

THE WAR EMERGENCY.

LOCAL CITIZENS' COMMITTEES IN TOWN AND COUNTRY.

MEMORANDUM OF SUGGESTIONS.

1.—Strengthen and Support the Local Committee.

The project of concentrating the responsibility for emergency measures in a single representative Local Committee (now to be styled "Local Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress") is a good one. But the Committee should be made thoroughly representative of all sections, including especially working men and women. The organization to which you belong should at once apply to the Mayor (or Chairman of County or District Council) for representation. If the Committee is already formed, ask that these representatives may be added. If representation is refused, write or telegraph at once to the President of the Local Government Board, London.

Take care to nominate a representative who can and will attend all the meetings (there will of course be no payment even for travelling expenses), and who will make himself or herself of use.

Send all your suggestions and offers of help to the Local Committee; and communicate to them at once, without rushing to put them in the newspaper, any complaints, or any information as to things not working properly.

2.—Keep Up the Volume of Employment.

The declared policy of the Government—quite rightly—is, *first and foremost*, to use every effort to maintain undiminished the total amount of wage earning employment in the Kingdom as a whole. This is to be the guiding policy of each Local Committee. Therefore don't go to the Committee with the idea that its main business, or the most urgent duty, is to organize measures for the relief of distress. It ought first to set its mind on *preventing the occurrence* of unemployment. It is ten times more valuable to prevent men from being discharged from employment than to relieve them when they are unemployed.

Let your first suggestions to the Committee be to keep up (at standard Trade Union rates of wages) the volume of paid employment. It is the first time that the Government has adopted so wise a policy. See that your Committee understands it.

3.—Increase All Municipal Enterprises.

All sorts of trades carried on by private enterprise will inevitably be diminished, or even stopped. Many employers will be driven to reduce their staffs of artisans and laborers, clerks and shop assistants, men and women.

Now is the time, so the Government rightly declares, for every Public Authority to be actually increasing its wages bill. Get your Committee to press this on all the Local Governing Bodies in your locality (Borough, Urban, Rural, County, and Parish Councils; Boards of Guardians; Harbor and Port Authorities; School Boards (in Scotland); Education, Asylum, Hospital, or Water Authorities). It ought to be the first duty of the Committee to write to every Local Authority, to enquire what steps it is taking in this matter. Here are some specific suggestions for Local Authorities.

- (a) It is not enough to decide to keep places open for Reservists and Territorials called away; to treat them liberally as to pay, etc.; and to make provision for their families. Urge strongly on your Local Authorities that they ought to maintain their staffs at full strength by taking on temporary men; that no public services should be reduced; that no officials should be recalled from leave, or denied their holidays; and that no systematic overtime should be worked. It would be well to get returns for all departments showing the actual numbers on the pay-roll (apart from men called to the front) now, and at the corresponding week last year.

- (b) Increased work should be promptly started. The first step should be to put in hand at once all the works of building, repairing, cleaning and improving provided for in the estimates for the current year. Do it all now, in order to absorb the men and women thrown out of work by the war. "Now is the winter of our discontent."
- (c) But much more should be done. The Government is prepared to help most liberally with money those Local Authorities that undertake at once new works of public utility, in order to maintain the volume of employment. Urge all the local Councils to draw up at once a list of the buildings that ought to be built, the repairs that ought to be executed, the public improvements that ought to be made in connection with each and all of the departments of their work during the next few years, specifying which of them could be started at once if Government funds were available, so as to involve no rise in the rates. Don't think yet of "relief works": think of the following :
 - (i) Elementary schools, provided and non-provided, that need to be enlarged, remodelled for smaller classrooms, improved or built (don't forget equipment and school furniture) ;
 - (ii) Additional secondary schools, training colleges, hostels, domestic economy centres, technical institutes, etc., that are required ;
 - (iii) Further buildings and equipment for university colleges, science laboratories, etc. ;
 - (iv) Roads, bridges, footpaths, etc., that need bringing up to the standards of the Road Board ;
 - (v) Tramways called for to complete the local system ;
 - (vi) Housing enterprises, including the improvement of slum areas, the erection of additional cottages, etc. Why should not the Pensions Committee seek Government assistance to build cottages, or what used to be called "almshouses," specially for old age pensioners ?
 - (vii) Hospitals for all diseases (which every Local Sanitary Authority has already full statutory power to erect and maintain, under the Public Health Act) : these are urgently required in every county of Great Britain, as the voluntary hospitals (where such exist) are nowhere sufficient for the needs revealed by the Insurance Act. Many even of the existing hospital beds are being reserved for the wounded. The Government is alive to this need, and will gladly receive suggestions for additional municipal hospitals ;
 - (viii) Street improvements, paving works, main drainage schemes, extensions of the water supply or of the gas and electricity works and plant ;
 - (ix) Afforestation of the municipal water catchment area, or other waste lands ;
 - (x) Additional parks and open spaces—now is the time to move to lay them out ;
 - (xi) Waste lands, whether in public or private ownership, for the reclamation or planting of which the Development Commissioners might be asked for grants ;
 - (xii) Harbor improvements, improvement of sea walls and other coast defences, prevention of floods, etc.

