# Che JOB PROBLEM

CAN THERE BE AMPLE EMPLOYMENT IN A PEACE TIME ECONOMY?

A Brief Appraisal

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# **FOREWORD**

Should the government provide jobs at the expense of the taxpayers or should it make it possible for the workers, in cooperation with management, to create their own jobs? This is the question which the nation will have to answer with the coming of peace.

In attempting to answer the question, the writer in this brief treatise, has been able to touch upon only a few fundamental points. Much has been left unsaid that might have strengthened the argument. No new theories to account for unemployment are advanced here, and no panacea is offered. The only aim has been to give greater emphasis to truths long ago discovered. These truths have become more or less obscure or have fallen into disrepute with the coming of our so-called "New School" Economists, with their "over savings" and "deficit spending" theories.

This is not an appeal to those who talk and think in terms of the fourth dimension, but to just plain folks who want their economics labeled in language which can be readily understood.

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# CAN THERE BE AMPLE EMPLOYMENT IN A PEACE TIME ECONOMY?

The answer to the above question is "Yes." This end can also be attained by more means than one, although there is but one right way to attain it, and retain our present system of private enterprise. It doesn't necessarily require a war to give a nation more opportunities for employment and at the same time provide work that is essential or productive. Neither is it necessary that jobs be provided at the expense of the taxpayer. Before, however, we attempt to prove our case let us briefly consider some of the proposed remedies for unemployment.

# One Way of Creating More Jobs - The Share-the-Work Remedy

One way to provide more jobs would be to make drastic reductions in working hours. Undoubtedly some additional employment can be provided by this means but in creating more jobs by this method, the output of the worker will be reduced, other things remaining the same. This, of course, will result in smaller earnings for him. It is only when invention comes to the rescue and boosts the output of labor that further drastic cuts in working hours can be made without cutting down output. As wages come from production, they are determined largely by what is produced. In other words, they are low or high, depending on output. It therefore follows that any drastic reduction in hours devoted to production which results in a lesser output per worker will either result in a lowering of naminal (money wages), or in an increase in prices. In either case, wage earners, as a class, will stand to lose by the decline in real wages, that is to say, wages measured by what they will buy. It is simply impossible to cut down the output of labor without adding to the cost of the product turned out, other things remaining the same. To add to its cost means adding to its price.

## We Need More Production

It is only by increasing production that we can expect any substantial increase in real wages. Our greatest need at this time is not for less production but for more. To secure a greater output of wealth we must not only see to it that the output of the worker is increased by one means or the other, but that more people are put to productive work. It would at least be a mistake to reduce the output of labor at a time like this when a much greater national income is absolutely necessary for the liquidation of our enormous national debt and the securing of a higher standard of living. The more we can increase production, the more wealth we will have to divide among all producers. What is more, labor

FOOTNOTE: The only reason that the American worker receives higher wages than the Chinese worker is because he produces more.

#### PUBLIC WORK PROJECTS

Then we have the remedy of public work projects which even many in high places advocate as a means of creating jobs. Undoubtedly such a program could be made to give us some new jobs, providing the taxpayers are able and willing to foot the bill. To the extent that public improvements of any kind are essential, or at least more essential to the national welfare than are other products of labor, there can be no sound objection to spending the taxpayers money to secure them. On the other hand when it is proposed that the government engage in extensive nonliquidating public work projects at the expense of the taxpayer at a time when consumer goods are much more needed and when the taxpayer is already overburdened with taxes, the proposal must be rejected by all clear thinking people. The time to spend the taxpavers money for public improvements that aren't absolutely essential to the nation's welfare is not when the nation is up to its neck in debt and goods are scarce but when there is plenty and there is extra money to spend for luxuries. This, of course, is quite contrary to the accepted view. If we are to provide jobs by this means it should be done out of tax reserves built up previous to the ending of the war.

Nor can we increase the tax load on private business in order to finance public work projects without reducing its ability to provide jobs. We must not overlook the fact that the capital going into new industry comes from the earnings of existing industry. This being true then the more the government takes of such earnings by way of taxation to finance nonliquidating work projects the less capital there will be left for the expansion of private enterprise. It therefore follows that any gain made in the way of public employment is made at the expense of private employment. This is on the assumption, of course, that the earnings of private industry will be re-invested in industry, which they will be in a free and healthy economy where conditions are favorable to industrial investments.

