Hopkins Makes Public Report on Direct Relief Conditions in New Jersey.

Starvation and disease are stalking through many dilapidated homes in New Jersey as the result of the failure of the state to provide relief for the unemployables, Harry L. Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, stated today.

In some New Jersey localities relief standards of the state Emergency Relief Administration, disbanded two months ago, have been largely maintained by the local agencies.

Sharp reductions in relief costs and number of cases by many municipalities following dissolution of the New Jersey ERA had been cited in support of the administration of relief by localities, and a survey was ordered by the Works Progress Administration, in continuance of earlier studies, to appraise the results. Mr. Hopkins made available today a preliminary report of the survey. Where ERA standards were most nearly maintained, the report indicates, the decline in relief costs was in large part seasonal. Extreme need of further aid had developed in other sections where drastic reductions had been made.

"The baby in the Downing family died two weeks ago from lack of milk," one case history begins. (Fictitious names are substituted in every case when such reports are made public.) "Their fifteen-month old child has whooping cough now. With a mounting drugstore bill and no money on hand, the Downings don’t know where they will get further medical supplies or medical care." The mother of this family of 13 is ill of heart disease, complicated by stomach trouble. The children complain of continuous hunger as a result of scant supplies provided by the local relief agency. For cooking fuel they have whatever the boys can collect from dump heaps, "old rubber inner tubes and old shoes, for the most part." Flies from a nearby swamp swarm in through broken windows of their house, on which taxes have been unpaid for seven years.
Under ERA this family received two quarts of milk daily, a $22.50 food order every two weeks, clothing, sheets and pillow cases; also 16 gallons of kerosene and a half-ton of coal every month.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cristopher Esti, an old Italian couple," another case history reports, "are starving to death. Mr. Esti has the distended stomach which is indicative of slow starvation on an almost exclusively starch diet." Mrs. Esti was barefooted. Their clothing was what was left from ERA grants. "We eat beans and doughballs and potatoes nearly all the time," the elderly man said. "Sometimes I think my belly is going to burst, and I will die. These relief people around here think we can live on nothing, but we can't. I hope the state takes it again."

Many of the extreme cases found in communities where direct relief had broken down stressed the need for medical care such as was provided under ERA as well as clothing and increased food allowances. In one case the food "apparently" had been purchased by the Township Committee from damaged or condemned food shipments that had been under water," a report said.

Approximately 1,200 cases which received their final relief grants from the New Jersey ERA during the first two weeks of April were chosen at random from the total relief load of that month, 100 in each of twelve selected communities. A carefully selected staff, supervised by agents of the Division of Social Research of the Works Progress Administration, interviewed each of these cases. Authenticated statements of the manner in which these cases were faring, as compared to their condition under ERA, were obtained.

Excerpts from a preliminary report on this investigation, which has been under way for two weeks, with some of the case histories, follow:

"One outstanding conclusion obtained from this series of studies is that the variety of practices under the local administrations is so great as to make generalization difficult. At present there are more than 550 separate relief jurisdictions in New Jersey. These have adopted almost every conceivable system for distributing relief funds. The care which relief cases receive depends on the amount of funds available for distribution in the
locality, the attitude of the community toward the relief problem, and the point of view of the local overseer or of the director of the local agency giving general relief.

"Reports indicate that a number of communities are following fairly closely the relief standards and practices of the ERA, have accepted a very large percentage of the former ERA cases, and, with allowance for usual seasonal change, are granting relief in amounts only moderately below those formerly granted by ERA. For example, in Paterson at the end of May, the overseers were carrying a load about three fourths as large as the April ERA load (after some reductions during May), and the average grant for relief cases (without non-relief income), was about 30 per cent lower in May than in March. In Orange about 90 per cent of the April ERA cases were receiving relief at the end of May, and the average relief grant for cases without non-relief income declined some 30 per cent between March and May.

"At the other extreme, some communities ceased almost entirely to give relief after the dissolution of the ERA. For example, in Commercial Township, only some four or five cases out of more than two hundred which received relief in April were granted relief in May. In Buena Vista only some 30 per cent of the April ERA cases received assistance from the local overseer in May. Most communities report sharp reductions both in the number of cases assisted and in the amounts expended for relief during the period of local aid as compared to the ERA period; these reductions varied between the extremes presented above.