The Government has taken statutory power to pay the whole or part of the cost of all the foregoing works ; and any part of the £100,000,000 of money voted by the House of Commons can be made available, if the Government think fit, for any of them. Do not be put off with Departmental refusals to sanction schemes or supply funds on the ground that the money is not provided for in the Department's estimates. It is understood that the Cabinet has decided that no technical difficulties are to be allowed to obstruct the immediate undertaking of desirable works. Applications with regard to No. iv should be made to the Road Board ; with regard to Nos. ix, xi, and xii to the Development Commission ; and with regard to the others to the President of the Local Government Board, who is the Chairman of the Cabinet Emergency Committee. Time presses : get the Local Authorities to act at once.

4.—Remember the Women.

It is inevitable that the works put in hand to increase the volume of employment should operate most directly on men's trades, especially the various branches of the building industry. This is no reason against their being undertaken. Every man kept in receipt of wages helps to keep others in employment in all sorts of occupations.

But something special is needed for the four million wage earning women and girls, many of whom, from "jam hands" to typists, will find themselves discharged. Press the following suggestions on the Local Authorities.

- (a) Take care that the staffs of women in public employment (teachers, typists, clerks, charwomen, school cleaners, lavatory attendants, etc.) are kept at full strength.
- (b) Do not postpone any orders for uniforms, asylum clothing, or other garments : rather increase stocks.
- (c) Increase the elementary school staffs of women teachers, so as to bring the classes down, where accommodation permits, to an average of not more than forty children.

More, however, will have to be done. Why should not the Local Education Authority seek authority and funds to enable it to provide maintenance scholarships and appropriate training for all girls under sixteen (or for all such now at school who are willing to stay on), so as to avoid flooding an already overstocked Labor Market? The same might usefully be done for the boys, especially where juvenile unemployment increases.

5.—The Three Don'ts.

Don't let your Committee be misled by some well meaning, but economically ignorant, person who suggests that the rate of wages should be lowered, "in order to enable more hands to be taken on," etc. Employers will be eager enough to have "cheap labor." This is bad economics. The Trade Union rate of wages must be upheld. Wages should be rather raised than lowered, to meet the rising prices.

Don't favor any idea of setting benevolent ladies or school children to make clothes for the poor or necessities for the troops. This is very apt to increase unemployment. All such work should be done on commercial lines, by properly qualified workers, and paid for by wages. Those who have means should be encouraged to pay unemployed women workers to do the work that they wish done. Children are at school to be taught, not to be set to produce. People willing to give gratuitous service should confine themselves to the work that is never paid for. (The Children's Care Committees or School Canteen Committees may be suggested as nearly everywhere needing additional workers.)

Don't give food or doles of money until you are face to face with actual want—and even then don't advertise it! Rather hire people to do some work that you want done—invent a service if you have it not—without any assumption of giving relief.

6.—When Distress Comes.

Unfortunately we cannot hope, whatever we may do, to prevent the occurrence of all distress. When it comes, avoid to the last the mere doling out of relief, whether in money or in bread. What the unemployed man or woman wants is wages, not charity. Do your utmost to get every applicant taken on at regular wages, at some occupation or other, whether or not his accustomed work, or near his present home. It is better to get men jobs in other places (helping them to move), or in occupations new to them (treating them temporarily as "improvers"), than to put them on relief.

The worst form that relief can take is doles of money or food. The evil effects of this so-called "charity" is not avoided by giving it only after elaborate investigation, or out of public funds, or under the influence of "war fever."

(a) FEED THE CHILDREN.

The first thing to be done in distress is to feed the children. The Board of Education is urging every Local Education Authority to undertake to feed, in connection with the elementary schools, every child in need of food, whether actually on the school-roll or not, on holidays as well as on school days, including children above school age, or under school age—even the infants (in connection with Schools for Mothers, etc.)—promising fifty per cent. of the amount spent on those on the school roll. The Prince of Wales's National Relief Fund will make grants towards expenses not authorized from the rates. See that your Local Education Authority does its full duty in this respect—if not, complain to the Board of Education. If it does, all relief for children had better be concentrated there; and (except in emergencies and special cases) nothing issued for children by any other agency.

(b) USE THE DISTRESS COMMITTEE.

All unemployed able-bodied persons in distress should be dealt with by the Distress Committee and by no other authority. See that your Distress Committee is actively at work—if not, complain to the Local Government Board. The Distress Committee should apply to the centre for whatever funds it needs. *The more the Local Authorities have neglected their duty to increase their enterprises—putting in hand the building of schools, etc.—the more men will have to be in some way maintained by the Distress Committee.*

(c) LOOK AFTER THE WOMEN.

