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With an Introduction by the Archbishop of York

Excerpt

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Part I

FACTS AND FIGURES

(i) THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

UNEMPLOYMENT has been since the War one of the greatest social problems in this country, and one which, on account of the poverty and distress associated with it, and of its effects on character and personality, cannot fail to interest those who care for their fellow men. Hitherto it has been impossible to say accurately what its effects on body and mind may be, and, apart from Mr Bakke's brilliant study of the unemployed man, which appeared in 1932, no general estimate based on extensive observation has been made. Until we know something of these effects, we can scarcely hope to deal with them successfully, and the object of this enquiry has been, first, to find out something about them, and secondly, to consider in the light of that knowledge the efficacy of the various efforts (both statutory and, in particular, voluntary) which are being made to deal with them.

The methods adopted in the enquiry were due primarily to suggestions made by the late Professor Daniels of Manchester, and Sir William Beveridge. The former pointed out that no satisfactory answer could yet be given to the questions: Who are the unemployed? What kind of men are those who are out of work, and why has the disaster of unemployment overtaken these and not others? Sir William Beveridge suggested that the crux of the matter was long unemployment, and that if we took a sample and interviewed in their homes something like 1,000 of the long unemployed, it ought at least to suggest what types of men were those who had been out of work for long; whether it was only the industrial misfits, with those who were too old for work and those who were work-shy, or whether there was a real problem of waste; of material, potentially good, which was rotting for lack of use. It would show what con-

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nexion there was between a man's previous employment history and unemployment, and might provide some information as to the attitude towards possible re-employment of the long unemployed. It might even throw some light on the question whether unemployment was affecting what, for want of more sharply defined words, we may call their standards and values, and whether the opportunities which unemployment provides of developing leisure activities were being used—if indeed they can, under present conditions, be used at all.

The technique of taking such a sample is familiar to statisticians and administrators, but perhaps not so familiar to the general public, and it is explained in detail in an early section of this report. In this enquiry it was decided to study the long unemployed, whom we defined for our purpose as those who had had not more than three days' continuous work in the year previous to the sample date, in six towns, the local differences of which might, when taken together, be expected to form a fairly representative picture of unemployment. These were Deptford, Leicester, the Rhondda Urban District in South Wales, Crook in County Durham, Liverpool, and Blackburn. There are aspects of long unemployment which are not adequately illustrated by the situation in these towns, and in some directions it was possible to collect additional material elsewhere. The selection of cases was made at random, in these various areas, from the live register of the Unemployment Assistance Board, which is responsible for the maintenance of the long unemployed.¹ We did not attempt to deal exhaustively with the group of unemployed who were not qualified to draw unemployment assistance at that time (owing to the fact that they had not previously worked at an insurable occupation) but depended on public assistance for maintenance. In two of the six places visited we were able to learn enough of this group to provide some comparison with those in the sample. One cogent reason why more could not be done was lack of time.

¹ In Appendix III (p. 416) an account will be found of the various statutory agencies dealing with unemployment. The difference between Unemployment Insurance, Unemployment Assistance, and Public Assistance is there explained.

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THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

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The form of record card used is printed in Appendix II (p. 413). It was planned to contain on one side details of age, occupation, composition of family, family income and regular outgoings, and employment record (the latter taken, after visits had been made, from records in the Employment Exchanges), while on the other side there were the more personal details, such as the man's appearance, his intelligence, his and his family's health, the domestic standards of his household, the "atmosphere" of the family so far as it could be judged, the man's employability and attitude towards possible employment, his attitude towards industrial transference and training, his relations with the social institutions of his neighbourhood, including the unemployed clubs, and his leisure. In most instances some particular aspects of the case proved to be specially interesting and were written up fully, while others were omitted; but taken as a whole the results give a vast amount of information on most of the problems which we set out to investigate. References to the numbers of effective visits in some of the tables given (e.g. pp. 197, 432) indicate the number of visits where information relevant to the particular topic discussed was obtained.