"Although it is difficult to generalize, the following observations may be advanced concerning the present relief situation:

"1. Part of the decline in relief loads in many communities between April and June is accounted for by a seasonal increase in private employment. Opportunities for seasonal work in fishing and oystering industries, in agriculture (including truck farming), and in caring for the summer resort trade contribute to this usual increase. Evidence of this normal movement is to be found in the April-June movement of case loads in 1935 in a number of the communities studied. During this period last year the case load in
Atlantic City declined about 15 per cent; in Commercial Township more than 40 per cent; and in Linden about 13 per cent. Consistent with this normal seasonal movement are the data on private employment in these communities obtained from this study; although, as a result of administrative changes, the variations in loads are much greater than the variations in private employment. In Atlantic City about 50 per cent of the cases surveyed reported private employment in May, as against about 33 per cent in April. In Linden nearly 45 per cent of the cases studied had private employment in May as against 30 per cent in April; in Commercial Township the corresponding percentages were more than 80 per cent as against 25 per cent. About one-fourth of the seasonal May employment in Commercial Township yielded monthly incomes of less than $15.00 per case.

"II. Decreases in case loads and relief expenditures due to the advent of summer weather also effected a reduction between April and June in the needs for relief (fuel and clothing); this influence is reflected not only in the communities cited above, but in other localities as well."

"III. In many communities overseers of the poor or other agents are granting little more than the cheapest types of staple groceries together with occasional small amounts of milk and kerosene or similar cooking fuel. In most cases no provision is being made to meet rent, medical care, clothing and other family needs. The attached case histories indicate some of the serious situations which are arising due to the absence of provision for these items. Particularly serious is the lack of medical care. In ten communities for which complete data are available on this point, the average relief grant for cases surveyed, which had no private income and which received assistance in May, declined about 40 per cent below the March level. Great variation existed among the communities, however. In Paterson and Orange average May grants by overseers to cases wholly dependent upon relief were 30 per cent below March ERA grants to the same cases. At the other extreme, in Atlantic City and New Brunswick the average reduction exceeded 50 per cent."
Some of the results of this policy are not yet apparent. Landlords may allow rent to accumulate for a few months but cannot be expected to continue this practice indefinitely. A number of evictions were reported to the investigators during the period April 15th to June 1st. Needed medical care may, in some cases, also be deferred but the results may be permanent injury or even death. A number of deaths caused directly by lack of medical attention or by malnutrition have been reported; one or two of these are described in the attached case records. Lack of sufficient food and clothing was reported by a great many of the cases visited by federal interviewers. In some instances children were unable to attend school because of lack of clothing; some of the housing was far below any civilized standard.

"IV. In a number of the communities surveyed local officials have refused to give relief to many cases in serious need, and even in dire distress. Some communities have refused all assistance to single persons regardless of need. Others have eliminated from the relief rolls all cases with any private employment, regardless of the amount of income from such employment. Cases were reported in which large families with incomes of less than $1.00 per week were refused all aid because the case possessed private employment. Some communities have put into effect the provision of the poor law requiring five years residence before acceptance for relief.

"In justice to local overseers of the poor, it should be stated that many of these officials recognize the inadequacy of the relief now being distributed in their communities; they commented freely to this effect to the investigators. Many of these officials have stated that they realize that relief cannot be continued at present levels without the most acute distress to needy families.

"V. Careful investigation failed to discover any considerable number of 'chiselers' in communities surveyed. In some of the communities no cases were found which could properly be accused of 'chiseling', in others, isolated cases were discovered. It cannot properly be said, however, that the elimination of 'chiseling' made possible any considerable reduction in the relief loads of
any of the communities surveyed. Some of the so-called 'chiselers' were cases which, because of the upturn in employment, had been able to secure private jobs after they had received their last ERA grant. Most of the cases charged with 'chiseling', however, were those with small amounts of private employment yielding an income clearly inadequate for their support.

