

Full Employment--America's Major Problem

By NATHAN M. KATZ

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*"The Greatest evil of unemployment is not physical but moral,
not the want which it may bring, but the hatred which it breeds."*

Sir William Beveridge

of the Republic Drill and Tool Company of Chicago, appearing before the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, in behalf of the Full

Employment Bill, stated, (as Reported in P. M., August 26, 1945):

"If we are to maintain those rights for which so many have

given their lives in these recent years, we must admit the necessity to add to those another which is most basic and upon which the other rights depend. This is the right to work, to earn a decent living and to do something creative for one's self and one's fellow men."

This is a forthright statement of the principle to which the Full Employment Bill seeks to give legislative sanction. The Bill, however, (Continued on page 30)

The prospect of 7,500,000 to 10,500,000 unemployed by the end of next year is so disconcerting as to fill one with great misgiving. We have labored under the illusion that when reconversion to peacetime production had been consummated, the great unfilled need for consumers goods would replace the wartime industrial boom and would at least keep unemployment down to a level where it could be managed without impairing the social structure. But it has now become obvious that we are not going to have so easy a time of it. I. F. Stone, in his Washington letter to the Nation of October 8, writes "... from the information available here, we seem to be headed toward chronic unemployment after reconversion; optimistic estimates add up to about 7,500,000 jobless by the end of next year, pessimistic, to 10,500,000." There are those among the great employers of labor who can be counted upon to exert every effort to make employment available, consistent with the understandable objective of insuring fair profits. There are, however, other employers who frankly assert that full employment is neither possible nor desirable in a peacetime economy. It is apparent that private industry is not only divided on the feasibility of full employment but that it is highly improbable that it can supply enough work for all. For example, Stone points out that in the automobile industry, where there is a huge "pent-up" demand, there will, nevertheless, be a big net loss in jobs during the "peak" period in which the back-log of automobile needs will be met. He concludes with the observation that "pent-up demand for consumer durables will not create full employment even temporarily."

Thus, it becomes obvious that only in Governmental intervention is there any hope of ameliorating the pending crisis, and that intervention must not be of a temporary character. It must have the sanction of law. It must envisage a long range program of planning and implementation. The Bill introduced by Senators Murray, Wagner, Thomas and O'Mahoney is legislation of this character. While it declares that "it is the policy of the United States to foster free competitive enterprises and the investment of private capital in trade and commerce and in the development of the natural resources," it also enunciates boldly that "all Americans able to work and seeking work have the right to useful, remunerative, regular, and full time employment;" and further declares that "it is the policy of the United States to assure the existence at all times of sufficient employment opportunities to enable all Americans who have finished their schooling and who do not have full time housekeeping responsibilities freely to exercise this right."

The recognition of the right to employment represents a great forward stride in the direction of the implementation of the civil, political and economic rights guaranteed by our democracy. It is an expansion of the concept of freedom in that it recognizes that it is fatuous to talk about our liberties if their enjoyment is not made secure by the assurance that each man and woman shall be capable of self support, of having enough food, shelter, educational and recreational opportunities and the other basic elements of a full life.

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(Continued from page 5)

goes beyond the mere decaration of policy. It fortifies it by the provision that "to the extent that continuing full employment cannot otherwise be achieved, it is the further responsibility of the Federal Government to provide such volume of Federal investment and expenditure as may be needed to assure continuing full employment." In other words, Government, as the instrument of all the people, undertakes to put its financial, political and economic resources behind "free competitive enterprise" by way of supplementing, complementing and stimulating its capacity for creating jobs and employment potentialities, so that the workers of the nation may not be victimized by either the vagaries or the vicissitudes of an unplanned and uncontrolled economy. It seeks to create what Stuart Chase has called a "compensatory economy," which he adds, "can also be called a thermostat economy." "When the house gets too hot," Chase states in colorful language, "the furnace shuts off; when it gets cold, it speeds up. The thermostat controls to puncture incipient booms and dissolve incipient depressions include incentive taxation, social security rates, public works, stimulation to little business, housing development, income tax rates, open market operations, Federal Reserve interest rates."

To achieve this end, the Bill proposes to set up a National Production and Employment Budget, which "the President shall transmit to Congress at the beginning of each regular session . . . which shall set forth in summary and detail, for the ensuing fiscal year or such longer period as the President may deem appropriate, (1) the estimated size of the labor force . . . ; (2) the estimated aggregate volume of investment and expenditure by private enterprise, consumers, State and Local Governments and the Federal Government, required to produce such volume of the gross national product . . . as will be necessary to provide employment opportunities for such labor force . . . ; and (3) the estimated aggregate volume of prospective investment and expenditure by private enterprises, consumers, State and Local Governments and the Federal Government . . ."

When it is found that the "estimated aggregate volume of prospective investment and expenditure" falls below the minimum required "to assure a full employment volume of production," the President "shall set forth in such Budget, a general program . . . as will prevent such deficiency to the greatest possible extent." The Bill also provides for action against "inflationary economic dislocations," as well as such "measures as may be necessary to assure that monopolistic practices with respect to prices, production or distribution, or other monopolistic practices, will not interfere with the achievement of the purposes of this Act." The Bill further establishes a Joint Committee on the National Budget, composed of members of the Senate and the House, whose function it will be to study the National Budget, report on its findings and recommendations and set forth by joint resolution a general policy with respect to it, so as to serve as a guide to the enactment of appropriate legislation.