### GOVERNMENT IN BUSINESS

Still another way to provide jobs, following the war, would be for the government to use its credit to start new industries and operate them in case private industry should fail to undergo sufficient expansion to pro-

FOOTNOTE: A free and competitive market is, of course, necessary if more of the fruits of industry are to go to producers. Unless we do have such a market we can't have full production. The proposed 30-hour week would be a serious mistake as a post-war measure.

vide sufficient employment. As long as there is a need for more industry to supply the nation's needs for both goods and employment, such a policy could be carried out without taking away the market now enjoyed by private industry. In this case government would simply be creating its own market by putting more people to work so that they could become buyers. Nor would putting the government into business necessarily add to the burden of the taxpayer, provided the program is properly managed, as it can be made self liquidating. In this respect it would be a far better solution of the unemployment problem than the customary wasteful public works plan. What Communistic Russia did to rid herself of unemployment—and she did rid herself of it—we here in America can also do and should do, provided we find that it is impossible for private industry to expand to the point of supplying jobs for those who need them.

#### THE BETTER WAY

As this unemployment problem is primarily a production problem growing out of the lack of opportunity to carry on industry, there is nothing to prevent private enterprise from providing most, if not all, of the jobs needed in the post-war era if we only see to it that conditions are made more favorable for industrial expansion. What is more, with few exceptions, it can also provide them at less expense to the community as there will be less waste and inefficiency.

There are no obstacles of either a physical or economic nature that prevent private enterprise from carrying the full load of employment. It is quite apparent that industrial expansion hasn't at any time been limited or checked by any shortage of raw materials, or by any lack of human wants. There has never been a time when production in general has been adequate to meet the need for goods. It is also quite obvious that under the profit incentive there are plenty of people who are willing and capable of giving us more industry if there is any assurance of reasonable earnings. If conditions haven't been attractive for more industrial investments it is no fault of the economic system, as many would have us believe.

# Markets Will Absorb a Greater Output

Some economists have calculated that it is going to take a national income of at least one hundred and twenty-five billion dollars to assure ample employment. Granting that such is the case, there is nothing to prevent us from having such an income provided the forces of production

Human wants continue to expand as means are found to supply them. Increased production always gives rise to greater buying power as buying power originates in production, being the fruit of it. In the last analysis, we buy with either services or goods, money being used merely to facilitate the exchange. Labor, too, has always shared in the greater buying power, resulting from increased production despite the inequalities in distribution. Federal census records fully prove this. It will continue to share in it, either through the increase in nominal wages or the lowering of prices. Were it not for monopoly, the returns to labor would unquestionably be much greater. As long as increases in wealth production resulting from improvements in the productive process are passed on to consumers in lower prices, as would be the case, in a free and competitive economy, we need not worry about any general overproduction of wealth. There is no danger whatsoever of production in general, ever reaching the saturation point.

#### WAR TIME PRODUCTION

That the industrial system under private ownership is capable of expanding when demands are made upon it, is seen during war times, when production is greatly increased and unemployment declines. While it is true that at such times the government enters the market and buys on a larger scale than during peace times, it is also true that it does so with the money or credit of its citizens. There is nothing to prevent these same citizens from using this same money or credit during peace times to buy more goods. What is more, they will buy more if there is the same assurance of steady employment. With the same number of people emplayed during peace times we should have as much industry and just as much buying power. Peace time needs for commodities are quite sufficient to put everybody to productive work as long as raw materials are ample and available to give us the finished products desired. The only reason there has been less buying during peace times is because there has been less industry which means fewer actual products, hence fewer buyers. The remedy then, is more industry.

It must not be assumed from what has been said here that there are no obstacles to further industrial expansion. We know there are many. They are, however, not inherent in the industrial or economic system. Their removal, therefore, will necessitate no basic changes in the economic system. Neither will it involve any arbitrary control by government over production and distribution, once such obstacles are removed, providing there is free competition in the price field.

FOOTNOTE: Spending the taxpayers money for public parks, better postoffices or more elaborate highways when other things are much more needed is like the householder who spends his money for sidewalks, shrubbery and beautiful vases for his porches while neglecting to repair the leaky roof of his house or the cracked chimney.

FOOTNOTE: \*The few natural manapolies are the only exception.

### OBSTACLES TO INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

If there is nothing inherent in our system of private enterprise to prevent it from supplying ample employment, why then, you ask, hasn't it been able to meet this need? The answer is obvious. The government, through its laws and administrative decrees has imposed too many handicaps and restrictions on business. Too many obstacles have been placed in its way, and mainly by well intentioned law makers. What is more, our law makers have been continually adding to such restrictions with the passing of time.