"VI. Certain other observations reported by the investigators concerning the local distribution of relief, should be mentioned. In many communities it appears that application for relief was intentionally made repulsive to persons with self respect. In one community grocery orders bear the statement across the top 'I have declared myself a pauper.' In some communities relief applicants were required to take a 'pauper's oath'; and in others they were required to stand in line in public places in order to receive their relief grant. Reports show that in many places relief is being distributed by untrained workers who do not make proper investigation of the needs of the families.

"The attached case histories, factual except for fictitious names, indicate some of the more serious situations which now exist in the New Jersey localities studied:

Case D-1. Mr. Desoto of Atlantic County is 76 years old, pitifully thin and emaciated, and it takes great effort for him to hobble about the yard to tend his small vegetable garden. Old and infirm as he is, he is the sole support of his 77 year old wife, who is a hopeless cripple and unable to leave her chair without assistance.

Coffee constitutes their breakfast, and for lunch they have only a dry meal of bread. At night, they eat beans and potatoes from the garden, provided they have fuel to cook with. The ERA relief supplied them with kerosene for cooking, in addition to food, milk medical assistance and clothing. But since the kerosene and the other state aid have stopped coming, they are on some days unable to prepare what little food they have because Mr. Desoto is physically unable to chop wood. The garden produces a few onions, but Mr. Desoto said, "I am so tired of eating them." Recently someone gave them an old goat, which Mr. Desoto traded for a kid. This supplies a pint of milk daily, which is used by his wife, whose condition, he says, is more serious than his.
When the interviewer called, Mrs. Desoto could not move from her chair to be photographed, for her dress consisted only of a shirtwaist, and a ragged petticoat made of flour sacks.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Desoto began to weep hysterically when the interviewer explained the purpose of his visit.

"Thank God that the government is going to help us again," Mr. Desoto said. "I hope so, for we can't go on much longer living like this. I am getting so thin I have trouble helping her to move around. And sometimes I think it would be better if, when we go to sleep at night, God will never let us wake up again. Then we would be out of our misery and would never bother anybody anymore."

Case A. When the interviewer stopped in to see the Tamara family in Pennsauken Township, New Jersey, Victor, his wife and four sons were sitting down to a thin supper of spinach and bread. They are on local relief, and the 12 year old boy who did most of the talking because his parents spoke poor English kept insisting that they were always hungry. Four dollars a week and some canned goods (Federal Surplus Commodities) constitute their relief allotment. The oldest boy is sixteen; the youngest of eight, a sickly-looking boy, can scarcely walk, because he doesn't get food.

Under E.R.A. the family received $15 a month toward rent, a $19 food order every two weeks, and two quarts of milk a day. Now their garden has failed on account of the drought, and their chickens are laying only one or two eggs a day, so that their attempts at supplementing the slim relief which they get from local authorities have been frustrated. They are very discouraged; the boys have become so rebellious that they have been stealing food when begging failed.

All the boys were barefooted, and Mrs. Tomara was ashamed of their lack of adequate clothing. They have been on relief since the beginning of E. R. A. because her husband, a stone mason, has not been able to find work. The son said that his father spent most of his time walking from place to place in search of work.
The Tomaras live in a double house belonging to an acquaintance who threatens to throw them out if they don't pay rent. The other half of the house is a beer parlor.

Case C-3. Mr. Ratchesky is a skilled worker, a plumber by trade, who saved enough to buy a house in Marcer County three years ago for $3,000. Since then he has been unemployed much of the time. In order to support his wife and eight children he mortgaged the house and is now about to lose it. He owes $975 on the mortgage which he cannot pay. He had three days work in May and has had three days so far in June.

The day the interviewer visited him he had received seven loaves of bread from the county relief office which was supposed to feed the family of nine for five days. He has a baby two years old and his oldest child is 15. "The bread is bad and moldy," Mr. Ratchesky said. The last few weeks it has been bad and went green before we could eat it. Canned food is bad. Some of the cans are rusty and the top is expanded. That's no good."

Evidently this food had been purchased by the Township Committee from damaged or condemned food shipments that had been under water.

"It is like starvation. You eat as though you were taking a dose of poison," Mr. Ratchesky said. "All the milk we get for nine people is two cans of evaporated milk a week. We get no fresh vegetables at all. One of us will be laid up sick sooner or later. It looks pretty bad for the winter with coal to buy and everything."

