

What the Workmen's Circle is Doing for its Unemployed Members

By P. GELIEBTER

THE more widespread unemployment has become, the more acute and ramified the whole problem has grown. The results which the present unemployment has brought in its wake are beginning to be felt more and more in every nook and corner of our social fabric. Not only do the wage workers, who are the direct victims of the terribly abnormal situation, feel it, but the middle class and the various philanthropic and cultural institutions are also beginning to realize it.

All are beginning to perceive now that unemployment is no longer a purely economic question. It also constitutes a problem for education, for cultural work, for philanthropic relief, for organizational activity.

Thus we see, for example, that many educational institutions have been hard hit by the prevailing unemployment: the Yiddish schools, the Talmud Torahs, and similar institutions have had fewer pupils in the past year than in previous years, while their income has likewise declined a great deal.

Cultural endeavor has also suffered greatly of late. Owing to the smaller budgets allotted for the work, many organizations and institutions have been forced to organize fewer lectures and otherwise to curtail somewhat this activity.

Philanthropic work has also suffered no little because of the business depression. On the one hand, unemployment has increased the number of needy persons who have to be provided with some form of relief; on the other hand, there has been a decline in the number of persons who can afford to contribute considerable sums for the relief of the needy.

In many large organizations part of their activity has lately been paralyzed. Every organizational activity requires financial means and a keen desire and urge to carry on the work. The depression has robbed many an organization of both of these resources: the financial means have shrunk, while the worry about to-day and the uncertainty about to-morrow have deprived many of the active workers of the will to continue their voluntary work in their respective organizations.

Quite recently the problem of unemployment became acute in the fraternal orders. Here the problem has been very serious and assumed wholly different forms.

Every fraternal order puts forth first of all the motto of mutual aid. In normal times these fraternal organizations did not have to worry about fulfilling their obligation to

the members. If a small percent. of the members was in need of help, the organization's treasury was always rich enough to render such assistance. If there was not enough in the treasury, there were always individual members or groups of members who could solve the problem. But with the coming of the depression, the situation became quite different. It was no longer a question of aiding individual members in this or that city, in this or that region; the demand for relief assumed a mass-character. The larger the organization, the greater the demand for help.

Among the fraternal orders unemployment created a double problem. On the one hand, the leaders of these organizations felt that they must provide the necessary relief for their members, since mutual aid is the very foundation of such an organization. On the other hand, it was evident that, unless immediate relief were given to needy members, not only would the members themselves suffer, but the organization would ultimately have to lose members. If one looks over the list of fraternal orders and compares their membership rosters for the last few years, one sees that many of them have lost a considerable number of members.

In the case of the Workmen's Circle, which is the largest labor fraternal order in America, the gravity of the problem was felt no less than in that of other fraternal organizations. On the contrary, it may well be that the problems created by the crisis were more acute in the Workmen's Circle than in other organizations. The great majority of members of the Workmen's Circle consists of wage earners and small business men, who were the first to be hit by the depression. They were affected by the hard times before others, and the effects of the crisis have been more painfully felt among them. One might have expected that the Workmen's Circle would be harder hit by the present economic depression, which has now lasted over two years, than other similar organizations. However, this organization did not suffer by it, for the more unemployment became widespread, the more the Workmen's Circle institutions began to apply all their resources toward the alleviation of the heavy burden which the crisis had placed upon the shoulders of the members.

Social Service

Let us cite a few examples. The Workmen's Circle has a Social Service Department, which has existed barely two years in all. For years the members of the Order had

dreamt of having an institution that would be charged with such duties as no other department of the Workmen's Circle could perform. The Workmen's Circle grants its members certain well-defined benefits, in accordance with the rules and regulations in force. The Social Service Department makes it its business to minister to those needs of the members which cannot be satisfied by the legal benefits. The Social Service Bureau established by the Workmen's Circle is based on the principles of self-help and self-respect. The Bureau seeks to develop in the members a sense of self reliance. The Bureau strengthens the members' faith and confidence in themselves and helps them so that they may not become despondent in time of distress. Here is what the Social Service Department of the Workmen's Circle has to say about itself:

"We wish to cite certain cases where our help and cooperation were of great importance and produced good results.

"1. We were of much assistance in getting patients admitted into hospitals; we were able to obtain places in convalescent homes for patients after they had been discharged from the hospital, and they recuperated and regained their strength there.

"2. We were able to provide nurses for ailing persons who were in need of temporary aid.

"3. Many parents came to us with their children who had been a source of much trouble both at home and in school. We placed the children in mental hygiene clinics, where they were examined and the difficult problems of their behavior carefully studied. Afterwards we gave the parents the necessary instructions as to how to handle such children, and informed the teachers of the results of the examination.

"4. In many instances where families in dire distress applied to us for assistance, we helped them get in touch with the proper relief organizations. In such cases the Department serves as a 'clearing house;' it plays the part of an intermediary. With our limited means we can render no direct assistance, but thanks to the fact that we indicate the way to relief, many unfortunate families are helped and their distress is mitigated.

