

Although the unemployment problem developed to a serious stage in New Zealand at a later date than in most other countries, and the stages of its development have been relatively more rapid, the latest available statistics indicate that the proportion of unemployed to the total population is still considerably below the figures recorded in the majority of other countries. At the same time, the methods adopted in New Zealand to relieve the situation are believed to be more comprehensive and continuous than elsewhere; and accordingly the average measure of relief granted compares more than favourably with that awarded in other countries.

Apart from the normal channels of contact through the official organization, direct personal oversight of relief administration has been maintained since July, 1932, through the Deputy-Chairman of the Board (Mr. J. S. Jessep), whose inspections, carried out as circumstances require, enable the Board to keep activities throughout the Dominion under continuous review.

HOSPITAL BOARD RELIEF : TRANSFER TO UNEMPLOYMENT BOARD.

Prior to July, 1932, relief activities by the Unemployment Board were supplemented by Hospital Boards, which under normal conditions are responsible for the relief of distress due to indigence. The abnormal spread of distress due to unemployment created a situation beyond the capacity of these Boards. It became necessary to draw some general line of demarcation of responsibility and following a conference between the Unemployment Board and Hospital Boards, the undermentioned classification, drawn up by hospital doctors, was adopted.

Class A : Men fit for any work in any place.

Class A2 : Men fit for camp provided light work is given.

Class B : Men fit for any work in city or town, but not fit for camp.

Class B2 : Men not fit for camp, but fit for light work in town only.

Class C : Men unfit for work of any kind.

Classes A, A2, and B were accepted as the responsibility of the Unemployment Board; and Classes B2 and C as the care of Hospital Boards.

It had to be recognized that in any such arbitrary classification of men, however carefully carried out, hardship would arise unless considerable discretion were exercised. This specially applies to the B2 class, in respect of which it was arranged that close co-operation should exist between the two authorities, and that the Unemployment Board would assume the responsibility for individual cases as suitable work becomes available.

As from 4th July, 1932, the Unemployment Board accordingly assumed the full responsibility of providing relief to able-bodied registered unemployed men, in Classes A, A2, and B, who were formerly assisted to some extent by Hospital Boards. Certifying officers were instructed that except in the special cases referred to at page 12 any relief so afforded to able-bodied registered unemployed must be awarded in the form of work, and that such relief, when added to the amount of relief work allotted to the recipient in the ordinary course under Scheme 5, should not exceed the maximum scale laid down under the rules of Scheme 5.

Investigations were made as to the extra charge placed on the Board's funds under this arrangement, and in cases in which it was necessary, increases were made in allocations.

AMENDMENTS TO UNEMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION.

Various amendments to the Unemployment Act, 1930, were enacted in the Unemployment Amendment Act passed on 22nd July, 1931; in Part 2 of the Finance Act (No. 4) passed on 11th November, 1931; in the Unemployment Amendment Act passed on 30th April, 1932; and in Part 3 of the Finance Act (No. 2) passed on the 9th December, 1932.

The principal directions in which the Act was amended were as follows:—

The provision of increased funds for unemployment relief by means of additional special taxation; authority for payment in advance of subsidy from the Consolidated Fund; abolition in later legislation of such subsidy; reconstitution of the Unemployment Board and the vesting in the Board of authority to appoint committees to investigate and report on various matters concerning unemployment and to delegate its powers to such committees; provision for Parliament to appropriate annually out of the Unemployment Fund the required finances to meet administration expenses; extension of the powers of the Governor-General to make regulations for the purposes of the principal Act; the provision of penalties upon summary conviction for the offence of attempting to obtain benefits under the Act by means of false statements or misrepresentation.

The amending legislation confers authority on local bodies to undertake work on individual private properties for the relief of unemployment, and for the cost, either in whole or part, to be recoverable by the Board, through the local authority, by means of a local rate. Under this provision the Minister of Finance may, if default is made by the local authority, appoint a receiver to levy a rate on the lands affected or on all rateable property in the district concerned.

In the case of larger reproductive undertakings affecting two or more private properties, the Minister of Public Works is empowered to declare such undertakings relief works, and have them carried out by unemployed labour.

THE RECONSTITUTED UNEMPLOYMENT BOARD.

Section 26 of the Unemployment Amendment Act, 1931, abolished the Unemployment Board as then constituted, and made provision for a new body consisting of five members. Previously seven members of the Board, other than the Chairman, were appointed on the nomination of various interests. Under the new constitution, the Board consists of the Minister, who is Chairman, three