

Woodcut by Herbert Pullinger

Along the canal at Manayunk, a factory district of Philadelphia

Is Unemployment Here?

By BEULAH AMIDON

FOR the first time in seven years unemployment is on the front page. It is not there as a local situation—a Ford lay-off, a coal strike, a textile mill cutting its work-week. This is large scale unemployment, men idle in every industrial center because they cannot find jobs. Wage-earners the country over face the reverse of that rosy picture of “unprecedented prosperity” at which we have gazed so long and so enthusiastically.

For some time there have been warnings of a falling employment barometer—an increase in the ratio of applications to placements in the public employment agencies, many more applications for home-work permits in large industrial cities, a steadily mounting number of men seeking shelter in homes for the homeless—bad weather signs which few of us noted. With the beginning of 1928, distress signals, local, state and national, began to go up rapidly. In New York, for example, the Charity Organization Society, through its vice-president, Otto T. Bannard, president of

the New York Trust Co., sent out a general appeal for “help in this crisis,” stating that it is “probably the worst we have had since 1921. Long lines of men wait here every day in the hope of finding work. When even the young and able-bodied are being laid off, can you imagine how hopeless it is for men who are ill or no longer young?” Governor Smith asked the State Industrial Commissioner for an immediate report on unemployment “to determine whether the state of New York, with its large public works program can do something toward relief of this situation.” And at Washington, the Jones Bill, providing for a program of emergency public works, at length becomes news. It embodies recommendations of the President’s Unemployment Conference, which met in 1921, under Herbert Hoover’s chairmanship, and which had gone unheeded for seven fat years.

A fortnight ago, a member of The Survey staff gathered up a sheaf of reports from unrelated groups in widely scattered cities in all of which there was mention of acute local unemployment. These were spread out before a labor

economist, and the economist was asked: What does this mean? Is there general unemployment? How much is there? Where is it? Why?

"There is no crisis, not in the accepted sense," said the economist. "This has been coming for a long time, slowly, like a glacier. Nobody has paid any attention. We have no general system of labor exchanges or unemployment insurance, making it to our immediate interest as a nation to know how many men are out of work and why and where. If we want to get a picture of the situation, we have to pick up bits here and there and piece them together. Why don't you take your questions to the family welfare agencies? They get the first impact of unemployment."

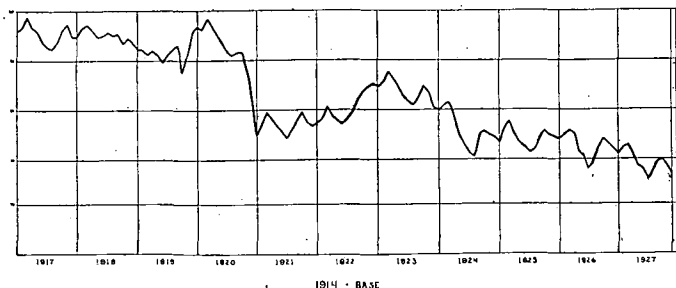
THE family welfare agencies of twenty-two cities outside New York replied to our request for facts about their unemployment situations. Differences in record-keeping and in division of responsibility among the agencies of the several communities make it difficult to compare these reports. It is clear, however, that case loads in industrial communities are markedly heavier this winter than last, and that there is a sharp increase in the number of families forced to seek help because of involuntary unemployment.

In Buffalo, New York, where the heavier end of the unemployment load is carried by the city Department of Social Welfare, the Charity Organization Society reports, "They are experiencing a worse situation today than in any year since 1921. For instance, in the week of January 6-12, 26 per cent of the applicants gave unemployment as the main cause of their difficulty. In the week from January 13-19, 29 per cent and in the week of the 20th to the 27th, 32 per cent. . . . In the year July 1, 1926, to June 30, 1927, the Department of Social Welfare spent about \$310,050 in family welfare relief. They have increased their fund this year and have at their disposal \$436,525. This increase has been sought on the basis of the pressure from an unemployment situation."

The general secretary of the Association for Community Welfare in Fall River, Massachusetts, indicates more acute unemployment than her own organization's figures (see table) reveal: "When our income fell off, as our contributors were not drawing dividends, our policy was changed to put the entire burden of unemployment on the Public Welfare Department. I happen to know that the department was giving relief to approximately 1,000 families the week of January 21, 1928. An ordinary case load for them is from 400 to 600 families. The head overseer of the department ascribed the increase to the local unemployment situation."

