

Our English Page

The organization of social work in Sweden.

The labour exchanges in different parts of the country co-operate, and for the guidance of the inter-local intermediary activity the Social Board draws up and distributes a weekly so-called "list of vacancies", containing information regarding the vacant situations and applicants within each county, which have not been filled or placed respectively by the local bureaux. By granting subsidies for the travelling expenses of the applicants, the State facilitates the movement of labour between different places.

Information regarding the measures taken by the official labour exchanges to combat unemployment is given in the following.

Unemployment and Remedial Measures.

Mass-unemployment was comparatively unknown in Sweden prior to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. During the winter months slackness of employment, it is true, used to occur within certain trades dependent on climatic conditions, but this chiefly affected the building trade and the unskilled labourers in the larger towns, and did not call for any considerable remedial measures on the part of the community. The outbreak of the war was accompanied by the first appreciable dislocation of the labour market, but the unemployment that then supervened gave place during the subsequent war years to a shortage of labour which at times, owing to the extraordinary industrial inflation made itself very perceptibly felt. Restrictions in production only occurred to any considerable degree in the tile and stone industries; beyond these, unemployment could hardly be said to exist outside trades dependent upon the supply of grain-stuffs and raw material, such as those of bakers and painters. Except for a brief interval of slackness at the time of the Armistice, this industrial inflation continued even after the end of the war reaching its climax in 1920 when it was succeeded by the so-called "post-war depression" which settled over the whole world. Up to that time industry had absorbed labour to such degree that in consequence agriculture periodically suffered severely from a lack of it, but the changed conditions immediately brought about a new situation. The turn of the year 1921-22 saw a total of more than 160,000 persons affected by unemployment. Since that time labour conditions have

gradually improved, so that to-day employment within the industries stands at about the same level as before the onset of the depression in 1920. The labour market has during the supervening years, however, received fresh yearly contingents of people seeking work, and the American immigration restrictions, by reducing emigration, have also contributed to making unemployment an ever-present problem. Of late years the number of persons seeking relief has never fallen below 10,000, whilst in the winter months this number has been doubled or even trebled.

In order to inquire into the conditions of unemployment, in May 1927 a general unemployment census was made, from which it appeared that 62,000 men and 2,000 women were without work. It was further approximately computed that in places not reached by this census there were about 15,000 unemployed people. That the figures were so high may be partly explained by the fact that the census took place at a time of year unfavourable to Northern Sweden, namely the interval of idleness that always occurs between the felling and the floating of the timber. Hence the figures representing those reporting themselves as unemployed were, as regards this class of seasonal workers, disproportionately large. The number of persons whose unemployment was attributable to seasonal conditions, i. e. not only lumbermen, but also agricultural, building, and transport workers, probably amounted to about one-half of the registered total. Of the unemployed, close on 20 per cent were under 20 years of age, which shows the existence of very wide-spread juvenile unemployment. On the other hand, this unemployment census showed that the unemployed largely consisted of elderly or in other respects less efficient persons, whom the industries had weeded out during the post-war depression, and whom it was not necessary to employ in view of the process of rationalisation then being carried out. Of the unemployed, 15 per cent were above the age of 50, and from closer investigations made in the larger towns it was established that about 20 per cent of the unemployed there registered had difficulty in obtaining work owing to some permanent physical defect or poor health. Apart from the phenomenon of seasonal unemployment, of such normal occurrence in the Swedish labour market, the census brought to light the presence of problems more difficult of

solution, namely juvenile unemployment, and unemployment affecting the less efficient class of workers.

The only measure of any greater importance for combating unemployment, resorted to by public authorities before the War, was the institution and development of the Official Labour Exchanges as an organ for regulating supply and demand as regards labour between different districts and industries. To facilitate their functions, these labour exchanges were empowered to advance the work-seekers their travelling expenses, to which expenditure the State contributed about one-half. Otherwise no relief was payable by the Estate to unemployed persons, but certain communes periodically severely affected by seasonal unemployment gave relief to their unemployed in the form of publicly organised relief works or by distributing supplies of necessities, besides which the Poor Law Guardians had in some cases to come to the rescue.

Within certain trade unions there had already by this time been instituted trade union unemployment relief funds. Subscribers to these funds to-day already number more than 200,000, and in 1921 alone, a year of outstanding unemployment, 8 million kronor were paid out in relief.

