

CHAPTER VI

UNEMPLOYMENT

The number of unemployed wage-earners in the United States, in September, 1921, was reported by the President's Conference on Unemployment as between 3,500,000 and 5,500,000, with a much greater number of persons dependent upon them.¹ Six years before, in March and April, 1915, a careful canvass of about 400,000 families in fifteen American cities showed 11.5 per cent of the wage-earners unemployed and an additional 16.6 per cent working only part time. On the basis of a similar investigation in New York City earlier in the year it was calculated that the total army of unemployed wage-earners in that city alone at the time numbered about 442,000.² The United States Census for 1900 showed that 6,468,964 working people, or nearly 25 per cent of all engaged in gainful occupations, had been unemployed some time during the year. Of these, 3,177,753 lost from one to three months' work each; 736,286 lost from seven to twelve months' each. A student of the problem finds that from 1,000,000 to 6,000,000 workers, exclusive of farm laborers, were idle in the United States at all times between 1902 and 1917.³ A study published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 1924 states: "To conclude that, averaging good and bad years, from 10 to 20 per cent of all workers are idle all of the time is probably an understatement of the situation."⁴

The employee's loss from this irregularity of work is twofold. Besides his enormous immediate loss in wages and the resulting distress, there is the equally serious loss in the weakening of moral fiber which comes with uncertainty, habits of

¹ *Report of the President's Conference on Unemployment, 1921*, p. 37.

² United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 172*, 1915, p. 7.

³ Hornell Hart, *Fluctuations in Unemployment in Cities of the United States, 1902 to 1917*, Helen S. Trounstein Foundation Studies, Vol. I, No. 2, 1918, pp. 51-52.

⁴ Shelby M. Harrison and Associates, *Public Employment Offices*, p. 9.