

Training The Unemployed

Editorial Note: Among the measures taken to reduce unemployment, one of the most constructive is to give appropriate training to the unemployed so that they are fitted for work. In Canada training schemes for juvenile unemployed have been established in all provinces assisted by grants from the Dominion Government, while attempts to train adult unemployed are still in an initial stage. In the latter field Great Britain has made valuable achievements.

I.—Unemployed Youth Training in Nova Scotia

By F. H. SEXTON

General Problem.

ALL over Canada, worried parents with boys and girls who have left school and cannot find any regular work, are the ones who realize most keenly the acute problem of youth unemployment. The young people, themselves, are definitely distressed, but accept the strange conditions more calmly than do their fathers and mothers. The latter are not so deeply concerned about the fact that their offspring still require clothes and meals from a shrunken family income, but that they are denied the opportunities of a normal significant life, productive work, economic independence, marriage, establishment of a home, and self-respecting citizenship. The elders experience a mounting anxiety that their loved sons and daughters are condemned to a dark future in which a few more years of enforced idleness will gradually squeeze out their ambition, initiative and desire for regular work, and fix them in frustrated lives as feeble, drifting, helpless human wrecks, spinning out aimless existences on the public dole. No wonder the older generation begins to doubt the advantages and superiority claimed by some for the present mechanistic civilization over the social and economic order that they entered when they were young.

Reactions of Unemployed Youth.

Youth on the whole bears up better under the strain. They are more adaptable and more optimistic of the future. Most of the boys find congenial chums who are also idle with whom they play games on the vacant lots and loaf along the curbs. They get occasional casual jobs on relief projects which help to buy a new windbreaker and denim trousers, a few cigarettes, an occasional moving picture theatre ticket, and a cheap adventure or mystery magazine. They do not consider the present as a fixed condition and look forward hopefully to a turn of affairs that will bring them a job and a chance to enter a normal life. Few of them deteriorate enough in four or five years of idleness to settle down in a gypsy life with mere subsistence, but have resiliency enough to work satisfactorily if they find a position. Few, however, have wisdom or initiative enough to lay out and follow a program of study and self-improvement which will qualify them for a definite occupation for which they are fitted. Very few make continuous efforts to find an opening and after making some applications in the most evident places, most of them subside into passive complacency with the conviction that there is no employment to be had. They have the vaguest ideas about what occupations they were best fitted for, the requirements for success in common crafts and vocations, and no

knowledge of the technique of seeking a job.

In the first few years after the depression began no one thought much of the fact that youth was idle because there were so many heads of families and competent persons who were without work. During this time all sorts of policies were adopted to share the available employment as fairly as possible. People with dependents were kept on the payroll even if they were not as competent as some others who were single. The young people as a class did not get any consideration. There has been such a surplus of applicants for employment ever since, that youth has not had much chance to start life careers. They have been piling up in greater and greater numbers until their plight has become one of national consideration and concern.

Lack of Opportunities for Training.

During the depression business and industry dropped their provisions for apprenticeship because they had to practice the most rigid economies in order to survive. This abandonment of training received the approval of labour, because it would not be common sense to prepare young people for trades where skilled craftsmen were not all able to find work. This continued policy, however, has worked to the grave detriment of youth in the last few years. When they apply for work, they are asked what specific kind of work they can do and usually reply that they have a good general school education, but have not yet had any practical experience. They hasten to add that they are willing to work for small wages or nothing so that they may acquire some competency and skill. The employer almost invariably replies that he is looking for a trained worker and has no time or facilities to train novices. The young person is thus caught in a curious dilemma where he cannot get a job because he has had no practical experience and cannot get the necessary experience even if he is willing to work for it without pay. Obviously the only way to break down the barrier confronting youth is to pro-

vide him with some opportunity to follow a program of apprenticeship or vocational training in an occupation for which his natural abilities, education, and interests fit him for success. This must be established and maintained by some agency or authority outside of business and industry. The most evident one is a department of government which is most deeply concerned with the problems and welfare of youth.

Dominion Appropriation for Youth Training.

