

FIFTY YEARS OF PROGRESS.

London's new Employment Exchange, a fine building in keeping with an expanding area, appropriately opened on the Jubilee of Labour Exchanges. In the presence of Minister of Labour Edward Heath the exchange began bringing employee into contact with employer without delay. In the old days how nearly impossible that often was. The fifty years history of the exchanges included almost 20 years of hunger and unemployment; the decades without hope.

In the depressed areas, to be out of work seemed to be without prospect of ever getting a job. And more than two million had no work. Slum life was the only existence hundreds of thousands ever knew. And as the shipyards, mines and factories, closed down things grew worse. "March", exhorted baffled labour leaders. So from the black areas the men without hope trudged up to London. Leaders like Ernest Bevan worked on their behalf. But neither they nor all the Labour Exchanges in the land could produce jobs. George Lansbury raised his voice in vain; and in the marchers path the government massed the police.

The police carried out their orders: "Keep them away from Downing Street". Politicians like Jimmy Maxton led delegations there, demanding public works to absorb the unemployed. "No earthly use", said Ministers, till Roosevelt a few years later proved how wrong they were. Eldon Wilkinson tried to stir the public conscience. She failed. There was nothing but the soup kitchen, charity and the dole.

Ironically, to end those years of misery, it took a still greater evil, the World War. And now, in February, 1960, the new Employment Exchange symbolises the new era. That great sociologist, Lord Beveridge, told how, 50 years ago, Sidney and Beatrice Webb urged Winston Churchill to enlist his aid in starting Labour Exchanges in Britain.

1960; and we have never had it so good - there is full employment in the factories. Such unemployment as there is mostly represents people going from one job to another. A transition swiftly accomplished in this day and age, this time of work for all, by the well oiled machinery of the Employment Exchanges.

Even for the elderly there is work nowadays, if they want it. How different from the bad days they remember so well. Now jobs for everybody. No wasting of men's lives in idleness. The new estates and new towns have turned the country's back on the hovels of the past and on the lost years. Those evils never return.