Think, first, of the case of the unemployed women, because they are generally thought of last. The lot of the women and girls thrown out of employment—jam hands and bottle washers, charwomen and box makers, "hands" from the tea and tobacco factories, and what not—is a particularly hard one. No one can think of municipal employment for them. The best thing to do for them is to take them on at wages as "learners" or improvers, in some big, empty warehouse, at making and repairing all sorts of garments, hats and boots, not to be put on sale, but for the use of themselves and their children. A certain number every day should be taught to cook the dinner for all, in the very best way. The work will be totally unskilled, even bad; and the result at first will be small. But if competent instructors are provided, the women will, in a few weeks, not only have improved in health, but also have gained a training of the greatest value in their homes. The necessary outlay on premises, equipment, material and instructors (who are themselves thus found paid employment) though, like the women's wages, a dead loss, is more than repaid by the training gained, if not by the utility of the clothes they retain for themselves. Wives of men out of work, or of men called to the front, should be eligible to join these Women's Training Depôts.

(d) FIND REALLY EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR THE MEN.

The very best use to which the men can be put, for whom no situation can anywhere be found, and for whom the Distress Committee has to provide, is to put them to work for themselves in some way that promotes their own improvement. The human engine is temporarily out of use—let us utilise the interval to bring it up to the highest possible health and activity. The Distress Committee can far more profitably pay the unemployed to work at raising their own condition than to work at their old jobs. The men for whom no situations can be found are, practically always, physically “out of condition” (which of us is not?); the occupation to which they have been accustomed is, at least for the present, not required, and hence has no value; they do not know how to produce food and clothing for themselves, nor yet how to do anything that the nation wants—let us teach them! Some can be put to work on the land (that is, can be taught the processes of agriculture and gardening); others can be put to work at the cooking and cleaning, and other household duties that any set of men require, repairing their own clothes and mending their own boots (that is, taught how to cook and to sew and to cobble); others can be put to do the necessary alterations, and painting and decorating the premises (that is, taught to use all the ordinary tools). Some few will actually want to learn something by which they think they can earn a living in a new way, or in a different locality—let us meet their laudable desires. What is essential is to realize that the men will, at any rate at first, produce next to nothing, and will need skilled instruction. The result will be, not much value in the way of material product—for “employing the unemployed” is always the costliest of processes—but great advantage to the men themselves in improved health and new training.

(e) FALL BACK ON RELIEF WORKS IN THE LAST RESORT.

Some people are impatient of the idea of putting men to work at anything that requires them to be trained: they revolt against the idea of expecting grown men to learn anything new! Well, if we are so prejudiced that we insist on keeping our unemployed in the same helpless condition as that in which we find them, we shall be driven to the costly futilities known as Relief Works. Pay on Relief Works is better than doles without work; and if the augmented municipal enterprises already suggested have not kept everybody in regular wage-earning employment, and if we won't train them to better things, we must put them to the only work they can do. The Distress Committee must exhaust all its ingenuity to invent such Relief Works suitable for “employing the unemployed”—improving the local parks and open spaces, making roads, digging up waste land to bring it under cultivation, planting waste places and spoil heaps, filling in disused pits or raising the level of low-lying land, strengthening the sea walls, raising the river banks, preventing floodings, and so on.

(f) ONE COMBINED REGISTER ONLY.

One indispensable thing in every locality must be a single register of all kinds of public provision being made for the relief of distress. A dozen different public bodies will be dealing with distress in each locality—to say nothing of all the private charities—and to prevent overlapping (and the chance of some unscrupulous families accepting help simultaneously from half a dozen different sources to the detriment of others more scrupulous) it is of vital importance that each authority or committee affording assistance should have some means of ascertaining, quickly and accurately, what is being done by the others. This register (which had better be kept by a special sub-committee of the Local Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress, and be arranged as a card catalogue of families) ought to include any assistance afforded by (a) the Local Committee itself; (b) the Distress Committee; (c) the Board of Guardians; (d) the Local Education Authority; (e) the Old Age Pensions Committee; (f) the National War Relief Committee; (g) the Committee for the Relief of Soldiers' and Sailors' Families; (h) the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild; and (i) any philanthropic societies or relief agencies willing to co-operate. It would be useful to have the clerk or secretary of each such organization on the sub-committee. Get your Committee to start such a combined register at once.

Local organizations, such as Fabian Societies; Co-operative Societies; Branches of the I.L.P. and B.S.P.; of Trade Unions; of the Women's Co-operative Guilds, and of the Women's Labor League; local “Brotherhood” Societies and Adult Schools, etc., might usefully watch the progress of unemployment and distress in their localities, and the proceedings of the several relieving Authorities; and might, from time to time, press on their notice by resolution any points needing attention. The War Emergency: Workers' National Committee (28 Victoria Street, Westminster) should be informed of any cases in which the interests of any section of the wage earning population are being neglected, or of any Local Committees that are not working satisfactorily.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY, 3 CLEMENT'S INN, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.
(after 29th September, 25 TOTHILL STREET, WESTMINSTER).

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