After these problems of the unemployment of our young people had become clamorous for action, the National Employment Commission recommended that steps be taken by the Federal Government to promote measures for the training of boys and girls who had left school and could not find work, so that they might become competent in the useful trades and occupations for which they had natural aptitudes. Accordingly, the Dominion appropriated a million dollars in 1937 for this purpose and made it available through the Department of Labour. Since the needs varied in different parts of the country, the provinces were asked to co-operate in the work and to develop those projects which seemed most likely to achieve the most valuable results. The provincial authorities were asked to provide a sum equal to that offered by the Federal Government, and to secure a contributory expenditure from municipalities where training centres were established for local purposes.

The response was immediate and general. Every province organized new training projects covering a wide range of objectives. They included preparation for a great variety of business and industrial occupations as well as some activities for the promotion of the health and the strengthening of the morale of youth out of work. The program of each province was distinctly different from the others as might have been expected, but all were fired with the same purpose of setting the feet of the coming generation on the path toward useful productive labour and self-support. The

success of these efforts during the first year was so satisfactory that the Federal Government increased its appropriation for the present fiscal year and the activities expanded throughout the Dominion.

Youth Training in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia has carried out a variety of training programs for its unemployed youth in mine apprenticeship, auxiliary apprenticeship, household service, power sewing machine stitching, a woodworking co-operative production unit, and specialized short courses in various phases of agriculture.

Metal Mine Apprenticeship.

The great expansion of metal mining, especially in gold production, was one of the most valuable phenomena in the great depression. It afforded much needed employment, furnished an immense tonnage to our beleaguered railways, provided large revenues to governments, stabilized and strengthened our financial structure, gave us the means of meeting foreign obligations, and assisted the national life in many other ways. This field offered employment opportunities for trained underground workers. The Province secured control of a gold mine at Chester Basin which had temporarily suspended activities and organized it as an apprenticeship training centre to prepare young men for the occupations of drill runners, timbermen, hoistmen, millmen, Diesel engine operators, and other vocations associated with gold mining. The mine was staffed with engineers to give supervision and theoretical instruction and with a number of experienced miners to give the practical training underground.

Young men were carefully selected with the required physique, health and interests from among those in the colliery towns who were unemployed and put through a rigid course of training for a period of a year. They were given the necessary clothes for underground work, subsistence, and a stipend of fifty cents a day at the start. As they increased in proficiency the pay was increased by stages to one dollar per day. Their recreation was organized and supervised

by a trained instructor. When they reached the required stage of competency in their occupation, they were placed on regular jobs in the mines of Nova Scotia, Quebec, or Ontario. The number of youths being trained at any one time was about one hundred. During the period of over a year of operation more than one hundred and thirty young men have completed their training and are now regularly employed. The enterprise represents one of the most carefully organized and successfully conducted youth training projects in Canada.

Youth Training in Agricultural Occupations.

The Department of Agriculture is carrying out a broad series of short courses in subjects relating to agricultural occupations and special activities in the successful operation of mixed farming. Most of them are planned to meet the needs of young men, but some of them are conducted in Home Crafts for the benefit of young women in rural life. The greater part of them are organized in rural centres so that the training is carried right to the threshold of the student's home, but others are held at the Agricultural College in Truro.

The range and variety of the work may be comprehended by considering the list of subjects offered. These are Poultry Raising, Grading of Dressed Poultry, Egg Grading, Beekeeping, Cattle Breeding and Herd Maintenance, Farm Mechanics, Horticulture, Tree Pruning and Grafting, Soils and Crops, Fertilizers, Horticulture, Home Crafts. Provision is made so that transportation and boarding costs may be given in part to the students in order to enable them to take the training. It is expected that the enrolment in these courses will reach at least 400 during the autumn and winter sessions.

Auxiliary Apprenticeship Program.

