

Before the Unemployment Board came into existence, the problem of alleviating unemployment was largely in the hands of the Government, with local bodies doing their share in providing relief work. By the Local Authorities' Empowering (Relief of Unemployment) Act, 1926, and subsequent amending legislation, local bodies were authorized to raise moneys by loan, in order to carry out works for the relief of unemployment, without taking a poll of the ratepayers as provided in the Local Bodies' Loans Act. The Imprest Supply Act, 1927, provided that a sum of £150,000 be set aside by the Government to subsidize moneys expended on relief works carried out by local bodies, and this amount was later increased by Parliament to a total of £400,000. The greater part of this sum had been expended by the end of 1930, while the balance not actually expended was committed.

In this connection it will be of interest to show the expenditure by the Government on works for the relief of unemployment during the last five years. The Public Works Department has employed by far the largest number of men, and its relief works have consequently absorbed the bulk of the expenditure. Other Government Departments assisted, however, in finding work for the unemployed, notably the State Forest Service, which has taken on a considerable number of men each year during the tree-planting season. The Lands and Survey and Railways Departments have also assisted in finding work for the unemployed at various times. The cost of such relief works, together with subsidies to local bodies for each financial year, are as follows :—

				£	£
1926-27—					
Public Works Department	..	..	..	130,000	
State Forest Service	..	..	..	14,240	
					144,240
1927-28—					
Public Works Department	..	..	..	379,565	
State Forest Service	..	..	..	27,550	
Subsidies to local bodies	..	..	..	75,106	
					482,221
1928-29—					
Public Works Department	..	..	..	680,393	
State Forest Service	..	..	..	50,250	
Other Departments	..	..	..	3,500	
Subsidies to local bodies	..	..	..	68,566	
					802,709
1929-30—					
Public Works Department	..	..	..	914,000	
State Forest Service	..	..	..	185,400	
Other Departments	..	..	..	204,464	
Subsidies to local bodies	..	..	..	111,728	
					1,415,592
1930-31—					
Public Works Department	..	..	..	1,249,446	
State Forest Service	..	..	..	85,000	
Other Departments	..	..	..	21,933	
Subsidies to local bodies	..	..	..	116,768	
					1,473,147
Total	..	..	..	..	£4,317,909

The average numbers of men employed during the year in the case of the Public Works Department relief works, and during the season in the case of the State Forest Service, are as follows :—

	1926-27.	1927-28.	1928-29.	1929-30.	1930-31.
Public Works Department	643	1,912	3,014	3,653	4,898
State Forest Service	123	263	640	1,180	700

Local Unemployment Committees.

At an early stage the Unemployment Board realized the necessity for some local organization to co-operate with it in the relief work to be undertaken. In common with the General Government and the Unemployment Board, local governing authorities have real responsibilities in regard to the alleviation of distress caused through unemployment in their respective districts, and they have not been divested of these responsibilities by the passing of the Unemployment Act. In recognition of this fact, the Chairman of the Unemployment Board issued, through the press of the Dominion and by special circulars, an urgent appeal to the Mayors of all cities and boroughs to take the initiative in the formation of Local Unemployment Committees of a representative character to co-operate with the Board on a strictly voluntary basis, as provided by the Act. The response to this appeal was prompt and encouraging, and by the end of March some 165 Local Unemployment Committees were functioning satisfactorily, with, in many centres, sub-committees operating in outlying districts under their jurisdiction. Each Local Unemployment Committee has a small executive and a Government officer