"5. We helped children, whose parents found themselves temporarily in a serious situation, to get admitted into certain child-caring institutions.

"6. We saw to it that children, and also adults, who were incapacitated physically or mentally, got the necessary experience in certain trades or special schools, so as to be able to adjust themselves to their hard lot and to earn something for a living.

"7. We helped widows to get the pensions they were entitled to but knew nothing about.

"8. We also assisted many in serious cases of tuberculosis.

"9. In the summertime we helped children who could not be admitted to the Workmen's Circle Camp, to get a free vacation."

In general, the Social Service Department has been placed at the service of unemployed and needy members of the Workmen's Circle and their kin.

Medical Aid

The Medical Department of the Workmen's Circle, which during the past year enlarged its activity in the field of medical aid, has during the present depression rendered special help to unemployed members. Even in cases where members pay for medical treatment, it costs them a great deal less than they would have to pay for such treatment privately. The Clinic of the Medical Department was placed on a truly modern footing. It is located at 401 Broadway, New York, and has in its service forty-three district doctors and twenty-three specialists.

The Clinics has now existed for upwards of eight years and a half. Its main work consists in treating patients sent to it by the specialists or district doctors after they have been examined and the nature of their sickness ascertained. At the Clinic there are special departments for nose, throat, ear, eye, skin, men's and women's diseases, nervous disorders, and hay fever; also, electric treatment is given for paralysis, rheumatism, and other ailments. In addition, patients may obtain a general examination at the Clinic.

In its last annual report the Medical Department states:

"A large number of our members are out of work. Many of them applied to us for treatment by specialists and were unable to pay. To be sure, they could not claim this of right, since such treatment is not covered by the membership dues, nor is there a special fund for that purpose. But among them there were often many who had to be helped. We received letters from a number of physicians offering to help and treat the unemployed free of charge. We on our part made this request of the other doctors, and they responded warmly. In many cases we ourselves had to pay for medical treatment."

The Workmen's Circle maintains 103 schools for children throughout the country. In these schools the children are taught to speak, read, and write Yiddish; in addition, they are given instruction in Yiddish literature, Jewish history, and the biographies of great men and champions of human liberty. They are taught to know the struggle which the Jewish masses have waged and are waging for economic and political freedom; they are acquainted with Jewish and libertarian festivals, and are placed in an atmosphere where they may know and appreciate the spirit of the Workmen's Circle and the ideals of the progressive labor movement.

Owing to the economic depression, many parents could

not afford to pay tuition for their children. In all such cases the pupils were exempted from paying tuition and encouraged to continue their Jewish and general studies at the Workmen's Circle schools.

These are merely individual departments, which did everything possible to help members who were out of work, or who were hit by the present abnormal economic situation.

The Workmen's Circle as a whole also took direct steps to help its jobless members. A few months ago the General Office addressed a letter to all the branches, exhorting them to do everything within their power to help their unemployed members and not to let them forfeit their membership because of inability to pay dues. But the General Office did not rest content with this written appeal. It also appropriated \$5,000 to help cover the dues of jobless members.

Nearly all the branches of the Workmen's Circle responded warmly to the appeal to help their unemployed. Many branches established special funds for the purpose.

And not only individual branches, but district committees of the larger cities applied themselves earnestly to this problem. Thus, for example, the District Committee of Chicago raised \$3,000 for the relief of the unemployed.

At the last convention of the Workmen's Circle, held in Washington, D. C., during the first week of May, 1931, the sum of \$25,000, was appropriated to help pay the dues of unemployed, needy members, and to aid them in special cases.

From one branch to another, from one end of the country to the other, the Workmen's Circle is now sounding the cry, "Don't let unemployed members be suspended, and help them all you can!"

In these trying times the Workmen's Circle has sought in its customary way to help the members who suffer for lack of employment, and to help them in a truly fraternal and sympathetic manner, as behooves an organization that is based upon the principle of mutual aid and social responsibility.

Emergency Unit Training Courses

By RUTH S. ROSENFELD

MANY things have happened as a direct result of the present financial situation; many adjustments have been necessary. The employee who was "always able to get a job" in the past has found himself job-hunting unsuccessfully. Where formerly a thorough knowledge of one kind of job was an assurance of steady work, it became inadequate with the reduction of the office force. Too many "white collar people"—"not enough jobs"—"try some other kind of work"—"go into the less crowded fields". Such has been the cry of the helpless employment offices. Where and how to re-equip these people to give them a new start in life was the question presented to the Emanuel Federated Employment Service, a section of the Emanuel Sisterhood of Personal Service in New York City.

This service was primarily organized to study the difficulties of Jews in employment and to offer ways and means of solving these problems. However, the industrial depression, coupled with the request that we handle a new piece of work, changed the nature of our work in a degree—making it non-sectarian in character. Nevertheless, the number of Jewish applicants for retraining, enabled us to make a study of a large group of Jewish unemployed and so continue our studies at the same time that we were working on this plan to help the Emergency situation. This piece of work was the initial experiment in this kind of adult

education in New York City. It is interesting to note that coincident with this experiment, similar pieces of work are being carried out in other parts of the country.

