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BLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS

ABOR IN THE DEFENSE CRISIS

Y T. R. CARSKADON

Will defense production absorb the unemployed?

Should defense strikes be outlawed?

How can labor disputes best be settled?

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS
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LABOR IN THE DEFENSE CRISIS

By T. R. CARSKADON

AMERICA began its intensive effort to arm for defense in the summer of 1940. Under the pressure of international events, the program has moved with increasing swiftness. With the signing of the Lend-Lease Act on March 11, 1941, this country definitely embarked upon an all-out armament effort. There is no longer any fight over appropriations; our national defense program is now limited only by the men and machines available for arms production.

What, then, are our immediate resources in unemployed man power? The research staff of the Labor Survey of The Twentieth Century Fund estimates the number of idle workers available for employment in the spring of 1941 as "probably not far from 4,000,000." Is this backlog of unemployed large enough to meet our defense needs? Very clearly it is not, and most forecasts agree that we will ultimately need more workers than are now unemployed.

Mr. Carskadon is Chief of the Education Department of The Twentieth Century Fund. This pamphlet is based on *Labor and National Defense,* by Lloyd G. Reynolds and the Committee on Labor of The Twentieth Century Fund. The survey is published by The Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1941. All estimates in this pamphlet are based on the situation as it appeared to the research staff in the early months of 1941.

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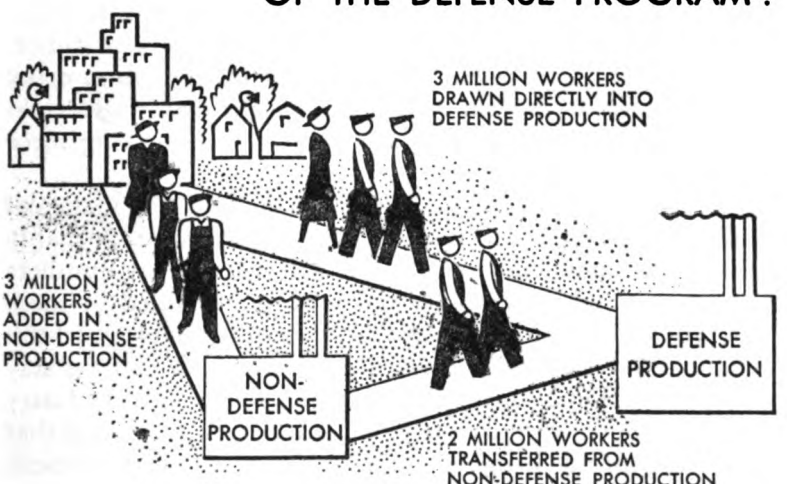
still more time to instal equipment, especially precision machinery that may in itself require a long, slow period of production. There are usually several weeks and even months between the passage of an appropriation, or the letting of a contract, and the beginning of actual production.

HOW MANY ADDITIONAL JOBS WILL BE CREATED IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE DEFENSE PROGRAM?



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It is also true that there will not be a smooth, even process of absorbing all the unemployed, after which the country will be faced with a general labor shortage. Things do not work out that way. There are acute shortages in many trades and many parts of the country right now. This is especially true of workers in the metal trades and shipyard crafts.

Meanwhile, there are many extra workers in other trades and in parts of the country that have not particularly felt the effect of defense activities. Labor skills, of course, are not interchangeable and cannot be shifted around like bales of cotton or barrels of fuel oil. Too many painters in one city will not make up for a lack of patternmakers in another.

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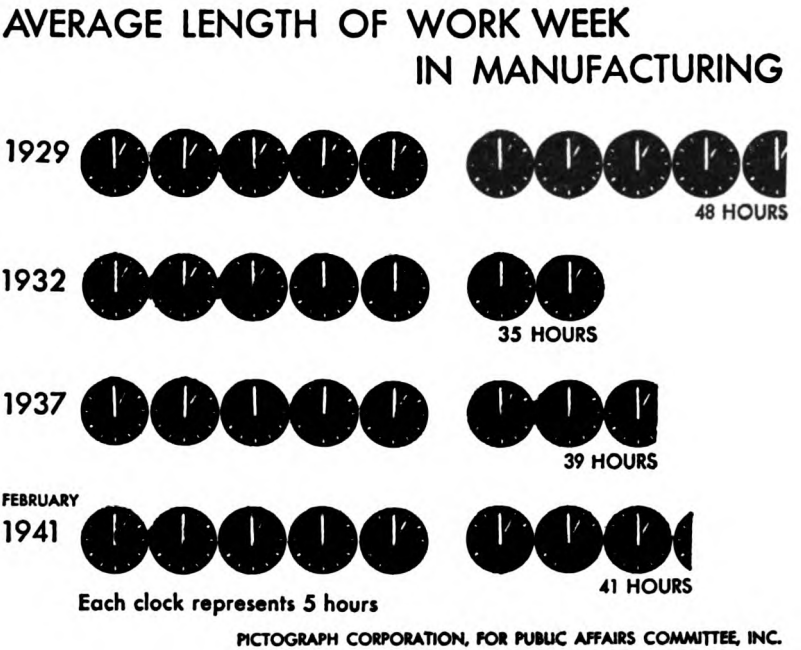
for all manufacturing industries. The great depression brought further reductions as plants worked short-time rather than dismiss their workers. In 1932 the average work week in manufacturing was only thirty-five hours. During the ensuing recovery the work week, instead of returning to the 1929 level as might have been expected, stayed at about forty hours.