Based on the average number of wage-earners employed

N.Y.C. FACTORY EMPLOYMENT INDEX NY STATE LABOR DEPARTMENT



Courtesy American Association for Labor Legislation

Factory employment in New York City touched a new low level in 1927, with indication of a still further downward trend

in the five years 1919-1923, the Division of Statistics, Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, represents employment in manufacturing establishments in the state as 77.2 per cent, the lowest point since the depression of 1920-21. "Boots and shoes and cotton goods are the industries hardest hit," Stockton Raymond of the Family Welfare Society of Boston points out, "employment in the former being represented by 46.2 and in the latter by 62.5. At the public employment offices the ratio of applications to positions filled is higher than it has been for a number of years, reflecting the situation as described."

In Philadelphia, "there is considerably more unemployment this year than last, and the number of applications coming to us [Family Society of Philadelphia] is exceptionally heavy. . . . Last November we received 307 applications, which is a larger number than in any November since 1918, the November of the influenza epidemic. In December, 1927, we received 340 applications, but there have been two Decembers since 1918 when we have received more applications than this. . . . It is exceedingly difficult to obtain jobs, and there is no doubt that except for the winter of 1921-2 this is the worst period through which we have gone in ten years."

In Portland, Oregon, "there is a decided increase in unemployment. At present there are probably 38,000 unemployed people here, which is an increase of over 100 per cent in our usual unemployed population."

"The unemployment situation in Milwaukee this year has been the worst since 1922," the general secretary of the Family Welfare Association reports. "However, the situation has not been serious enough to term it a crisis and all indications point to a decided improvement from February on. The situation might have been worse had the winter been more serious."

In New York, the State Labor Department reports that in December employment touched its lowest point for the year 1927, and that in January approximately 20,000 wage-earners were laid off. This pulls the index of employment "lower than it has been at any time since the trough of the depression in the summer of 1921."

The Industrial Bulletin of the department gives the number of workers registered for each 100 places open as 165.4 for December, 1927, as compared with 137.2 for November, 1927, and 116.3 for December, 1926.

A voluntary employment agency in New York City reports that in January, 1927, it secured 207 jobs for 265 applicants through 960 contacts. This January it was able to get only 149 jobs for 489 applicants, and over two thousand interviews were required.

When jobs are scarce, industrial home-work increases. Nelle Swartz, director of the Bureau of Women and Children, New York Labor Department, states that while the applications for home-work permits usually average ten a day at this season, they now average more than twenty.

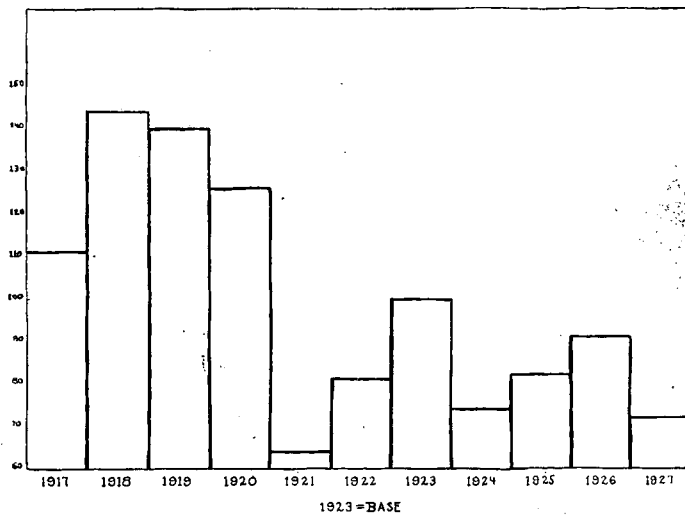
Men and women are out of work in industrial centers, according to the available evidence, not because we face a sudden crisis, but because of slower and less dramatic influences: uncontrolled seasonality in many trades, gradual business recession, increased mechanization of industry.

"Among many causes responsible for the increase in unemployment is the substitution of machinery for hand labor," Richard A. Flinn, chief of the division of employment for the New York Department of Labor, states. "Steam shovels now excavate in building construction, subway con-

HELP WANTED ADS

N.Y. WORLD

MALE AND FEMALE



1923 = BASE

Courtesy American Association for Labor Legislation

The Help Wanted Ad trend supplements the New York Labor Department figures, since it measures for the most part domestic and "white collar" jobs which are not included in the manufacturing index

struction, state road construction which formerly gave employment to thousands of unskilled workers. Conveyors take the place of wheelbarrows in transporting building material to the building mechanic. In modern shops, conveying machinery carries the product in the process of manufacturing from the place where it enters as raw material to the place where it is placed by machinery on the freight car or motor truck. Many of these indoor jobs are not available.

