

THE PROBLEM OF MANPOWER

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FEW YEARS MAKE. Only a few years ago, millions of persons were on relief and on relief projects and the principal problem of the nation was how to spark business and industry and provide jobs. Today the pendulum has swung to the other extreme and the principal domestic problem is to provide a supply of skilled manpower with which to keep war production at scheduled levels.

A RATIONING PROBLEM. It may soon develop into a rationing problem—the rationing of people to areas, plants, and industries where they can perform the most useful service in the war effort.

THE CAUSE. The cause is neither mysterious nor complicated. When Selective Service reached into the 131,000,000 people of this land and lifted out more than 6,000,000 young men for military and naval service, it left a great void in the factories, and plants of the nation. Men with certain skills were taken from their work benches and farms and as the number in uniform increased, so the problem of meeting production schedules of ships, tanks, planes and other war supplies became more aggravated. An estimated military and naval force of 9,000,000 in 1943 merely means that the problem will become more and more aggravated.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PROBLEM. An army without weapons is as good as no army at all. A Navy without vessels, guns and equipment is as good as no Navy at all. Thus there must remain on the home front, a sufficient supply of skilled manpower to carry on production of the instruments of war that our fighting forces might be adequately equipped with the most improved weapons and adequate supplies. Moreover an army would soon be reduced to a ghost organization if food were not provided so there must remain on the home front, men to till the soil, produce corn, wheat, hogs and livestock, operate the processing plants, the transportation facilities and the ships to get these essentials to market and to the combat front. Men, women and children on the home front must also eat, wear clothes, live in houses, read newspapers, be provided with fuel and other necessities so there must remain on the home front, men and women to operate stores, coal yards, set type, operate electric plants and do a host of things that our civilian establishment may continue to function. All this then raises the question of who shall do combat duty, who shall remain at home, where shall they who remain at home work in the best interests of victory.

SOME SYMPTOMS. Already shortages of food and milk on a limited scale have developed in various areas. Certain war plants have not been meeting schedules. New plants coming into operation are likely to rob the materials' supplies of those now operating. In 67 areas, there are labor shortages in various lines and already the problem takes form as the most important matter before the country.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE. Six months ago, a War Manpower Commission was created to deal with this problem. It has issued many orders and appeals and sought to stop the pirating of labor from one plant to another, freezing of labor in certain industries such as metal mining, lumbering and livestock production, the more extended use of women in industry, and the use of the United States Employment Service in stabilizing and controlling the migration of employees. In one case the War Labor Board authorized a wage increase to prevent copper miners from leaving their jobs. In another case, the War Labor Board set ceilings on the hourly wages of tool and die makers in the Detroit area

to prevent pirating. But the problem grows in volume and importance. It may soon become critical and is now receiving vigorous attention. THREE PROPOSALS. Three broad proposals have been made to meet this problem. The first is that of Harry Hopkins, Paul V. McNutt and others for a National Service Act under which all civilian workers would be subject to compulsory service like men in the military service. The second is that recommended by the Tolán Committee of the House of Representatives and the Truman Committee of the Senate for the creation of a War Mobilization Office with a division to be known as the Office of Manpower Supply. This office would take over both the Selective Service System and the present Manpower Commission. Its function would be to allocate manpower as between the armed services and essential production needs, making a continuous inventory of manpower reserves, provide for training and placement, arrange for the transfer of workers from plant to plant, industry to industry, and area to area and police the industries of the nation to develop maximum labor efficiency. The third proposal is to let the matter continue on a purely voluntary basis and permit employers to solve it for themselves.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE. The general objective of course is to approach the British system under which the importance of an individual is determined by his skill and usefulness and to assign him to military service or to production on that basis. It would mean that an individual's family status becomes a secondary consideration in determining whether he shall be deferred from military service.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS. In meeting the problem, many specific proposals have been made. It has been suggested that (1) war contracts be awarded only to areas with a labor surplus (2) the 40 hour week be increased to 48 hours (3) dig into the army and take out men with special skills and put them back in industry (4) import labor from Mexico for farm work in areas where a shortage exists (5) admit girls of 16 to defense plant work (6) curtail civilian production of non-essential goods and commodities (7) stop all enlistments so that manpower can be thoroughly controlled (8) compel skilled workers who left their trades for better paying jobs to back to their trades (9) standardize goods and commodities to save labor and materials (10) draft those under 35 regardless of family status and permit men in older age groups to return to industry (11) withhold price relief from non-essential industries and thus compel workers to ship to war industries (12) begin an elaborate training program of youth, women, and new workers. These and other specific suggestions have been made to meet the problem.

DIFFICULTIES. To ration sugar or tires is one thing. To ration people is another. Suppose a tool maker living in St. Paul is ordered to report for duty at a certain factory in Cincinnati. Who pays his transportation. Does his family go along and if so, who pays their transportation and moving costs? Suppose he has obligations and commitments back home: who pays them? Suppose he owns a home with a mortgage. What happens if his removal to Cincinnati makes it difficult or impossible to meet the payments? What happens if the pay scale in Cincinnati is less than in St. Paul? What happens to his seniority in the place where he works in St. Paul? Does he get his old job back when the war is over? What about his union membership? These are but some of the difficulties involved.

ONE CERTAIN THING. We can, we shall, we must win this war. Victory requires soldiers, human personality, energy and intelligence. Production must go forward on all fronts. It will go forward on all fronts because Congress is determined to find an adequate solution for this problem.