

HOLLOWAY EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE

Fifty Years of Useful Work

The Holloway Employment Exchange, first known as the Islington Labour Exchange, was one of the original 62 State Labour Exchanges which were opened in Great Britain on 1st February, 1910. It then occupied shop premises at 131-3, Holloway Road.

The present building in Medina Road, which was specially designed for use as an Exchange, was opened on 14th January, 1933. It was built in order to release leasehold premises, but at certain periods since then it has been found necessary to rent additional accommodation. Recent extensions, however, have ensured not only adequate space for existing and foreseeable needs, but also better facilities for private interviews.

Almost all the Metropolitan Borough of Islington, which is predominantly residential, is covered by the Exchange. There are no large factories in the area (there are only 27 establishments of any kind employing more than 250 workers), but there are many small to medium sized firms, mainly engineering and building, and a number of laundries.

The Employment Position

The number of registered unemployed at the Exchange has varied since the war from 643 to 2,721. In October (the latest figure available) it was 1,396 (men 1,009, women 387). The number of vacancies on the books of the Exchange during the past year has averaged 903 each month (men 580, women 323) and an average of 767 people have been placed in employment each month (men 457, women 310).

Although there are 2,354 people, including 466 women, registered as disabled in the area, only 100 disabled men and 22 disabled women are registered as unemployed. This represents 5.1 per cent of the register compared with a national figure of 7.9 per cent.

A considerable number of coloured workers, mainly men and women from the West Indies, have settled in Holloway, and the register of unemployed persons has for some time included 25 to 30 per cent of these workers. Although exact figures are not available it is estimated that the Exchange has dealt with 45,000 registrations for employment by coloured workers in the last five years.

Resettlement of Ex-prisoners

One special feature of the work of the staff is that of interviewing and finding employment for prisoners released from Pentonville and Holloway Prisons, both of which are within the Exchange area.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

Telephone:
Whitehall 6200

8, St. James's Square,
London, S.W.1.

PRESS NOTICE

22nd January, 1960

50th ANNIVERSARY OF EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGES

A Half Century of Achievement

100 Million Jobs Filled

The 50th Anniversary of the opening of the National Labour Exchanges in Great Britain occurs on 1st February, 1960. They were established in 1910 under the Labour Exchanges Act, 1909, introduced into Parliament by Sir Winston Churchill, then President of the Board of Trade. That Act gave the Board of Trade power to set up Exchanges to collect and furnish information, either by keeping registers, or otherwise, of people seeking workmen or workmen seeking employment. It was administered by the Board of Trade, and the first Director of the Department's Labour Exchange Division was Mr. William (now Lord) Beveridge.

Originally the scheme provided for 250 Exchanges. Today there are just over 900 Exchanges, and more than 100 sub-offices and branch employment offices. For administrative purposes the country was divided into 11 divisions, each in charge of a divisional officer, controlled from and co-ordinated with the central office in London. Today the country is similarly divided, but there are only 10 regions each with a Regional Controller in charge.

The principle of controlling and transferring labour was not new. For many years before the Labour Exchanges Bill was brought before Parliament there had been efforts to maintain registers of people applying for work. Most of these were bureaux organised and run under voluntary management, and later under local committees set up by Act of Parliament. One of the earliest recorded experiments in the organisation of labour was in 1547 at Coventry, where aldermen were instructed to enquire among their neighbours and "transfer workmen from one master to another as needs require". Tradesmen, such as carpenters and masons, were instructed to attend the Broadgate at 5 a.m. on a summer morning ready for work and "attend such as lacked workmen". None was to be found "idle at home" or "in any ale-house on pain of imprisonment".

EARLY BUREAUX

About 25 years before the State scheme came into operation a Local Office was opened at Egham by a Mr. Nathaniel L. Cohen. This was run under voluntary management and later the same year another free bureau was opened at Ipswich. During the depression of 1892 assemblies of ratepayers in London, called Vestries, established labour bureaux to register unemployed workmen. Their functions were transferred to the Metropolitan Borough Councils by an Act of Parliament seven years later, but the accounts of the boroughs were, unlike those of the Vestries, subject to strict audit and the legality of their expenditure was challenged. With one exception the bureaux were closed. Three years later the Labour Bureaux (London) Act gave the council of any metropolitan borough the power to maintain a labour bureau, and allowed the cost to be deducted from local taxes. But this was not a compulsory measure, and only eleven bureaux were established in London.

Under the Unemployed Workmen Act, 1905, official organisations were set up under the Local Government Board for the purpose of establishing Labour Exchanges and employment registers. Distress committees were also started in 29 London boroughs and 89 provincial centres. Among their duties were the maintenance of registers of unemployed workpeople. Little progress was made in the provinces, but the Central (Unemployed) Body set up to co-ordinate the working of these committees began the setting up of a system of employment exchanges for London in 1906. This work, undertaken by a special committee under the chairmanship of Mr. William Beveridge, was instrumental in starting 25 exchanges.

