

Unemployment in American Cities

By FRANCES A. KELLOR.

According to Frances A. Kellor, in the National Municipal Review, American Cities have suffered from unemployment, since the war started, in almost equal proportions to Canadian cities. In summing up the record, Miss Kellor lays great stress on the large part that the cities have played in the solving of the unemployed problem. "Despite all appeals," she says, "to the nation and to the states, it is emphatically clear that it is the city that grappled with the situation in the greatest hour of need."

The article reads partially as follows:—

The American city has had one dominant, heart-gripping problem this winter—not economy, not administration, not politics, but a problem vitally human and primarily industrial. Has it been equal to the task and is it finished? What have we done about unemployment? To the average citizen, conscious for the first time of an unemployment problem, the spring sunshine means that "it is all over," the "bread-liner" has gone to farming, the skilled workman to building, and the immigrant to digging trenches. Only the unemployed themselves and the responsible employer know that this is one of the delusions of sunshine and green grass, and that when men can live without starving and freezing their hardships are not like to intrude upon their neighbor's happiness.

An official canvass in Philadelphia showed 200,000 men unemployed; the house-to-house canvass of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of its policy-holders in New York, thrifty people ordinarily, gave the basis for an estimate of 357,000 men and women out of work in the entire city. This agrees with the 350,000 estimate made by the Brooklyn committee on unemployment. The labor organizations in New York City estimated that 471,102 were either out of work or on part time. In Chicago in January the municipal markets commission estimated 189,866 out of work. A Cleveland survey in December showed 61,000 unemployed; in the same month the city charities in Philadelphia estimated that Philadelphia's unemployed numbered 175,000.

The most careful surveys showed that where there was one man unemployed in 1913-14 there were two unemployed this past winter, and that the increase was from 40 per cent to 50 per cent. Without exaggeration it was conceded by those familiar with conditions that one out of every five bread-winners was unemployed. This unemployment was concentrated in cities primarily, but the small towns and villages also felt the shock and found it necessary to organize relief measures.

In some respects unemployment differed quite radically from that of previous years. At one bound the problem was lifted from the realm of relief into that of industry. Many thousands of able men and women were involuntarily unemployed for the first time in their lives or in many years; the additions to the bread lines were young men with hard hands and clear eyes instead of old men with soft hands or blear-eyed "hoboes"; women joined the ranks of pleaders or became the supporters of the family. At the same time the demonstrations and riots which characterized last winter disappeared, as though some of the sorrow of the war had found its way into the industrial disaster in America.

Of the causes we have learned but little. "The war" is the most common answer; "the administration" is the second best guess; while legislation, monopoly of land, the wage system, tariff, immigration, and the usual popular explanations have not been wanting. It is noteworthy that though there have been many reports by official commissions and private committees, none has yet made a real contribution to the subject of causes. This is partly explained by the fact that the demand for relief has been so widespread and immediate that the formulation of reasons has had to wait; also because those responsible were reluctant to face their own conclusions.

The test of meeting a concrete situation has made two things clear. Unemployment is a national situation, involving distribution of an interstate nature and supplemental planning of work of a climatic nature, which is within the province of the federal government and is its immediate duty. It is natural, however, in the absence of vision on the part of the state governments that the cities should have carried the burden and that the average citizen should have shouldered the load for his government. Early last fall it was noticeable that not only the larger cities, but indeed, and perhaps chiefly, the smaller towns realized

what the increasing shortage of work would mean during the winter. Interested and persistent effort was made in many cases to hasten or create public work to meet the decrease in private employment. There was much discussion of bond issues, loans, and public works; but the cities and towns that actually had work started upon any considerable scale were, until the opening of spring, few indeed. It was impossible to appropriate or divert funds quickly for many reasons, chiefly lack of precedent and of courage. It was objected that beginning certain kinds of work in the winter would increase the cost of it; that the necessary formalities had not been duly considered; and there were determining differences of opinion between boards of aldermen, controllers and boards of estimate. There were also elaborate debates over whether it was the business of the government or of philanthropy to relieve the situation. The traditional municipal emergency measures, such as rock piles and wood piles, hardly left an impression upon the situation. In a small western city, for instance, the officials under the stress of the critical unemployment there arranged to put a rock crusher into operation. It employed 25 men; 1,000 applied for work upon it. Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Boston, Lynn, Providence, Niagara Falls, Pittsburgh, and a long list of other cities and towns made some appropriations for work, New York represented those cities that depended entirely on contributions from citizens.

At least forty cities and towns in the country, and very probably more, had unemployment committees or commissions. Almost half of these were official—"mayor's committees"; a number of others had such close co-operative connection with the city council, the mayor, etc., that although they were nominally citizens committees they had, to all practical purposes, an official influence. They represented chambers of commerce, churches, city departments, charities, clubs, philanthropic organizations of all kinds, and individual citizens.

Most of the committees attempted little beyond immediate relief. Those that began on the other theory, as in New York City, finally saw that the present crisis and a long-time preventive program were not compatible. The New York committee began its emergency workshops about February 1. The thousands that flocked to them eager to work for 50 or 60 cents a day, and the thousands that had to be turned away because of lack of facilities, sufficiently attested the need of this artificial work as a measure of immediate relief. The New York committee did not by any means originate the emergency workshop; it had been adopted early in the winter by the vacation war relief work committee, the Red Cross in Buffalo and Albany, the emergency aid committee in Philadelphia, the Woman's Club in Chicago—also in Kansas City, Cincinnati, and probably on a small scale in many places. The idea is not new; certain churches have used it for years. It is admirably adapted to unemployables, or, better, partially employables. For the employable, it is, by every implication, an emergency measure, to be used only in a crisis.

The response of the American cities to their greatest problem this past winter is impressive and encouraging if one can lose sight temporarily of the enormous loss of resources in vitality, health, skill, happiness and hope. The unemployment has taken its place among the questions with which we shall deal with increasing sympathy and intelligence: it has been transferred from the province of charity to that of industrial organization. Where one citizen was enlisted as its foe; a hundred now stand ready. The preliminary educational work has been done, we have now but to organize the forces at work, seek the causes and institute remedies.

TREE PLANTING BY UNEMPLOYED.

In recommending to the city a program of tree planting and care, the Street Tree Committee of the Los Angeles City Club made the interesting point that eleven miles of street trees were planted a year ago by unemployed men at a total cost of \$1.25 a tree, including purchase, excavation, planting and staking. The committee urges that the whole city be planted, the original cost being met by assessment. And it proposes to meet the maintenance cost of \$20,000 a year thereafter by reviving a disused but still operative ordinance which provides that the city may charge 10 cents for each load of gravel taken out of the river bed. Canadian municipalities can take the hint.