There are two features of this method which deserve further remark. One is that it has made it possible to form a picture of the effects of unemployment on the ordinary man. This proved to be very different from the picture which would have been given if we had only come into contact with unemployed men through the unemployed clubs, for in many places the clubs appeal only to a section of the unemployed. The second is that whereas the sample method has been employed many times before to the study of different aspects of unemployment, there has not been before in this country, so far as we are aware, an application of the method so widely as we applied it, in the effort to obtain not only statistical information, but an insight into the minds and feelings of the men we visited. The degree of success which was attained exceeded our expectations. Though we had our failures and a few doors were slammed in our faces, it was noticeable that the majority of men interviewed, and their wives also, talked readily. They often

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said that they had never before had such an opportunity as these interviews gave, for talking over their problems and relieving their minds by “telling someone about it all”, and each one of us is the richer by some personal friendships as a result.

The Unemployment Assistance Board generously put at our disposal their register for the selection of a sample of long-unemployed cases which would satisfy recognized statistical tests as being unbiased. We were also helped in the selection of the six towns, where, as explained later, the sample was carried out, by the statistical authorities in the Board and the Ministry of Labour. The records of the Unemployment Assistance Board and of the Labour Exchange are confidential, as are the records of our talks with the men. Though the sample was taken from the register of the Unemployment Assistance Board, no names or addresses appear on our record cards, only guide numbers. It was surprising how willing men were to talk to strangers with no introduction save a letter signed by ourselves, stating that we were interested in unemployment, a letter which in the later stages of the sample was discarded as unnecessary. We believe that in a great number of instances their confidence was won, and that it has been respected.

It is hardly necessary to add that in interviews of this kind subjective factors are likely to influence the result. We are aware of this, but the number of those who undertook the visits, which were all made by those directly concerned in drawing up this report, was sufficiently small for it to be possible to isolate some at least of these factors in the records and to make allowances for them. Many of the questions we discuss cannot be measured or stated in terms of figures, but they are none the less important, and where generalizations are made in the report, they are made, not on the basis of individual instances, but of a group of cases about which we are in substantial agreement.

Thus the report has some claims to be taken as a picture of the situation as a whole. Each of the men interviewed represents many others, for even the isolated cases of long unemployment in our London borough have their counterparts in other parts of London and in many of the prosperous towns of the south of

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England. Where we talk of problems by tens, it means that these problems exist in thousands. To the situation in each of our areas the situation of some place, or places, elsewhere corresponds. It is only when the greatness of these problems, in numbers as well as in complexity, is understood that their urgency can be recognized. The homes we visited are like 300,000 others. Our only justification for intruding on the privacy of these hundreds of unemployed will be if it has made possible such an analysis of their real needs that something more can be done to meet them.

(ii) LONG UNEMPLOYMENT BEFORE THE SLUMP

In November 1936, when the sample enquiry was undertaken, a cycle of three years' growing depression, followed by four of recovery, had just been completed. In November 1929 the economic life of the country had been for some time in a state of equilibrium. These were not years of real prosperity, though they appeared so in the light of the "great depression" that was going to follow. Of ten English workers willing to contribute their share to national production, only nine were doing so at any time during that period. The tenth man was registered at an Employment Exchange as looking for work. Thus, of Great Britain's working population insured against the risk of unemployment,¹ gradually increasing from 11,000,000 men and women to 12,000,000, rather more than 1,000,000 were involuntarily out of work. This state of affairs, though puzzling to the mind of those used to the "good old times" before the War (and, incidentally, before disturbing figures of unemployment began to be officially published), had gradually come to be accepted as a normal state.

There was no considerable section of the population which was permanently "tenth man". In February 1930 when the depression had already begun to make itself felt and the number of unemployed had risen to 1,500,000, only 131,000 of this number had failed, between February 1928 and February 1930,

¹ About three-quarters of the total working population in a social sense, but representative for nearly the whole *industrial* working class.

