation; but it is the fact that feminine representation is suggested on such a Commission which shows how broad is the scope of the new investigation of unemployment. Such a recognition of the importance of the woman worker's place in the industrial world is a welcome indication of feminism of the safe and sane type which will ultimately be for the benefit of all workers.

The seventh recommendation, following the suggestion that the system of unemployment bureaux be managed by the Labor Commission through a director, advocates the appointment of a woman of training and ability to act with this director as assistant. The duties of this feminine associate would be the inspection of the women's department of the employment bureaux and the study of employment for women. The eleventh recommendation (such lucky odd numbers for the woman worker) suggests that representation be given to women on the local Advisory Committees.

The carrying out of these three recommendations will go far towards improving conditions for the unemployed woman, who (despite the cheap cynicism of certain would-be social philosophers) will find that the other woman more readily understands her needs than would the best-meaning masculine director. The members of the Commission are to be congratulated on the broad sympathy and farsightedness which have inspired these recommendations and also upon the fact that there was associated with them as assistant secretary, such an experienced and capable woman journalist as Miss Marjory MacMurchy, who has made a special and thorough study of feminine employment and who knows and feels whereof she speaks.—From Saturday Night.

## Rebuked

From The Winnipeg Telegram.

It is highly presumptuous on the part of these journals (The Daily News and The Globe) of the effete east even to discuss the social status of a gentleman who has been honored with the Premiership of Manitoba, much less, we take it, to question the respectability of professions leading to the higher walks of public life. Next thing one knows, The Globe and The News will get all "het up" over the social status of the Honorable "Jack-Pot" Chambers and as to the respectability or otherwise of arranging election saw-offs as a steady profession for an ambitious young man, we would thank them to keep their hands off what is purely a matter for Western etiquette to decide.

## Not the Cause of the Trouble

From The Hamilton Herald.

"Somewhat trying" is The Globe's description of Toronto's climate. There has long been a suspicion that there was something wrong with Toronto, but there seems to be an element of unfairness in placing the blame on the climate.