There was a time in the history of our country when we had a free public domain and our geographical frontiers were subject to further and further extension. It was possible during this period, for the government to muddle through without causing too much harm to the business life of the country. With the closing of this safety valve of the labor market, the situation has become quite different, and one which calls for the removal of the many legislative obstacles to production.

# TAXATION AS AN OBSTACLE TO EMPLOYMENT

There is taxation, for example, which is a creature of government. It is being continually used in such a manner as to check industrial expansion. To the extent that it has deprived industry of earnings which have been badly needed to enlarge the industrial plant and has penalized thrift, it has been an obstacle to such expansion. We can not overlook the fact that taxes on the output of labor enter into the cost of production and are shifted to the consumer in higher prices. Higher prices in turn tend to discourage and check the demand for goods, other things remaining the same. In checking demand, they check production. Simply because there have been times when production has increased in the face of higher taxes is no proof to the contrary. In such cases other factors have operated to offset the higher taxes. By giving us more wealth to tax they have cancelled out the depressing effect of the taxes.

#### THE CAPITAL STOCK PILE TOO LOW

There isn't any question at all but that our government,—and this applies to all governments,—has in the past siphoned off business earnings by way of taxation that have been badly needed by private enter-

FOOTNOTE: The most serious threat to our system of private enterprise comes from those who would use taxation as a means of redistributing buying power and who look upon savings as an obstacle to industrial expansion. If these impractical theorists who mistake effects for causes are to continue to influence the fiscal policies of our government with their pernicious "over savings" and deficit spending theories the time will soon come when private enterprise will be bled so white that it will wither on the vine.

Another serious threat to our present industrial system is our present federal income tax law. It is hard to conceive of a better way of discouraging thrift and enterprise. It leaves very little incentive to make two blades of grass grow where one grow before

prise to give the nation the industry required to assure ample employment. Undoubtedly much of the money so taken in taxes has been needed by government in times of war and even in peace times. What is more this need for higher taxes will continue as long as we tolerate wars and prevent millions of our people during peace times from becoming self sustaining. This, however, does not alter the fact that taxes may become so excessive as to become an obstacle to industrial expansion.

Nor does it mean that we cannot reduce the tax burden without working serious hardships on those who are now more or less dependent on government. To the contrary, the removal of some of the tax burden from the back of industry would, by giving us more wealth and more productive jobs, greatly reduce the need for government assistance of all kinds. \*With more wealth to tax, the tax burden would also be lighter on everyone. The expenses of peace time government should never be permitted to become so high as to deprive the nation of industry needed to supply the needs for wealth or jobs.

# LAND COSTS AN OBSTACLE TO PRODUCTION

As production cannot be carried on without land (natural resources) it is evident that anything that interferes with the use of land must operate to discourage and check industrial expansion. It goes without saying that the cost of access to natural resources often becomes more or less prohibitive for industrial purposes. This is especially true during cycles of business expansion when land speculation forces up land costs higher than is justified by the increase in industrial earnings. Whenever these costs become so high as to eat into the customary earnings of labor and capital, the effect is to discourage and check the further development of natural resources for productive purposes.

Excessive land costs, like excessive industrial taxes, also tend to impoverish industry leaving it with less capital for development purposes. In doing this these inflated costs become an obstacle to industrial expansion and employment. We do know that in the early colonial period when this country was fortunate to possess a free public domain productive enough to attract new industries and offer an avenue of escape for wage earners from the labor market, the problem of unemployment did not exist. In fact, during this period labor was so scarce and wages so high that laws were enacted with a view to preventing workers from obtaining land for themselves. This experience conclusively proves that our land economy is an important factor to be considered when looking for the causes of unemployment.

FOOTNOTE: \*If we are to have higher government expenses without making taxes a hindrance to production and employment we must first see to it that there is sufficient industrial expansion to give us the needed wealth and employment and still leave sufficient national income to meet higher government expenses.

#### MAKING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES MORE AVAILABLE

While we can't bring back our once free public domain we can make our natural resources more available to capital and labor by discouraging speculative land prices. This will leave more money for development purposes. We can also stop penalizing by taxation those who would put natural resources to their fullest and best use, which would also make for more employment. Those who would have us believe that our land economy no longer has any important bearing on the problem of production and employment are either blind to a most simple, self evident truth, or they haven't the moral courage to face the issue. I would remind them that we are still obtaining our raw materials from our natural resources and are also using them in other ways to carry on production, just as we have always done. Nor has anything taken place to correct the evils growing out of land speculation and land monopoly.