In order to train unemployed young persons for a variety of occupations, it was evident that some provision should be made for them in their own home towns. There were a number of important factors that had to be met for a

satisfactory plan. The regular demands for employment could not be interfered with. There were still large numbers of competent workers with dependents who could not find steady jobs. It would serve no useful purpose to displace one of these by a learner at low wages. The training program would have to provide for a wide range of trades in order to meet the individual abilities of the young persons and to avoid preparing too many people for any one occupation. The best kind of training would be on the job under real working conditions instead of in some school or institution because of the great expense of providing accommodation and equipment. There would have to be some means of giving the learners the scientific, technical, and related trade knowledge that is needed under modern conditions to prepare thoroughly competent and skilled workers in the occupations which they would follow through life. Some modest weekly stipend would have to be paid the learners to enable them to buy working clothes and contribute something to the family budget.

A plan of training was evolved which covered all these elements and it was designated as the "auxiliary apprenticeship" system. Employers were asked to take on one or more auxiliary workers who would be surplus to all actual labour requirements and attach them as helpers to the journeymen or skilled workers for practical instruction. The auxiliary apprentice was expected to work for one month for nothing in order to find out whether or not he wished to enter the occupation as a career and to demonstrate to the employer whether or not he possessed qualifications for success. Then, if both were satisfied, they signed an agreement for one year during which the learner was given a chance to learn the trade and was to be paid a stipend of \$3.00 per week. This contribution was made by the employer as his effort to help solve the local youth unemployment problem. The apprentice was given two half-days per week to attend a training centre where he was instructed in the mathematics, drawing

science, business courses, and trade knowledge necessary for a thorough understanding of his specific vocation. The whole enterprise was organized and administered by the Technical Education Branch of the Department of Education under the provincial Department of Labour. The costs were shared equally by the municipality, the province, and the Dominion.

Vocational Surveys.

In order to ascertain the information as to whether or not an auxiliary training centre would be justified in a town or city, the Technical Education Branch first conducted a vocational survey. Young men between the ages of 18 and 25 were given extensive individual interviews in which the pertinent facts were gathered about their abilities, education, experience, interests, and ambitions for a definite vocation. Guidance and counsel were given each one about their choices and the possibilities. Then each employer and proprietor of business establishments was canvassed to see if they would take one or more apprentices. A report was made to the municipality with recommendations for the establishment of a training centre and an estimate of the cost.

Apprenticeship Training Centres.

North Sydney was the first town to set up a program of auxiliary apprenticeship and it has been conducted there successfully for over a year. Glace Bay started a training centre this summer and it is now functioning smoothly. The City of Sydney has had a vocational survey and had decided to proceed with the organization of such a plan of vocational training. The five towns of New Glasgow, Pictou, Stellarton, Trenton, and Westville jointly requested a survey which was recently completed and are now considering the establishment of a similar co-operative effort in the near future. Over 1,000 young unemployed youths have been interviewed and over 300 openings have been found where they can get training. The breadth and variety of occupations can be judged by the follow-

ing ones taken at random from the list:—automotive mechanic, baker, barber, boilermaker, carpenter, retail clerk, credit clerk, dental technician, electrician, draftsman, jeweller, laundryman, telephone lineman, machinist, painter, pattern-maker, photographer, plumber, plasterer, printer, sheetmetal worker, shoe repairer, tailor, tinsmith, undertaker, welder, X-ray technician. It is felt that the plan meets many of the needs of the situation and will be extended to other towns and cities in the near future.

Household Service Training Centres.

Investigations proved that there were opportunities for young women in household service if they were given definite training for this occupation. Centres have been established for this purpose. In each case a practice house has been secured and staffed with instructors who have had thorough training in teaching household arts. Groups of girls consisting of between 15 and 20 have been given instruction for a period of three months. They had to become skilled in all the jobs that are performed in the ordinary good home and were given classes in nutrition, sewing, personal hygiene, home etiquette, etc. At the end of the course they were given an interim certificate of competency which was exchanged for a permanent one after three months of satisfactory service. Such centres have been operated in North Sydney, Sydney, and Halifax and plans are formulated for conducting them in other places.

Power Sewing Machine Training.