Critics, perfectionists and doubters can point to many weaknesses and imperfections. It cannot be denied that there are loopholes through which the effectiveness of the Bill and its counterpart in the House, where it is sponsored by a bloc under the leadership of Representative Patman of Texas, can be reduced. It is true that of itself, it will not solve the problem. It is, however, designed to make the Executive, the Congress and the people conscious of the pressing need for full employment. It is intended to periodically focus universal attention on this gravest of all problems. It will make Congress and the Executive responsive to and responsible for the necessary legislative action to implement the National Budget in all of its

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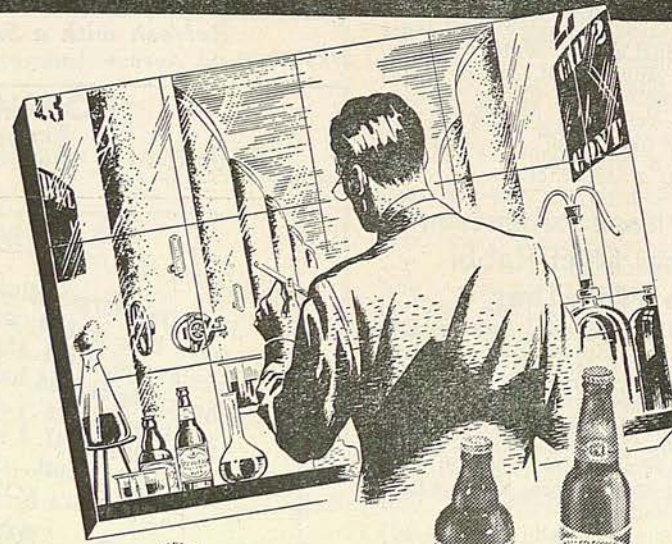
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implications. As such, it is the most effective instrument that has been devised to assure full or reasonably adequate employment "in a free competitive economy," contrary to the dour pessimism of those who plaintively cry that the two are incompatible.

The Bill is a valiant effort to prevent continuous cycles of unemployment and the dire results to our national well being that are bound to follow. It is expressive of confidence in the ability of our economy to provide full employment. In short, it deserves the support of all protagonists of an effective and expanding democracy. To make it work, we shall require effective co-operation among all groups. Full employment was attained in time of war. It is achievable in peace, if we are earnest in our determination to insure "freedom from want." Leo Barnes, in an article entitled "The Anatomy of Full Employment" stated clearly the need for planning and co-operation, when he wrote:

"sustained full employment is neither certain nor impossible in a free society. But it will require far more co-operation among management, labor and Government than we have ever had except in War. The economic equivalent of War will require some, at least, of the economic organization of War."

* * *

What is the significance of a rising tide of unemployment? What does it mean in terms of the peace, tranquility and progress of our Nation and of the World? What will be its effect on the status of minority groups generally and in particular upon the Jewish minority? It need not be demonstrated, I am confident, that widespread unemployment brings unrest, universal disaffection and strife. The frustrated individual, unable to attain security, tired of fruitless job-hunting, disillusioned, broken in spirit — becomes an easy target for the demagogue who is poised to capture his imagination and allegiance on the alluring promise of a better order of things. He becomes vulnerable to the suggestion that his troubles are the fault of the Jew, the Negro, the Catholic, Labor, Capital or whatever scapegoat may at the moment be the object of attention of the preacher of hate and divisive propaganda. It is no secret that the "haters" are counting heavily on increasing unemployment to assure the success

of their efforts to undermine the unity of the American people.

Dr. Kurt Lewin, an eminent authority on the causes and nature of group tensions, writing in the Jewish Frontier some years ago, asserted:

"... it can easily be shown how any increase or decrease in the economic difficulties of the majority increases or decreases the pressure upon the Jewish minority. This is one of the reasons why Jews everywhere are necessarily interested in the welfare of the majority among whom they live."

Every segment of the democratic world, including our dominant American democracy, has been exposed to the dangerous influence of Nazi-Fascist ideology. Acute unemployment and economic distress will reactivate this influence and increase its potency, jeopardizing our liberties and endangering the very foundations of democratic institutions. This admonition is not based on the fulminations of alarmists. It reflects the sober judgment of the soundest democratic sociologists, economists and statesmen. It moved Dr. Frank Kingdon, in his recent book on the social thinking of Henry Wallace to say:

"The way to keep Anti-semitism, Anti-Catholicism, Anti-Negroism, and all such 'anti' movements under control is to order our social life so that everybody has the fullest possible assurance of work, health and liberty."

The struggle for full employment becomes the struggle for the preservation of freedom and basic human liberties, without which the world may not retain the virility to withstand a possible second onslaught at the hands of Fascism. It therefore behooves us as Americans and as Jews, as a further and fuller expression of our patriotism, to join in this struggle. Not only is our fate involved, but the fate of the Nation and of the World are in the balance. Only a strong, united, effective and unselfish American democracy can assure the peace of the World. The leadership of the United States in the family of nations is so vital and crucial, its example so influential, that weakness, faltering, internal economic cleavage or disintegration are bound to affect disastrously all of world society and imperil the future of Mankind.

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