#### TAXATION THE REMEDY

If we would see to it that a much greater percentage of peace time public revenues is raised by our present ad valorem tax on natural resources—which, by the way, is no new proposal—it would not only give industry much needed tax relief, but it would also act as a damper on land speculation. To discourage such speculation would be to keep land costs from becoming so excessive as to check industrial expansion. Obviously this would be most desirable from the standpoint of more industry and more employment.\* This is the only way that any appreciable reduction in taxes on industry can be made following the war. Merely to shift the tax burden from one of industry's shoulders to the other, and change the tax label,—as many politicians and so-called economists are suggesting—, will accomplish little worth while. Needless to say, any drastic change in our tax laws such as we are advocating here, will not meet with ready acceptance. If this was not the case, such a change would have taken place long ago, as the idea is by no means new.

#### MONOPOLY AN OBSTACLE TO PRODUCTION

Monopoly in industry has also grown to such proportions as to become quite a serious obstacle to industrial expansion. No private industry that has a monopoly of the market ever becomes so large as to supply as much employment as would be supplied by competing indus-

FOOTNOTE: Russian industry has a considerable advantage over ours in the way of land costs, as it has none to pay. This advantage has been one of the factors responsible for the rapid growth of Russian industry under the communistic regime. It doesn't take much stretch of the imagination to see that the easier we make it to get access to our natural resources, which are the primary source of production and employment, the more employment we are going to have.

\*Such a tax should be levied with a view to absorbing values that are the result of community growth and endeavor. While it may not always be possible to measure such values one hundred percent accurately, yet they can be measured accurately snough for all practical purposes. We can't hope to attain perfection in this world.

tries in the same field. This is because no industrial monopoly ever sells at competitive prices. As the non-competitive industry charges all the traffic will bear, its prices will be so excessive as to check the demand for the goods it produces. This, of course, means less production, hence less employment. Our public service monopolies, for example, have by their excessive charges not only limited their own operations, but have actually made it impossible for other industries to take root. This is especially true of the electric power monopoly.

Nor is monopoly limited entirely to the field of industry. It is also to be found in the field of natural resources and to some extent even in the field of organized labor. With the aid of government, the organized labor movement in this country is rapidly taking on considerable manopoly power which threatens to become quite dangerous to business in general. Regardless of the fact that wage increases may be fully justified, the fact still remains that when such raises aren't general they operate to reduce the buying power of those who fail to share in them. We must not overlook the fact, which the economist Emerson Schmidt has repeatedly pointed out, that fundamentally the workers in all industries are working for each other—exchanging their man-hours against each other. It therefore follows that the basis of the exchange is one factor which determines to a considerable degree, the level of output and employment.

It is quite apparent that wages can become so high in an occupation as to check employment for those engaged in it. Prices may be so raised on the products produced by those receiving the higher wages as to check the demand for them on the part of those who fail to share in the wage increase. The effect of this is exactly the same as when an industrial monopoly boosts its prices above the general run of prices prevailing in the competitive field.

While labor organizations have undoubtedly done much to improve conditions for wage earners and have raised the earnings of their members, much of this gain has been lost to them by the increase in prices resulting from the increase in labor costs. It is also true that much of the gain in wages for our organized worker is made at the expense of the unorganized worker who is forced to pay higher prices for what he buys. It will also be found upon careful analysis of the problem that most of the gain in real wages that has taken place over the past years has been the result not of organization in the field of labor, but of increased output resulting mainly from science and invention. Labor as a class has therefore much more to gain by working for greater production and an expansion of the industrial plant.

FOOTNOTE: The revisions of our patent laws, the reduction of trade barriers, the enforcement of the anti-trust laws and the proper use of the taxing power will largely suffice to rid the nation of most of its industrial monopolies. In the case of the few natural monopolies, which comprise our public utility companies, we may be compelled to resort to public ownership.

### WHEN JOBS COMPETE FOR MEN

If industrial expansion during peace times is carried far enough, the demand for labor will reach a point comparable to that reached since the war started. It will at least be equal to the supply. Under such conditions employees would be able to bargain individually with employers on equal terms. This being the case the need for collective bargaining would largely disappear. This is an ideal which is surely worth striving for and one that is quite possible of realization.