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to make at least thirty contributions to the Unemployment Insurance Scheme, while the number of people who had had no work at all during this time was again very much smaller. In September 1929, of a total unemployed army of 1,150,000 people, only 53,000¹ (less than 5%) had been continuously out of work for a year or more. Apart from this small stagnant pool, we must think of pre-depression unemployment as a fairly rapidly moving stream. A figure of 53,000 means that in a typical middle-sized community of 40,000 people there were not more than some fifty long-unemployed men and women. The percentage of the total industrial population which persistently failed to get absorbed into employment (less than $\frac{1}{2}$ %) was the same as that which we found seven years later in the most prosperous of our six towns, the Borough of Deptford. Although there is no information whatsoever available about the composition of this small number of long-unemployed men in 1929, because no one bothered about a problem of this extent, some light may be thrown on who the long unemployed were before the depression by the description which will be given of long unemployment in Deptford, and the reader who tries to imagine pre-depression conditions in the light of our Deptford study will not be very far wrong.

There are reasons for thinking, however, that even the situation as we found it in Deptford was worse than that of the normal community in 1929. Of the 53,000 unemployed for more than a year at that time, not less than 38,000² were coal-miners, most of them thrown out of work in the 1926 lock-out and never reabsorbed. The problem in 1929 was thus mainly a localized abnormality of coal-mining districts dependent on mines abandoned or permanently closed. In all other industries taken together, the number of long unemployed shrinks to the small figure of 15,000 and the number of long-unemployed families in our

¹ This figure is not official, but an estimate is made to show the problem of the following enquiry in its economic perspective, as one of the last depression. The estimate is based on a Ministry of Labour sample enquiry conducted at that time, involving 10,000 unemployed. It is probably correct within a small margin of error.

² This figure again is not official, but is an estimate made for this report.

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normal community of 40,000 people, if it does not happen to be a mining community, shrinks from 50 to 15, unnoticeable, and an easy object for individual help and supervision.

(iii) DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY

Within three years of the beginning of the depression the number of unemployed had risen from 1,281,000 in the last quarter of 1929 to 2,757,000 in the last quarter of 1932. There were four men for every three available jobs. 60% of all workers in shipbuilding and allied industries were out of work, 46% of all workers in the iron and steel industries. As the depression went on, the number of men and women out of work for a year or more increased even more rapidly than the general tide, as more and more men who had been thrown out or temporarily stopped work by firms closing or contracting failed to get work and began to be reckoned as long unemployed.

At the beginning of 1932 the number of long-unemployed¹ men alone passed the 300,000 mark, and during that year, when the depression gradually spent its force and not many more men were turned out of work afresh, the number of long-unemployed men continued to increase rapidly, passing the 350,000 mark in the summer of 1932, the 400,000 mark in autumn, and the 450,000 mark early in 1933. Their number continued to increase right into the summer of 1933, when the general tide of unemployment had already definitely begun to recede.²

In July 1933 the total number of long-unemployed men and women was over 480,000. Of 100 men queuing up at the Exchange in September 1929, only 5 or 6 had been persistently unemployed. Of 100 men queuing up three years later, when the depression was at its worst, 20 had had no work for a year or more. In the middle of 1933, when the last of the men thrown out by the depression and not reabsorbed had passed on into the

¹ By "long unemployed" we shall from now on mean men continuously unemployed for more than a year.

² The numbers of long-unemployed women follow a rather different course, but mainly for administrative reasons with which we are not concerned here.

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long-term class, 25 of every 100 unemployed had had no work during the last year. Instead of 50 families in our "average community" there was now a crowd of 480 families. A social problem of the first order had arisen. We have seen that, with the exception of some mining districts, it was wholly a creation of the economic depression. The question was whether recovery would undo what the depression had done, and whether the new problem was thus going to be automatically solved.

The three years of depression had already been followed by four years of recovery when the sample of long unemployment which forms the basis of this report was taken. Thus it illustrates a state of recovery which had progressed considerably both in duration and extent, though it was by no means yet completed; for the year which has passed since it was made brought continued recovery, and we found a considerable number of long unemployed in work again when they were visited in the course of the six months following the sample date. The problem that we saw and now describe is, therefore, what was left by the great depression. Some of these long unemployed may still be absorbed into normal industrial society, but they have failed to be reabsorbed for a long time, during which expanding industrial activity has brought back to work many unemployed and has absorbed many newcomers as well. Economic forecasts are uncertain, though perhaps less so than they used to be. Conditions during the slump showed that the industrial system can fare worse than when we analysed its least used resources of labour in 1936, and subsequent improvements have shown that it can fare better. We may perhaps say that by November 1936 a stage had been reached which represented fair prosperity for the country as a whole under post-War economic conditions.