Support for the schemes of Labour bureaux set up under the 1905 Act came from the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, which reported at the beginning of 1909. The majority Commissioners put them in the forefront of their proposals, and the minority Commissioners were of the opinion that the national Labour Exchange, though not in itself an adequate remedy, was the foundation of all their proposals.

PIECE OF SOCIAL MECHANISM

Introducing the Bill to the House of Commons, Sir Winston Churchill followed this argument by saying that the Exchanges were the only method of grappling with the evils of casual employment singled out by the Royal Commission as being the original foundation of so many of the greatest evils in the nation's social life. When he visited the Exchanges at Hackney, Stepney and Camberwell on the first day, he described the new experiment as a piece of social mechanism, absolutely essential to any well-ordered community.

On the first day, 62 Exchanges were opened, mostly in London and the larger provincial towns. These included several taken over from the Central (Unemployed) Body for London. Many types of buildings, old post offices, chapels, schools, factories and shops were adapted to meet the requirements of the new Exchanges. At present three, Aberdeen, Dewsbury and Tottenham, still occupy the original premises. According to contemporary reports, pressure of business was considerable and on one occasion the assistance of the police had to be sought to maintain order. To meet the convenience of employers and workers, some of the Exchanges opened at 6 a.m. and one, indeed, opened every morning at 4 a.m. During 1910, 94 more exchanges were opened, and 274 more had come into use by January 1914.

In 1911 the National Insurance Act first proposed by Mr. Lloyd George in his Budget of 1909 and foreshadowed by Sir Winston Churchill when he introduced the Labour Exchanges Bill was passed. It came into operation in July, 1912. This measure which applied to a limited number of trades, engineering, ship-building, works of construction and building, affected about 2,250,000 people. Its administration was entrusted to the Board of Trade through the Labour Exchanges which made the first payments of benefit in January, 1913.

MOBILISATION FOR WAR

Excluding certain casual occupations, more than 17,000 vacancies were filled each week, mostly for skilled labour, but the system had hardly got into its stride when the first world war broke out. Although designed for peaceful purposes, the machinery was quickly adapted to enable the Exchanges to take an important part in the mobilisation of the reserve, and then to handle manpower problems at home. In 1916 there were three events of considerable importance for the Exchanges. The first was the passing of the National Insurance (Munition Workers) Act, which extended the provisions of unemployment to men and women engaged in the production of war munitions and materials, and brought the total number of workers affected by unemployment insurance to 3,750,000. The second was a change in title. On 11th October the Board of Trade announced that in future Labour Exchanges would be known as Employment Exchanges. This was the prelude to an even bigger change, for little more than two months later under the New Ministries and Secretaries Act, the Ministry of Labour was created to take over from the Board of Trade certain powers and duties in relation to labour and industry, and, in particular, the administration of the Labour Exchanges and the Insurance Acts.

Provision was made in the 1909 Act for the establishment of advisory committees. Originally, these committees covered wide areas, and experience showed the need for more localised bodies in closer contact with their environment. Accordingly under the Employment Exchanges (Advisory Committee) Regulations, 1917 introduced in June of that year, local advisory committees later to become local employment committees, composed of representatives of employers, workers and other interests, were established. These bodies took a large share in the period of resettlement after the war and in the local administration of the unemployment insurance scheme. With the ending of the war Exchanges had to face the smooth translation of men and women to peace-time employment. The magnitude of the task which faced them can be measured from the fact that within six months of the armistice the number of unemployed persons rose from 73,500 to 1,119,000.

ALLEVIATING HARDSHIP

Already burdened with the duties of resettlement, the Exchanges were called on to administer the Out-of-Work Donations Scheme, which was introduced to alleviate hardship during resettlement. Obviously this could not be done under the existing system, and an extension of the organisation was required to meet this. The appointment of Branch Employment Offices achieved this aim.

In 1920 the work and administration of the Exchanges was the subject of an inquiry by a committee set up under the chairmanship of the Right Hon. G.N. Barnes. That committee reported that the Exchanges must be retained as a national system, and that they were a necessary corollary of the State system of unemployment insurance. It was in this year that the Unemployment Insurance Act was passed. Not only was that measure the basis of all subsequent legislation on unemployment insurance but it extended the provisions of the existing scheme bringing within its scope about 12,000,000 workers in the United Kingdom. Hardly had it begun to operate then industrial depression set in. By the middle of the next year more than 2,000,000 workers were registered as wholly unemployed with more than 1,000,000 on short-time. Additional measures had to be passed with the passage of time to modify the scheme when heavy demands were made on it. In 1934 legislation provided a permanent self-supporting scheme of unemployment assistance for those outside insurance.

The essential work of placing people in jobs continued, and the use of Exchanges for the engagement of labour steadily increased. Between 1923 and 1938 the annual number of vacancies filled increased from less than one million in 1923 to a record figure of 2,700,000 in 1938. Although burdened by the payment of benefit, Local offices also operated schemes controlled by the Ministry for the training of unemployed workers and their transference to areas with better employment prospects. A Youth Employment Service was also maintained in areas where Local Authorities did not exercise their right to do this.

