

The immediate care of the Board is to relieve distress due to involuntary unemployment. Its total ability to do so is the extent of its income. This limit is arbitrary. Any adjustments consequently necessary in the disbursement of relief must in fairness, therefore, be based on the variations, produced by local conditions and personal obligations, in the degree of individual necessity.

In this country the climate of whose northern territory borders on the sub-tropical, and whose length extends south over a thousand miles covering thirteen degrees of latitude, there can be no hard-and-fast gauge of individual need, or of the monetary relief necessary to ameliorate it, that could have equitable application over the whole Dominion. It is found in practice that a measure of relief which is adequate in one area where fuel is either abundant or unnecessary, rentals are cheap, and fish, game, vegetables, and other food resources provided either by nature or for the trouble of cultivation, is inadequate in other districts with more rigorous climatic conditions or less bountifully endowed by nature. This disparity, sometimes very marked, between natural conditions in one district and another, is usually accentuated by secondary differences due to varying social and/or industrial conditions.

In order, therefore, to devise means of equitably combining the impersonal numerical element with humanitarian consideration for personal factors in a method of distribution of relief funds under the Board's major scheme for the relief of unemployment, it has been necessary to accept some factor common to all centres as a basis for primary allocation. Experience led finally to the adoption of a system of allocating funds strictly proportionate in the first place to the current unemployment registrations at each centre. This gives an absolutely impartial and unvarying basis for a primary allocation to each centre in proportion to its aggregate of need as measured by registrations. Adjustments are then made to meet known variations, due to local conditions, in degrees of necessity; and the allocations which cover the ensuing four weeks are remitted from the Board to its certifying officers at 350 registration centres.

The method of subsequent disposition of the funds is explained at page 12 in the section dealing with Scheme 5.

The policy of requiring reproductive work to be done in return for relief is based on two considerations, both of which, in the view of the Board, are of prime importance. Firstly, there is the psychological effect on the worker, previously referred to—the mental effect on the individual of performing, for lengthy periods, manual work which it is apparent to him is of a useless nature, is both positive and harmful. Secondly, the special taxation which is the source of the Board's funds is derived immediately from the earnings of citizens, but depends ultimately for its continued yield upon the productive assets of the Dominion. Therefore, it has been deemed wise to direct the expenditure of relief moneys, into channels which will tend to enlarge those assets. A related consideration, which has weighed with the Board in this connection, is a desire that, when revival of trade renders relief activities no longer necessary, any continuing evidences of the present depression will present themselves to posterity not as liabilities, but as tangible assets in the shape of improved and extended farm lands, improved access to backblock districts, additional public facilities, and other works of definite community or productive value.

No organization comparable in nature and magnitude with that which has sprung up as the vehicle of unemployment relief has previously functioned in the Dominion. The Board, therefore, has no means of relating the multifarious administrative problems to past experience. There have been no precedents to guide the Board in the formation of policy, nor the certifying officers and associated officials in administering it. A national situation, of economic origin, and expressing itself in human distress, arose and intensified with an irresistible rapidity that brooked no delay in the conception and launching of counteractive measures.

The problem of deciding courses of action was not alone an abstract one merely of declaring what forms of work should be performed for specified measures of relief, and of creating a Dominion-wide organization to function with machine-like efficiency. Superimposed on the sufficiently intricate considerations associated with those phases were the facts that every line of even routine official action impinged finally on the personal lives of citizens, with a significance magnified by their condition of unaccustomed dependence; and that rules of procedure, however elaborately drawn by the Board and meticulously observed by its officials, failed in their purpose if their ultimate effect in operation were not ameliorative of the personal hardship the Board's funds were designed to relieve.

Early experience persuaded the Board of the consequent necessity of investing its employment schemes with the highest degree of elasticity consistent with proper safeguards. This was possible only by leaving to its certifying officers very wide discretion. Happily, the class of officer discharging those functions permitted this being done. The Board is deeply sensible, and records its appreciation of, the initiative displayed by the officers in their handling of a situation having facets peculiar to each centre; of the responsible manner in which they have viewed the extraordinary and onerous duties devolving upon them; and of their unselfish application to the voluminous clerical work associated with the Board's activities.

The task of finding sufficient suitable work for the relief of unemployment has been by no means an easy one, but with the co-operation and help of employing authorities (principally local bodies and Departments of State), this has been accomplished. The Board acknowledges with thanks the valuable assistance and co-operation which it has received from local authorities throughout the Dominion, and from Government Departments.

Due mainly to a further sharp decline in the value of primary products, the numbers of unemployed have continued to increase, as the report shows, until during the winter of 1932 the figures reached a height unprecedented in the Dominion. With some 70,000 men a charge on the Unemployment Fund at the time of preparing this report, the problem of utilizing available finance in the most equitable manner is an extremely difficult one. Despite increased taxation, the pressure on the Fund has never relaxed sufficiently to allow a reserve to be built up.