As it was foreseen that special difficulties would arise in the labour market at the outbreak of the war, a State Unemployment Commission was appointed for the purpose of taking steps towards palliating and relieving unemployment. All communes affected by unemployment were authorised to appoint Communal Unemployment Relief Committees for dealing with these matters. On a proposal submitted by the Unemployment Commission, the Riksdag, in 1914, voted a grant for carrying on specially organized relief of the unemployed. For the organization of such relief work the initiative had to be taken by the commune concerned, but in order to obtain State aid — ordinarily amounting to one-half of the expenditure — it was necessary (from 1921) to secure from the Unemployment Commission its authority for starting the work. No unemployed was entitled to claim relief as a right, but such was granted only after considering the needs of each individual case, with due regard to the involuntary character of the unemployment, and to the applicant's readiness to accept employment. It was thus fixed that the unemployed person must be above the age of 15 and be capable of work in his trade, and that during the preceding six months he had not, except in certain special cases, been the recipient of poor law relief. It was further required of the applicant that he had, at a labour bureau, applied for, but failed to obtain employment, and also that he should be found to be in need of relief on account of enforced idleness for a period of not less than 6 days prior to his application. Pecuniary relief for the assistance of underservedly unemployed was extensively granted during the years 1914-1915 and 1921-1923, the largest total of those relieved,

65,000 falling within 1922. Thanks to the speedy recovery of industrial life, this form of relief has only been of exceptional occurrence since 1923. The form of unemployment relief, however, that has been most extensively practised is putting the unemployed on specially organized works, the so-called State relief works. Works of this class were inaugurated in 1916 already, but attained their greatest extension in 1922 when no less than 31,000 persons were thus employed. The number of public relief works has in recent years varied between 2,000 and 5,000, dependent upon changes of conditions in industrial life and seasonal changes in the labour market. In the case of these relief works payment (on a piece-work basis, as a rule) is regulated so as to cover the bare necessities of the workers, certainly, but on the other hand so as always to fall below the rate of earnings obtaining in the open labour market, the reason for this partly being the emergency relief character of these works, partly the necessity of not checking the personal interest of the workers in obtaining employment on their own initiative. The rate of wages for relief work must be regulated with due regard to the wages standard in the respective localities but any supporter of a family who is sent to some place where relief work remuneration is lower than that prevalent in his home locality, receives the difference between those two rates as a family allowance (called local allowance). Relief workers are lodged gratuitously at the place where they are employed, but have to feed themselves, which is generally done by forming co-operative messes. In cases where a labour exchange is able to secure employment in the open labour market for any relief worker, the latter is bound to leave the relief work, but his travelling expenses are paid.

To be continued.

Destiny

St. Paul says: "Every man shall rise in his own class." In the future, as in the past and the present, the law of association determines destiny. Each man goes to his own place.

Source of all Love

He who loves not God, nor his brother, cannot love the grass beneath his feet, nor the creatures which live not for his uses, filling those spaces in the universe which he needs not; while, on the other hand, none can love God, nor his human brother, without looking upon them, every one, as in that respect his brethren also, as in the Doctrines of the brethren also, and perhaps worthier than he. If in the under concords they have to fill, their part is touched more truly. — John Ruskin.

Motives

It is not the motive, properly speaking, that determines the working of the will, but it is the will that imparts strength to the motive. Coleridge says: "It is the man that makes the motive, and not the motive the man."

Differences

Love one another in spite of your differences, in spite of your faults; do what you can to serve each other, to lighten each other's trials and inconveniences and burdens; above all, make the best of one another.

Trustworthiness

There are some men who are trusted by all who know them, enemies and friends alike. The recipe to insure such trust is a simple one. It was suggested in a recent utterance about a man just now very much before the public, when a friend said of him, as to his attitude toward a certain class of citizens: "He will do everything in his power for them except to do that which is wrong; he will do wrong for no man, and, therefore, can be trusted by all men." Are you winning the title to such trust by your fellows?

Brevity

If you would be pungent be brief, for it is with words as with sunbeams — the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn. — Southey.

Eternity

If we but provide for eternity with the same solicitude and real care as we do for this life, we could not fail of heaven. — Tillotson.

Talk

Talk, after all, is pathetically cheap. Where one cannot understand without words, no amount of explanation will make things clear. Across impassable deeps, like lofty peaks of widely parted ranges, soul greets soul. Separated forever by the limitations of our clay, we live and die absolutely alone. Even Love, the magician, who for dazzling moments gives new sight and boundless revelations, cannot always work its charm. A third of our lives is spent in sleep, and who shall say what proportion of the rest is endured in planetary isolation? — Myrtle Reid.

Image of Eden

The faint image of Eden which is stamped upon our hearts in childhood, chafes and rubes in our rough struggles with the world. — Nicholas Nickleby.

A City

Blucher, who helped at Waterloo, was once taken by Wellington to the dome of St. Paul's. The old warrior looked around the city, and at last Wellington said to him, "Well, what do you think of it?" The blood of ten generations of heathen warriors rose up in his cheeks, and he said, "What a city for pillage!" What is the city to you? A place for pillage, to get your own, to advance your own interests? Or do you look, like your Master in Jerusalem, upon the great needy rich city and reach out your hand to help it? — C. L. Goodell.

Words

If your foot slip you may recover your balance, but if your tongue slip, you cannot recall your words. — F. Langbridge.