In January the Emanuel Federated Employment Service, at the request of the Welfare Council Coordinating Committee on Unemployment and in cooperation with the Board of Education, organized the Emergency Unit Training Courses, an experiment in adult education, at the East Side Continuation School.

Before the school opened its doors to these new students the Emanuel Federated Employment Service held a meeting to which it invited the representatives of the various cooperating agencies, and at which meeting these agencies were urged to send those unemployed who they felt would profit by the proposed scheme of training. The Welfare Council sent out circulars explaining the whole idea and on and after January 12 we were at the school to greet the trainees sent by these agencies. At any time after this we might have stepped out and let the school officials carry on the work but for several factors. While fine, sympathetic, and interested in the experiment, school people are essentially teachers of children, circumscribed by the walls of the school, accustomed to dealing with children and not with adults. They lack the settlement worker's democratic attitude, the social worker's viewpoint of seeing

various sides of a situation. The adult coming back to school does not want to be treated as a child; he needs sympathetic and intelligent understanding of some of his personal problems, and allowances for his idiosyncrasies. The greater number have come back with a real seriousness of purpose but they do not want the discipline of a children's school. We feel that they have been grateful for the feeling of separateness from the rest of the school which we have given them and for the fact that there has always been some one not of the school with whom they could discuss their difficulties. As was to be expected, a number of the people sent to us by social agencies were problem individuals—those who for physical, mental, or social reasons had not adjusted to the life of the community. These people have required special attention on our part. They have needed follow-up, special encouragement, special efforts to aid in placement. Then, too, there has been the payment of the tide-over wage. While only ninety individuals out of a total of 797 who registered, received the \$6 a week tide-over wage or the payment of \$1.50 to cover carfare and lunches, the need was much greater. The money for the tide-over wage was made possible by Temple Emanu-El through the efforts of Dr. Nathan Krass.

In order to keep a close cooperation between the school and the social agencies we have visited twenty of these agencies, to discuss with them individual problems, or new ideas for training which they or we might suggest. Through the work of the Committee on Trade and Job Studies of the Emanuel Federated Employment Service, we have followed up their excellent study of the waitress by developing contacts which they began in that study with a number of chain restaurant chains. We have every reason to believe that young men and women who are trained to suit the needs of these individual restaurants can be placed. We have succeeded in diverting some of our young women from the commercial field into this group but it is an extremely slow and difficult process. We have brought into the school the idea of a beauty culture course which we hope will shortly be begun. We have gone out into various industries to find out what their needs are and what opportunities exist for our trainees and we feel that in this direction we have a very important function to perform.

Approximately five hundred young people have received more or less concentrated training. Many of them have completed a course which will launch them in a new trade, while others have been stimulated to increase their efficiency in their own line of work. Many have been kept busy during a period of stress. And, finally, 115 have actually been placed—some through their own efforts, some through the teachers, some through the agencies that originally referred them, and some through contacts which we have made although we have not attempted nor organized ourselves to do

placement work. While perhaps less than half of these have taken jobs in the lines for which they have received new training, we feel that these few indicate what can be done even under conditions so adverse to successful placement as they are today. Two cases might be cited as examples. A young bookkeeper lacking in the personality that makes for success in office work, making \$15 a week as a learner with unusual promise of advancement. A young boy of low mentality but excellent qualities of character—sense of responsibility, reliability, and industry—took the cafeteria course and last week left to be assistant cook at a summer hotel.

While it is true that this is an experiment and that as in all experiments we must grope to some extent, we realize now that though we have made some real contributions, there are definite facilities that we lack. The man of thirty-five or forty who comes to us for training in a new trade has no time to waste. He must have some assurance that if he spends six weeks for example in the auto-mechanics course, he is going to get a job as an auto-mechanic. That assurance we cannot give him. There is very little information available to give to the man who comes to us regarding the opportunities open to him. We know that women power machine operators can be placed; that there are some opportunities for waitresses; and that there is an over-supply of commercial workers. When men of forty tell us that they have been salesmen, insurance agents, Italian lawyers, or bank correspondents, that they have lost all their money or their jobs, we are at a loss to tell them where the opportunities for them exist and what type of work they should now turn to. They realize that the white collar job is too uncertain and they are willing to work with their hands, yet it is impossible, with the knowledge available at this time, to direct each individual.

As a result of our experiment, certain outstanding facts present themselves. We are firmly convinced that there is a need in our educational system for industrial schools for adults; adapted to their needs, with flexibility as to time and program schedules. We need more vocational guiding and testing, particularly for adults. We need more information as to industrial requirements. We must keep in constant touch with every industrial field and follow the trends in order that we may know where the adult with varying aptitudes and different experience can be placed.

Along these lines an interesting project has been started. A suggestion came to us to train men in combined mechanical fields in order to take jobs as handy men and assistant superintendents in office buildings and apartment houses. The school offered the necessary facilities but it was thought advisable first to go into the plans very thoroughly and map out a careful program. A series of conferences are being held under the auspices of the Emanuel Federated Employ-