

## UNEMPLOYMENT POSITION.

The total number of males in receipt of Scheme No. 5 rationed work-relief, sustenance, and those registered for unemployment relief at the 11th March, 1939, was only 726. In addition, there were 7,256 on sustenance unfit for employment for health or other reasons and being afforded relief from the Employment Promotion Fund. The former total was made up of 77 on Scheme No. 5 and 649 ineligible for relief awaiting the expiry of the qualifying or requalifying periods. There were no males fit for employment drawing sustenance without work. This position reflects in achievement the Government's policy of putting every able-bodied male to work.

The figures for the 11th March, 1939, which were presented in the usual form, were the last details relating to unemployment in New Zealand to be published in that manner. With the repeal of the Employment Promotion Act no provision exists for the Labour Department to continue its purely unemployment-relief activities. This has resulted in the discontinuance from the 31st March, 1939, of the payment of sustenance, the provision of rationed work-relief under Scheme No. 5, and the payment of sustenance to those unfit for employment for health or other reasons. The Social Security Department, from the 1st April, 1939, made provision for the payment of sickness and unemployment benefits, and the incidence of unemployment is reflected by the number in receipt of unemployment benefits provided under the Social Security Act of 1938.

It is necessary at this stage to refer to the methods of presenting unemployment figures. Some years ago there was no internationally general practice in the preparation of unemployment statistics, but more recently definite principles have become established, and the Dominion practice follows the method of other Administrations which render returns to the International Labour Office at Geneva. Consequently, the value of the New Zealand figure for the purposes of international comparison is of use only if it shows the true unemployment position and does not take into account those working full time in receipt of standard or award rates of wages. The New Zealand figures, as published, have followed international practice, but, in addition, the four-weekly expenditure for the period under the heading of "Promotion of Employment" (as distinct from relief expenditure) is also included. This expenditure may have suggested that there were more people a charge on the Employment Promotion Fund than was actually the case. The easier method of presenting only the number of persons assisted, and making no mention of the expenditure incurred in promoting employment, could have been followed, but to show in what manner the moneys from the Employment Promotion Fund have been disbursed it will be of assistance to those who in future may be called upon to write the history of the present times to know to what extent employment with State aid whether by way of public or local-body works, land-development, forestry, &c., was provided for those untrained and unskilled units for whom jobs could not be found in the existing industrial fabric. It is a matter of interest that the average unemployment figure over the period 1901-21 was 8,150. To the extent that these details have been kept, and to record the position faithfully as it has been known to the administrators, Table VII in the Appendix shows the progress of unemployment under the four main headings from 1931 to March, 1939.

In whatever form the unemployment figures are published, the true measure of the extent of unemployment as it existed until 31st March, 1939, is represented by the total number who are without a contract of employment—i.e., sustenance men, Scheme No. 5, and those who are registered for work but ineligible to receive relief for various reasons. Men in full-time employment, the numbers of whom are recorded in Table VII merely for statistical purposes, cannot be classed as unemployed even though the industry or occupation in which they are engaged may be receiving a stimulus from the Employment Promotion Fund.

To obtain a clearer appreciation of how far the unemployment position has been improved it must be recalled that, by raising the maximum permissible income provisions, unemployment relief naturally became available to a greater number of people. The increased sustenance rates instituted early in 1936 also attracted to unemployment relief a section of the community which before had not availed itself of this assistance. In addition, the regulations governing the payment of sustenance were so relaxed as to permit of assistance being granted to those unfit for employment for health or other reasons. Notwithstanding the greater field to which unemployment relief applied, the figures for November, 1935, including those working full time with the aid of subsidies from the Employment Promotion Fund, and November, 1938, offer a striking contrast, as the following table will show. The figures for March, 1939, are also shown for further comparison :—

	November, 1935.	November, 1938.	March, 1939.
(a) Registered but ineligible for relief . . . . .	1,825	507	649
(b) Receiving rationed work-relief under Scheme No. 5 . . . . .	19,610	519	77
(c) Receiving sustenance without work . . . . .	14,544	7,583*	7,256*
(d) In full-time employment with the aid of subsidies from the Employment Promotion Fund . . . . .	21,267	28,771	24,087
Totals . . . . .	57,246	37,380	32,069

\* Unfit for employment for health or other reasons.

To obtain sustenance previously applicants had to be fit to undertake manual work, and the 14,544 of November, 1935, are not to be compared with the 7,583 *unfit* recorded for November three years later. Previously, those unfit persons who, by reason of their infirmities, could not qualify for sustenance payments were required to obtain any desired assistance from Hospital Boards, relief organizations, &c.