

Unemployment No Longer Exists

By I. AMTER.

A serious dispute arose at the Unemployment Conference between Mr. Hoover and Secretary of Labor Davis. The former, in an endeavor to minimize the extent of unemployment in the country asserted that Davis' figure of 5,500,000 jobless far exceeded facts. Mr. Hoover made a "liberal" estimate of 3,000,000.

Now after several months of "interest" in the unemployed and earnest effort to procure work for them by "recommendation" to the State and municipal authorities, Mr. Hoover finds that 2,000,000 of his suppositious 5,500,000 are back on the job. It is obvious that Hoover is playing a game of bluff and is getting away with it.

The Committee of Unemployment for New York City announced on December 15 that work had been obtained for 12,000 men and women since October 15. There are still 331,000 unemployed in the city of New York alone, according to the estimate of the committee. "The main increase in employment which has occurred is in the retail trade, which is probably the result of seasonal conditions." There are more idle steel workers—and the steel trade is an index to activity in the United States.

Mr. Harding is "confident of the return of good times." Mr. Gary on the other hand, warns us that 1922 may be a year of serious industrial disorder. There has been no satisfactory revival of trade, profiteering continues and the world situation is most discouraging. The steel industry is not working more than 30 per cent. of capacity, as compared with 70 to 80 per cent. of a year ago. Farming conditions—the economic confusion in Europe—the decline in export trade—point to the fact that 1922 instead of being a year of hope will be one of struggle for the workers.

The English method of caring for the unemployed is not proving a great success. Naturally! The dole, inadequate as it is, was declared a drain on British finances. It was continued, however, under the threats of the unemployed, who were getting into a desperate mood. But the coming of winter demonstrated that the workers are not content to accept charity. They are organizing and are making definite demands on the government. The unemployed of Germany have even gone on a strike against the lower wages that have been granted them for municipal emergency work.

The issue is clearly defined. The unemployed are a menace to all workers. It is the duty of workers who are interested in their own welfare to take steps to protect themselves. Unity of the working class is the slogan that must guide the workers in all their actions.

This is the motive that is bringing together the workers, despite all differences. Unity against further encroachments on the part of the employers; unity in an offensive to regain the losses that have been sustained in the past year or more. This unity must include the whole working class, both employed and unemployed.

Hence, as in other countries, the labor unions must be the first to take steps to organize the unemployed. In the crisis, they must make strenuous efforts to increase their membership. Organization work to include all workers must be the immediate goal.

To do the job properly, the following steps must be taken:

1. All delinquent union members out of work must be reinstated without payment of arrears and without compulsion to pay dues and assessments while out of work.

2. All unorganized workers out of a job must be admitted to Labor Unions without initiation fee and with remission of dues while unemployed.

3. All organized workers must refuse to work overtime, in order to put an end to artificial unemployment on the one hand, and overwork on the other.

4. Labor unions must organize Unemployment Councils, in order to give expression to the needs of the unemployed and make it possible for them to enforce their demands.

These four steps represent the unity and solidarity that alone can save the working class as a whole from further degradation.

Protests against injunctions and wage reductions, against evasions of federal regulations (as by the Railroad Companies who have decided to abolish shop work and let it out to sub-contractors, who, in many instances, are the companies themselves), against the open shop campaign and the reinstitution of long hours of work, when millions are clamoring for a job—all such protests are futile, unless the working class is lined up solidly for a common battle.

These four steps are so obvious that argument is hardly required. Nevertheless, the exclusiveness of the American labor movement has been such that the fight must be taken up in every local. There are but few unions that issue "out of work" stamps. Furthermore, such stamps are merely a postponement of payment. Men out of work should not be compelled to pay a cent of dues and assessments, but should be retained as full-fledged members. Unorganized workers should be admitted without initiation fee or payment of dues. They are of the class that does not yet recognize the necessity or good of labor unionism. They must be won over by the employed workers and lined up to protect the labor organizations themselves.

No man should consent to work longer hours than hitherto. This will lead but to further unemployment. In fact were the American labor unions prepared to act, they should logically demand a general reduction in hours in order to find work for the unemployed. But labor unions in America are too weak, too disorganized, to attempt even to do more than hold their own.

Finally to do their work efficiently, and not be compelled to wait for the conversion of all unorganized workers to the notion of labor unionism, the labor organizations must organize Unemployment Councils, backing them up in every phase of their activity and giving substance to their demands. Christian G. Norman, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Building Trades Employers' Association, says that "where there are more men than there are jobs, the efficiency improves."

There are many more men than jobs at the present time, and the bosses are increasing efficiency—from their point of view—by exploiting all labor to the limit.

But according to the sage Mr. Hoover, unemployment is decreasing at an alarming rate. Mr. Gary, whose industry is working 30 per cent, is a better prophet. 1922 is to witness serious events in the industrial world.

Now is the time to prepare.