MANPOWER ALLOCATION IN WARTIME

The difficulties caused by mass unemployment began to disappear in 1938 when the growing threat of war led to rapid expansion of re-armament. Soon the country was at war again, and the Ministry was called on to deal with problems of the allocation of manpower, not only for the Services and industry, but also for civil defence. In the discharge of that task, affecting as it did the entire working population, the Employment Exchanges played a vital roll. They carried out the only registration under the Military Training Act, 1939 which covered young men between 20 and 21 and continued with the work of registration under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act, 1939 passed at the outbreak of war.

In all, 42 registrations for National Service were made between 1939 and the end of 1945, and more than 8,000,000 persons were registered. About 13,750,000 men and women were registered under the plans for the mobilisation of labour for industry. During the war the Exchanges and Appointments Offices filled 22,500,000 vacancies for workpeople in industry. At the peak of mobilisation in September, 1943, nearly 15,000,000 of the 15,920,000 men of working age in Great Britain were in the Forces, industry or civil defence and about 7,250,000 of the 16,020,000 women of working age were similarly occupied.

MAINTAINING FULL EMPLOYMENT

As the war in Europe entered its final stages plans were being prepared the Government to ensure the maintenance of full employment in the post-war a. Demobilisation started in June, 1945, and by the end of 1947 nearly ,000,000 men and women had been released from the Forces and absorbed into industry without there being serious unemployment. In 1945 the majority of the functions of the Ministry under the Unemployment Insurance Acts and Unemployment Assistance Acts were passed to the newly formed Ministry of National Insurance. It was foreseen by Sir Winston Churchill in 1909 that the administration of the unemployment insurance scheme and an effective employment placing service were complementary. This argument was repeated in Parliament at the time of the formation of the Ministry of National Insurance. Consequently, it was decided that the Exchanges should continue to register and pay claims for unemployment benefit on an agency basis for the new Ministry.

The demobilisation of industrial manpower followed a similar pattern to that devised for the Forces, and in general the re-allocation of labour was completed by the early months of 1948. The Employment and Training Act of that year brought up to date the law relating to the placing of persons in employment, the transfer of labour and training, and authorised the extension of those services as necessary for the purpose of "promoting employment in accordance with the requirements of the community". This Act provided a permanent legislative basis for the extension of the wider services dealing with employment on which Exchanges could concentrate as activities relative to post-war resettlement of ex-servicemen and civilians gradually ceased.

As part of the process of resettlement workers were, with certain exceptions, required under the Control of Engagements Order, 1947, to obtain consent of an Employment Exchange or an approved Employment Agency before accepting an offer of any employment. This Order was revoked in 1950 but in 1952 the Minister made the Notification of Vacancies Order which required the notification of vacancies to be made through an Employment Exchange or an approved Employment Agency. This Order ceased in 1956.

BASIC FUNCTIONS

The basic functions of the first Labour Exchanges were designed to provide ready means of bringing together as employers desiring employees and would-be employees seeking employment. Today the Employment Exchanges still provide that service. Every effort is made to find the right job for the right man or woman. Advice on the choice of jobs or on other labour problems is part of the service available both to workers and employers alike. Vacancies which cannot be filled locally are circulated throughout a wide area and, if necessary, throughout the country. In addition, particulars of suitable applicants are submitted in writing to distant employers.

There is a specialised Hotel and Catering Trade Employment Exchange in London with associated hotel sections in Liverpool and Glasgow. A service known as the Professional and Executive Register for persons seeking professional, managerial, senior executive and executive posts is maintained at 48 of the larger Employment Exchanges which also cater for ex-officers of the Forces as part of the Regular Forces Resettlement Service. Another specialised employment and careers advisory service, the Technical and Scientific Register, is maintained in London and Glasgow for scientists, professional engineers, architects and surveyors. There are also 160 Nursing Appointments Offices held in exchanges, dealing with nursing midwifery, medical auxiliaries and allied occupations.

At every Exchange is a Disablement Resettlement Officer whose duty is to help disabled persons to find suitable employment in industry or for the more seriously disabled in sheltered occupations. A special responsibility of the Exchanges is recruitment under the Vocational Training Schemes of which there are three, a general scheme, one for the disabled and one for ex-regulars. Training in certain trades is provided at Government Training Centres, and by arrangement at Technical Colleges or with selected employers. For people who have suffered illness or injury there are fifteen Industrial Rehabilitation Units which give training aimed at assisting these persons to become fully fit to take up work, as well as giving guidance on the best type of employment to take.

When the Exchanges were opened in 1910 few could have seen the many diverse jobs they would have to perform in the first 50 years of their existence. Against that background of diversity they have become part of the life of the nation. In the last half-century Exchanges have been responsible for filling more than 100,000,000 jobs. In the first year of their existence they achieved about 400,000 placings. In 1959 the total, including those effected by the Youth Employment Offices, was nearly 1,900,000.