In Windsor and Truro are textile factories where underwear and garments are manufactured. Most of the work is done by girls and the largest number of workers are operators of power sewing machines. There is a seasonal fluctuation of employment and a fairly large annual labour turnover in this occupation. A training class was set up in a school in each centre and equipped with the types of power machines used in the factories. A group of 10 to 15 selected girls was given practical instruction in

their operation under an expert operator for a period of four months. All of the girls in one centre found employment within three months and part of those trained in the other centre are now at regular work.

Co-operative Production Unit in Woodworking.

In the town of Inverness a Community Development Association was formed about two years ago to promote activities for the improvement of the locality. One of the projects proposed was the establishment of a woodworking factory to serve the needs of the district and to give occupational training to some of the unemployed youth. The one industry in the town is coal mining and this is owned and operated directly by the provincial government. Most of the houses in the town belong to the mine. The government had promised to give the Association two dollars for every dollar raised by voluntary subscription.

The Association secured the use of an abandoned concrete building belonging to the mine for the purpose of establishing a woodworking factory. The government gave also the roofing material and lumber needed for the rehabilitation of the building and electric power. A group of ten young men who promised to give one year of their time to the enterprise was selected and the Technical Education Branch furnished the services of a competent instructor on a part-time basis. It took seven months to put the building in condition because the good intentions of the learners faded gradually until only one of the ten remained at work. More recruits were signed on and finally the shop was ready for equipment. Some second-hand machinery was purchased and some was loaned from the Technical College. This was installed and this month orders were secured from the mine for material to repair the company houses. Enough work has been promised to keep the shop going for a year and the group became fired with a new spirit when actual orders rolled in and is now working nights. The group is forming itself into a regular co-

operative production unit and the prospects for its success seem very bright indeed. The whole enterprise has been an experiment, but some such procedure must be followed in other places and other activities if work and training are to be provided for our idle youth.

A good start has been made in tackling the problem of training our unemployed youth for useful lives. Only the fringe has been touched but methods have been actually tried out that promise success. The auxiliary apprentices who have been carefully selected and placed at work have stuck to their jobs and given their employers satisfaction. Only a dozen

or so have withdrawn after a trial or have had to be replaced. If some small increase in business activity comes within the next year which seems reasonable to expect, they will all find regular employment and the way will be open to take on new recruits for training. No apprentices have been developed during the last ten years and employers state that there is a dearth of skilled workmen in every line to supply the demands of normal activity. This emergency method of co-operative training for young people may well become a permanent activity in our educational and industrial life.

II.—Training Schemes for the Adult Unemployed in Great Britain

THE training schemes organised by the Ministry of Labour in Great Britain are intended to repair the effects of prolonged industrial depression on the workers of the country. The first, through the Government Training Centres, gives six months initial training in a specific trade, to selected unemployed men, while the second deals, through the Instructional Centres, with unskilled men of the labouring type and aims at a three months general "toning-up" which will help them to regain and hold employment.

Vocational Training.

The fourteen Government Training Centres with accommodation for 7,500 men are not intended in any way as a rival to apprenticeship in the supply of skilled workers. They merely meet certain needs which apprenticeship, particularly in times of trade depression, is unable to meet—the needs of men who, perhaps through domestic misfortune, but chiefly through the industrial circumstances of the district in which they grew up, have been unable to enter industry in the normal way and have been condemned to unemployment. Men

(such as miners and textile workers) whose skill has become redundant or obsolete are also helped to learn new trades. Men who have served in the Army and thus been deprived of industrial experience are similarly prepared for their entry into civil life.

Recruitment is carried out through the Employment Exchanges, and while first attention is given to the Depressed and Special Areas—any man over eighteen who can show that he has no chance of employment in his normal occupation can apply for training. An interviewing panel tests men's educational and physical capabilities and endeavours to ascertain the trade for which they may be suited. Particular importance is attached to the keenness which men show, for it is impossible to obtain satisfactory results without willing co-operation on the part of the men themselves.

Fares are paid to the Centres, which are usually located in prosperous districts. Unemployed men receive the unemployment benefit or allowances to which they would ordinarily be entitled if unemployed with 5 shillings a week extra for incidental personal expenses and special provision is made for their dependants. They live in lodgings near

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