Mr. Ratchesky said his children's teeth were bothering them since they had been on this meagre diet, but he could not afford to take them to the dentist. Under the ERA the Ratcheskys got a food order of $18, coal, kerosene and three quarts of milk.

Case A-2. Allen Black, an elderly man and head of a family of six, of Burlington County, New Jersey, has for many months been totally dependent upon relief money for food, fuel and shelter, and medical treatment from the State Emergency Relief Administration.
The head of the family has an advanced case of diabetes, and for many months has been undergoing a cure at a local hospital. His E.R.A. relief made this medical care possible.

Since the E.R.A. relief was discontinued, Mr. Black has had to leave the hospital and return home, as the city does not supply medical care.

The last food orders this family received were on April 16, when a $7 order was given, and on April 23, when a $3 order was given. At that time the family was told that there would be no further relief, as the city has no funds.

Since the E.R.A. stopped, the family has been dependent upon a minor son, who is on the Youth Program. The boy's entire wage has barely paid for rent and for the plainest food. These expenditures have left no money to buy insulin, with which his father's diabetic treatment might be continued at home. The insulin, naturally, is essential to the man's life.

Case B-9. The interviewer found an Italian, 83 years of age and blind in one eye, living alone in an old house in Atlantic County. The old man had been eating his lunch from a garden and was chewing a lettuce leaf as the interviewer approached. He looked tired and wan, and as the interviewer explained why he was there, he began to tremble.

"I thought you were bringing me something from the relief people" he said. "I asked for relief lots of times but they say 'Wait a little longer', but I can't wait too long. I feel weak and dizzy. Today I could hardly get up from my chair. I know I'm going to die soon. In a few more days you wouldn't have found me here. The state took good care of me," he said, "I hope they do something soon before it's too late."

The man had no fuel to cook his garden vegetables. He needed clothes and medical attention. Obviously he did not have enough food.

Case B-8. Boris Hanson is 78 years old (badly ruptured and with a wounded leg which pains him constantly) and alone in the world. He has not
had a cent of income since ERA was discontinued in April. His one-room shack stands in a small community in the oystering section along the southern coast of New Jersey. The shack is about two city blocks from his nearest neighbor, and Mr. Hanson with his rupture, his advanced age, and his wounded leg can walk only a few steps. An old neighbor gives him small amounts from his old age pension and a Negro friend gives him fish from time to time. He has no other food. Recently a friend gave him some jam but he had no bread to eat it on.

The county overseers are doing nothing to help this man. "I would have died," he said, "if it hadn't been for my good neighbors who have gone without food themselves to keep me alive."

Case J-10. In sight of the impressive Atlantic City Boardwalk is a crude houseboat, the home of Mrs. Jennie Jenkins. The home amounts to little more than a water-front shack approached by a primitive bridge of boards wide enough to enable one person to pass. Mrs. Jenkins, a native-born American citizen, has resided in Atlantic City for fifteen years, but she owes her present shelter to the generosity of a 78 year-old friend, who makes a meager living by junking. She frankly admits begging and picking up food from dumps, and claims that her destitution has driven her to this.

Under the recent discontinuance of ERA relief in April, this woman received $8.80 per month. For a while the Overseer of the Poor continued giving her this relief, with the exception of milk and kerosene grants, but in May she, along with the closing of all other single employable cases, was barred from the relief rolls.

Mrs. Jenkins, who has been separated from her husband since 1910, was formerly a maid in one of the large Atlantic City hotels, but is now unable to find work.
Case C-2. A mother and six young children in Atlantic County were trying to live on $3 a week which they got from the Overseer of the Poor. Mrs. Black's husband left her seven years ago, two months before her youngest girl was born. Her oldest daughter is 14 and the others, all girls, are 7, 9, 10, 11, and 13 years old. Mrs. Black worked as a charwoman for many years in order to support her family. About three years ago she became ill and could not work any more. She had no relatives to help her and went on relief. On ERA she was able to keep her home together and feed and clothe her children, but the last grant was made in April and since then they have had to exist on a weekly $3 food order with no provision for rent. They expect to be evicted.

The mother had tears in her eyes when she talked to the interviewer. "I expect any day to be put out of my home because I can't pay the rent", she said. "If the neighbors didn't feel so sorry for my little girls and give them food, we would have starved to death."