Many persons have urged an increase in the length of the work week to speed up the defense program. However, there is a limit to this possibility. The more hours a man works beyond a certain limit, the more tired he becomes. As he becomes tired, he turns out less work and makes more mistakes. Toward the end of a too-long day or week, his output may fall off so rapidly that he may actually turn out less in a long week than if he had worked fewer hours.

Some careful studies of this problem have been made in this country and in Great Britain. The experience of the

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considerably narrowed. Years later, under the National Recovery Administration in 1933-1934, the gap was narrowed still further by the wage minimums written into the N.R.A. codes. These usually resulted in much greater relative increases for low-paid than for high-paid labor. Now the two are drawing apart once more. The gap probably will be widened during the next few years as skilled workers, now scarce, get more raises than unskilled workers, who are still abundant. It is estimated that about 35 per cent of the men demanded for the defense program will be skilled workers, 40 per cent will be semi-skilled, and 25 per cent unskilled.



TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR DEFENSE WORKERS

ONE way of providing needed skills is to train workers. Industry, of course, is always training men in its plants; and labor unions, in turn, have well-established apprenticeship programs, especially in the skilled trades, although the number of apprentices is limited. Under pressure of the defense program, all such activities are being greatly intensified. Public and private schools and colleges offer vocational training and the government itself is conducting large-scale training projects.

The most direct training of all is carried on by industry itself. Government aid in this field is given through the

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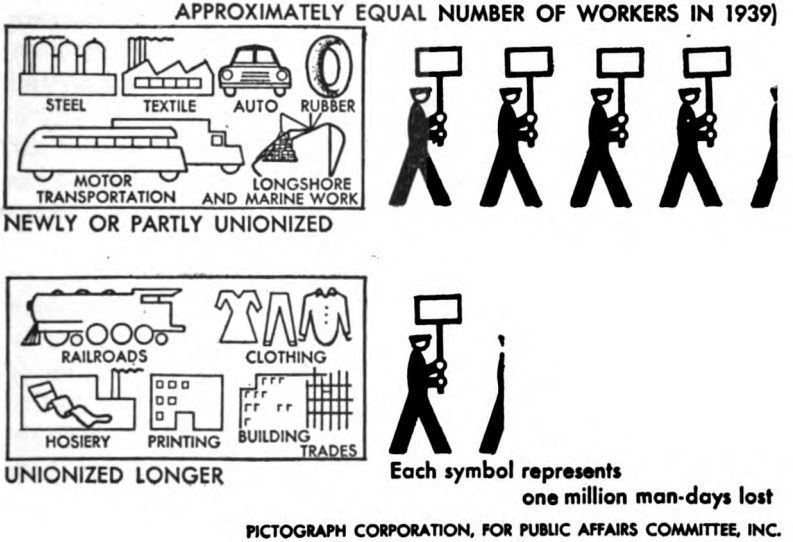
tain understandable mistrust and suspicion on both sides. It takes time to build up mutual confidence and create a sound working basis. Management in a newly organized industry often retains a good deal of smoldering hostility toward a union; and the union, in turn, particularly if it has inexperienced leaders, may have difficulty in controlling and disciplining its own members until it is more firmly established.

FEWER STRIKES OCCUR IN OLDER UNIONIZED INDUSTRIES

(COMPARISON OF TWO GROUPS OF INDUSTRIES EMPLOYING APPROXIMATELY EQUAL NUMBER OF WORKERS IN 1939)



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In the light of these facts it is significant that the defense industries are for the most part unorganized or newly organized. In 1933 (as in 1917) there was virtually no union organization in steel, automobiles, rubber, oil, chemicals, machine tools, shipyards, electrical manufacturing, or airplane manufacturing. Today the situation is greatly changed. In each of these industries there are many union members and some union agreements. In few cases, however, do these agreements cover as much as half of those engaged in and about the

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to reach a settlement by voluntary agreement. An essential factor is that neither side is forced to accept a recommendation with which it does not agree, and neither side surrenders any of its fundamental rights.

Mediation works. The figures show that the proportion of success in mediation cases usually runs above 90 per cent. The United States Conciliation Service was able to adjust all but 146 of the 1,678 disputes in which it intervened during 1938-1939. The New York State Mediation Board adjusted all but 30 of 310 cases during 1939.



Technique of Mediation

These are the results that mediation achieves. What of the procedure itself? Because of the great variety of situations that arise, it is hard to say just how mediation is carried on. Since the mediator can come into the picture only with the consent of both parties and has no power to impose his will, his first task is to create confidence by showing a grasp of the problem and a nonpartisan attitude. The next step is usually to define the area of controversy by discovering on what points the parties are already in substantial agreement.

Beyond this the method varies from case to case. The mediator may hold joint conferences to debate the issues and explore possible bases of settlement. He may confer with each side separately and serve as a go-between for the transmission of proposals. If these methods do not work, he may have to work out a plan of settlement and urge both parties to accept it. The force of public opinion helps to strengthen his proposals, particularly in a time of great national effort called forth by the defense program.

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