Of the rise in unemployment from 1,281,000 to 2,757,000 persons between the last quarters of 1929 and 1932, a great portion has been made good in the four following years. In the last quarter of 1936, 1,621,000 persons were out of work. Of 100 men and women thrown out of work between 1929 and 1932, the great majority, 77, have returned to employment, if we neglect for the moment those who died, those who retired with

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an Old Age Pension, or the women who withdrew from the labour market into family life. By the third quarter of 1937 the majority of the remaining 23, namely 17, had returned to employment as well. But, in this recovery, what had become of the long-unemployed man, this new phenomenon of the depression?

We saw that before the depression (September 1929), among 100 men queuing up at the Exchange, there would have been no more than five or six who had not had work for a year past, and we noticed the rapid rise of this figure to 20 at the depth of the depression, and to 25 in the summer of 1933 when firms had ceased to close down, but the last batch of dismissals during the depression had increased the number of long-unemployed men to the new high level of 460,000. When the recovery took place, the proportion of long unemployed did not go back to the old level; it did not even show a tendency to decline again, but it went on increasing.

During the first year after the peak in the summer of 1933, the actual number of men out of work for a year or more fell considerably. It had dropped by 90,000 to 370,000 in October 1934, and at that date we would have found 24 long-unemployed men among 100 registering at the Exchange, and some optimistic observers might have thought that unemployment might both return to its old level, and, in the process, revert to its old character as mainly an industrial turnover of human labour, a fairly rapidly moving stream with only small stagnant pools here and there. But the following year, from October 1934 to October 1935, showed that nothing of the sort was going to happen. While the recovery went on rapidly and the total number of unemployed men fell by a considerably larger number than the year before, the number of the long unemployed remained nearly stationary, declining by a bare 10,000 to 360,000, so that in the autumn of 1935, 26 out of 100 men at the Exchange had been out of work for a full year or more.

In the following year (that preceding our enquiry), from autumn 1935 to autumn 1936, with industrial activity growing apace, the number of long-unemployed men went down again

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by another 60,000 to just under 300,000.¹ But the proportion they bore to the whole did not change, and there were still 26 men out of 100 unemployed. During the year following the sample, the time during which the data for this report were collected, the number of long-unemployed men continued to decline, and a fall of about 65,000 in nine months brought the total down to 265,000 men.² But the proportion had now risen, and there were, in August 1937, 27 men out of 100 unemployed.

Thus a majority of workers, turned out of their jobs during the first three years of the seven years' cycle between November 1929 and 1936, had got back during the following four years, but for every 100 men who had become long unemployed between 1929 and the depth of the depression, only 39 had managed to get out of that class again. In addition, the problem had ceased to be so predominantly one of the coal industry since, in our average non-coal-mining community of 40,000, the number of long-unemployed families had risen sharply from 15 to 220. Recovery had failed to solve the problem. On the contrary, as the unemployment figures fell, its seriousness became more and more obvious.

Another analysis of the unemployment figures will help to show what has happened. For this purpose we will consider four different categories of unemployed: (*a*) the man just out of work, who has been out for less than three months; (*b*) the short-term unemployed (three to six months); (*c*) the middle-term unemployed (six to twelve months); and (*d*) the long-term unemployed (over one year). These categories represent, of course, quite different types of problem. Many of those in category (*a*) would not be reckoned in some countries as unemployed at all. The docker who works regularly those days of the week when ships come in and is idle the rest of it appears

¹ To this figure there should, however, be added an, at that time, unknown total of able-bodied long-unemployed men in receipt of neither assistance nor insurance payments. A few months later when this category was brought into the scope of official statistics, their number turned out to be about 30,000. The real number of long unemployed at the time of our count was, therefore, about 330,000.

² The 30,000 newcomers had by now been included in the official figures.