The previous day she and her six daughters had nothing to eat but bread and water.

Case C-4. "A sin before God Almighty", is what Mrs. Dodge thinks of the conditions in Mercer County since E.R.A. ended. Her family consists of 13 persons, the oldest, her husband, 82 years old, the youngest, a child of three. On E.R.A. they received $24.10 in cash and a food order amounting to $26 every two weeks.

On June 12 the Overseers of the Poor gave her 2 pounds of macaroni, 4 cans of beef, 1 can of corn, 1 can of tomatoes, half a pound of sugar, two cans of peas, two cans of salmon, one box corn flakes, one can of spaghetti, two pounds of flour, one pound of coffee, and a can of pork and beans. This was to be their food for the next five days.

Mrs. Dodge is getting no fresh milk for her children. She dilutes canned milk to put on cereal. The children are rapidly losing weight.
Rent is $12 a month, but the family has been unable to pay it for six months. The only fuel they have is wood picked up at the dump. With this, Mrs. Dodge cooks their food. When the interviewer was there, she was getting ready to fry some fish which a friend had given her. The fish and biscuits would be their dinner. Formerly the family got $14 a month from a son in the C.C.C. but they have not heard from him for four weeks.

The children are developing various ailments, but the county provides no medical care. One member of the family has asthma, another has epileptic fits, and others have bad coughs.

When the interviewer asked Mrs. Dodge how county relief compared with state relief, she said, "It was much better when the state had it. We don't need coal now but you don't get medical care. I told the district supervisor about the children's coughs, but he said he couldn't do anything about it. I said because you live in the township you have to die before they do anything."

Case E-1. Mrs. Eva Amado, an Italian-American woman nearly 80 years old, could not keep from weeping when she was questioned about conditions since ERA was terminated in Atlantic County. The Overseers had given her nothing, telling her that her children should support her. Her children themselves were on relief.

Since she was removed from ERA, she has been living on a most meagre diet. All she had in the house when interviewed was potatoes and bread given her by relatives. Her finger was badly infected, and her general health appeared very poor.

In order to keep alive last month she had sold all her little treasures of Italian gold, getting a total of $5 from the sale. She had parted with her ear rings and other small pieces of jewelry. All that was left was a plain gold wedding chain which she had had for 62 years. She showed this chain in a little box and wept bitterly. She said she would have to sell it soon.
Case B-6. Barry Fuller, Middlesex County, is 56 years old but he looks to be nearly 70. Because he is single, the municipal relief agency will give him nothing. When visited in his home-made shack by the river, he was obviously starving. He had lived on nothing but bread and coffee for three days. He said he begged from the grocery store and was sometimes given food, evidently left-over Federal Surplus Commodities.

This man had a WPA job for a short time but was laid off as unable to work. He had been on relief the greater part of the past three years, but had always been marked down as unable to do heavy or even moderate labor. Occasionally he had been able to do some light work for his relief. Sometimes he made a little money selling junk and always when this happened, he did not come for his relief. He is in such poor health now that he has little energy to gather junk and is seldom able to make more than 50 cents a week.

Fuller built his shack out of cast-off pig iron and pans. It stands on a sandy path only a few feet from the river. He even constructed a bathroom with a bathtub crudely enclosed with pieces of tin. He invited the interviewer into his shack to show how well he had fitted it out from the junk piles. He had covered the bed with ragged layers of something resembling bedding and had made himself some pillow cases out of flour sacks.

When he had employment, Fuller paid his debts to the local grocer. Now he is practically a beggar in the community.

Case S-6. Saul Franklin, his wife and three children, one a crippled boy, were evicted from their home in New Brunswick April 15, after ERA stopped. The family was broken up. Mr. Franklin went to live with his father and mother, both past sixty, and his sister. All of them are unemployed.

Mrs. Franklin and the children went to live with her parents, and her sister and brother whose only income is what they get from the Overseer of the Poor. This amounted to $9.00 twice a month from April 15 to June 1.

Mrs. Franklin tried to get extra money for the crippled boy who is supposed to be getting fresh vegetables, fruit and milk. He had this diet while on ERA. The overseers refused to grant the extra amount.