"Electrical appliances including the vacuum cleaner, washing machine, the electric iron, have curtailed the demand for casual women workers and the wet-wash laundry has lessened the demand for the casual laundry worker.

"Finally, the surplus of strong, able-bodied unskilled workers has given the employer the opportunity to select more carefully and as a result the applicant who does not look strong and healthy or who is no longer young finds it exceedingly difficult to obtain employment."

Chicago has caught the backwash both from the Ford lay-off and the soft coal strike. The city's widely heralded building and engineering program has brought an influx of men looking for jobs. At the same time, steel and iron, meat-packing and the clothing trades are "slowed up" and "freight tonnage has declined, throwing trainmen and dispatchers out of work."

Philadelphia and the New England communities suffer from the general depression in textiles. Fall River reports a ten per cent wage cut in addition to a three-day work week.

In St. Louis, "the increase in unemployment is probably due to a more complete shut-down in almost all types of factories employing both skilled and unskilled workers. . . . The industries in St. Louis are diversified, but we have noted that several of the large chemical companies producing patent medicines and drugs are not running full force, manufacturing plants making steel railroad cars are almost shut down, canning factories are employing only a portion of their usual force, and the clothing and shoe manufacturing companies, which represent the largest single industry in the city, are producing less than last year."

In Buffalo, "The industrial situation as a whole has been

bad this winter. The policy of retrenchment began as far back as July and has affected the whole economic situation. The building trades, steel and metal trades, the automobile and the auto accessory manufacturers seem to have been our principal sufferers. . . . At the same time our local savings bank deposits have increased quite remarkably. . . . Personally, I feel this is because of the quite general feeling that jobs are so scarce that those who are employed are putting away the maximum amount in savings accounts in order to meet the possible break in employment."

Portland, Oregon, reports that "All our local industries are involved inasmuch as the principal industry which we have, lumber, is only at 50 per cent of its capacity and you can see what the effect would be upon all the other local industries." A similar situation is reported from the United Charities of Dallas, Texas: "The opinion of our staff is that there is more unemployment this winter than last winter. . . . There seems to be a general slowing down in all industries. The situation is not due to the closing down of any particular industry."

Three basic causes of widespread unemployment are set forth in this statement from Salt Lake City, Utah: "A great many of the mines in districts surrounding Salt Lake lay off men regularly each winter. These men pour into the city hoping to find work here. . . . In addition to the general business depression and the fact that we have so much seasonal work here, three of our largest concerns have laid off men, principally through the installation of improved machinery."

IN the present situation, there is little evidence that the country as a whole or that individual communities are adopting any sort of program for the relief of existing unemployment or for checking its spread. The Survey's question, Is the community making any effort to alleviate the unemployment situation, such as a cooperative labor exchange or increased public work? is answered with an unqualified "No" by the family welfare agencies of Providence, Jacksonville, Little Rock, New Haven, Fall River and Portland.

AS SIXTEEN CITIES REPORT IT

	Total active cases				Cases where the unemployment was a factor			
	Dec. 1926	Dec. 1927	Jan. 1-15, 1927	Jan. 1-15, 1928	Dec. 1926	Dec. 1927	Jan. 1-15, 1927	Jan. 1-15, 1928
Salt Lake City, Utah . . .	205	300	124	208	90	133	98	150
Baltimore, Md.	1,639	1,866	1,528	1,797	217	534	372	877
Chicago, Ill.	3,282	3,372	3,203*	3,390*†		197§	529§	346
Milwaukee	2,060	2,200						
Providence, R. I.	624	525	603*	530*				
Youngstown, O.	457	877	270	461	98	321	51	182
Cleveland	2,980	3,255	3,065			1,367		
Kansas City, Mo.	1,218	1,357	419*§	338*§				
St. Louis	1,990	2,159	1,422	1,812	396†	928	546	792
Boston	467	534		480	89	176		106
New Haven, Conn.	268	287			53	73		
Little Rock, Ark.	261	321	260	300	89	145	84	152
El Paso, Tex.	367	364	205	173	157	112	110	67
Jacksonville, Fla.	467	534		480	89	176		106
Portland, Ore.	1,220	1,078	552	630	472	392	270	350
Denver, Colo.	690	615	613*	553*†	355	403	388*	380*

* Jan. 1-31

§ Major cases, three month period

† Estimate

*§ Intake only

The unemployment situation as shown by the records of the family welfare agencies

In Salt Lake City there have been "tentative group discussions but no definite effort made." In St. Louis, "the Community Council is proposing an employment bureau, which will not go into operation in time to affect the situation this year." (Continued on page 721)



HENRY FORD

Drawn by S. J. Woolf for The New York Times