

I. THE PROGRAMME AND ITS RATIONALE.

No one who has given any thought at all the problem, or rather problems, of Unemployment will need to be told that the formulation of a research programme which will cover all the important ground is beset with difficulty. It is initially difficult because of the many possible avenues of approach - even if they all do, eventually, and if pursued far enough, lead to much the same ends. It is even more formidable, however, if that programme has other considerations in mind as well. And there are three:

(1) the choice of those aspects which have more than a transitory significance, which constitute a durable or resistant part of the problem, or are of special importance in this country;

(2) the attempt to select, so far as is consistent with scientific and impartial research, the problems where investigation may more reasonably or readily than in others be expected to yield fruit as well as light; and

(3) the choice and definition of problems in such a way that either they can be investigated as a whole, i.e., by the various specialists in the social sciences but in cooperation; or else will link together or support each other at not too far removed an interval.

We should attempt, in sum, to choose projects which will be (1) representative, (2) fruitful, and (3) which will lend themselves to cooperative effort.

Even when these requirements are borne in mind, however, no programme - especially when it has to begin on a small and manageable scale - can be expected to be free from criticism. Unemployment is a subject, after all, which embraces, sooner or later, most of our economic and social organisation: and it is a field of enquiry wide and complex enough for there to be scores of students of the problem each of whom feels that his own approach is the most important one. To tackle them all at once, however, would require an army of research workers - apart altogether from special provision for their training. What can be done is to pursue a plan which has reasonable prospects of expansion, while remaining aware of the aspects or problems not touched by it. Once it is begun, time and patience are called for as earnestly as is energy in research.

One broad distinction, which is relevant in defining our research programme, can be made. For practical purposes it is possible to distinguish two main types of unemployment investigations, as follows. The distinction outlined is one of method rather than of subject-matter. The pursuit of one method, moreover, cannot disregard the findings arrived at by the other.

Purely for convenience, we may perhaps call these the "causal approach" and the "survey-method" respectively. It is the latter which we are following.

The "causal" or mainly economic approach

(a) The study of industrial (or "business") fluctuations, why they occur, and how to reduce or prevent them; since these are the main direct causes of unemployment. This is the familiar field of the economist and statistician. Business fluctuations and breakdowns can be resolved into their various elements