Study of Transient Problems is Made Public by Hopkins

Futility marked the wanderings of a majority of those who took to the road as transients in 1934-35 insofar as improving their economic condition was concerned, a report prepared by the Division of Social Research of the Works Progress Administration and released today by Administrator Harry L. Hopkins, reveals.

The report covers a study of migrant families and individuals in thirteen representative cities during the year from May, 1934, to April, 1935, and concludes that the majority of those who left their homes in the aimless search for work would have been better off to have remained where they were.

The disbanding of this wandering population, which at any time from May, 1934, to April, 1935, averaged about 200,000 unattached persons and 50,000 family groups, depended on the provision of the jobs necessary to stability. The work that a portion of them did find on their wanderings was of brief duration. Until private industry can reabsorb them, the Works Program has undertaken to provide as many jobs for these employable transients as well as for the resident employable workers as possible.
What kind of people were the transients? Contrary to current opinion, these migrants were not loafers or "bums". They wanted work, and most of them were able to work. A few of those registered had physical disabilities, and some of the women heads of family groups could not leave their children to take jobs.

Most of them went out from urban areas and usually they had no destination. Rumors of jobs or curiosity determined their direction. The unattached transients came in the main from east of the Mississippi, primarily Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin, while states west of the river, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas, ranked first as the origin of migrant families.

Their number and membership shifted so rapidly that undoubtedly two or three times the number registered at any one time were at some time cared for by the Transient Relief Program.

A higher proportion of them were unskilled or semi-skilled, than of either the general or the resident relief populations. The last jobs held before going on the road had in half of the cases continued for over eighteen months, but on the road they found only casual and seasonal jobs, if any. Only about one-third of them found any non-relief work during their wanderings, and the jobs they secured were short-lived.

Although most of the transients were unattached persons, about one case out of every four was a family group. Families with small children were less likely to wander than others. The typical transient family had three members: the husband, wife and one child under sixteen. For the most part, the couples were young, with few or no social and economic ties to keep them from leaving home in search of a better environment and living.
Few of the unattached persons were women, but among the heads of migrant family groups studied, 15 per cent were women.

The majority of the people wandering in the hope of finding a community where jobs were more plentiful were native whites. Only one-tenth of the transients were Negroes, and one-twentieth, foreign-born whites. They differed from the general population of the country only in that they were, on the average, younger. Two-thirds of the unattached persons and one-half of the family heads registered were between sixteen and thirty-five years.

Measured in terms of school years completed, the transients were fairly well educated. The majority of them had grade school education or better, and only a small group lacked any formal education.

Return to their legal residences was no solution to their problem, since settlement depended on the demand for labor. Ill health, search for adventure, domestic troubles and inadequate relief had in some cases influenced the decision to leave home, but unemployment was the primary factor. Therefore, only as this transient population, which arose out of the depression, is given work can it be reabsorbed into the more stable population of the country.

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