# TRADE BARRIERS

Another obstacle to industrial expansion which results in unemployment is trade barriers. Anything which tends to obstruct trade necessarily tends to restrict production. Like monopolies such barriers make for higher prices and in doing this they lessen the demand for goods. The barriers for example which have been set up against foreign trade not only operate to curtail foreign markets but domestic markets as well. To the extent that they operate to give any industry a monopoly of the home market and enable it to boost prices they reduce the demand for domestic goods. In doing this they check production.

It is quite apparent that the freer we can keep trade either domestic or foreign, the easier we make it for people to obtain the products of labor. This is because trade makes for lower prices for the consumer. With more goods being exchanged there will be more business, hence the need for more labor especially in the distribution and service end of business. Just to the extent that trade either domestic or foreign raises the national income it gives the nation not only more money to spend for goods but also for services of all kinds.

While it is true that certain tariff created industries would suffer a loss of markets as a result of the removal of foreign trade barriers and would have to turn to producing other products, it is also true that industry as a whole would experience a considerable increase in markets. Any workers losing jobs by reason of the lowering of trade barriers would soon find other jobs and more remunerative ones in either distributing the greater output of commodities or in the fields of service or personal service. Employment in these three fields has always increased with the march of invention and the increase in foreign trade.

FOOTNOTE: Nothing is gained by labor as a class in the way of buying power through the boosting of "take home wages" unless such raises either promote greater production or are preceded by a greater output per worker. To boost money wages without adding to output can only mean higher labor costs which in turn will be reflected in higher prices. The industrialist can and will shift the higher costs to consumer in higher prices. In many instances he is forced to shift them if he is to stay in business.

#### MINOR OBSTACLES

While we have pointed out the major and underlying causes of involuntary unemployment there are, of course, numerous other lesser obstacles to production which make for a scarcity of jobs. Among them are inflation, strikes, patent laws, monetary and other legislative or administrative acts which either hinder or frighten business. Confidence is always necessary to good business. Governments can do much to either inspire or destroy this confidence.

Needless to say nothing worth while will be done to remove any of the major obstacles to production in time to prevent what may turn out to be serious unemployment with the coming of peace. What is more, there is little likelihood that anything will be done towards removing them for years to come, judging from the results of past efforts to accomplish this end. It may take a revolution to remove these obstacles and it may come to this if more productive jobs are not provided in the post war period. It may be too late to save private enterprise. As the causes of unemployment are deep seated it is necessary that drastic remedies be resorted to if these causes are to be removed. This is the stumbling block to any successful solution to the problem in the near future. About all that can be expected is the use of a few polliatives, some of which may do more harm than good.

#### TEMPORARY EXPEDIENTS

If we are going to resort to palliatives to stimulate industrial expansion let us not make the same mistake that was made during the last depression by pouring the taxpayers' dollars down rat holes. If we are going to continue the policy of creating jobs at the expense of the tax-

FOOTNOTE: Trade barriers also make it necessary for the worker to be more steadily employed in order to supply his wants.

It has been estimated by economists that the lowering of trade barriers between the mations following the war would give us at least three to four million more jobs.

payer, let us use the tax money in a manner that will directly benefit industry much the same way as it has been used during the present war. Our experience since the war started has shown that it can be used in this manner with good results even if such a remedy is only a makeshift. If most of the money used for this purpose is taken out of taxes on unearned profits, especially those derived from speculation and monopoly earnings, industry as a whole would be benefited by such a use of the taxing power.

# SPECIFIC REMEDIES

Not only should assistance to business take the form of loans at low rates of interest but it should also go so far as to stabilize prices, guarantee markets in time of emergency and provide tax rebates or bonuses for plant expansion. The guarantee of market plan which was proposed as an emergency measure by an economist during the last depression, can also be of temporary assistance if properly safeguarded. If limited to staple commodities and to the transition period until industry is able to get into high gear, it can be made to give us a much greater output of commodities. This same guarantee of market plan can also be useful in getting the wheels of industry off dead center in case of another depression. In either case its application would give us greater production, more employment and more buying power. If care is taken in advance to ascertain market requirements, and a quota system is used based on former yearly outputs, very little, if any loss would be experienced by our taxpayers. It can at least be said for this plan that it would entail far less loss to them than would unemployment and the dole. It is also to be preferred to the wasteful pump priming flasco of the last depression.

Should it be found necessary to resort to public work projects to take up any remaining slack in employment, such undertakings should be confined mainly, to self liquidating projects, which when completed will help create more private industry. Where hydro-electric and irrigation projects can be made to conform to this formula, they should be undertaken. Barring the possibilities of strikes and the failure to control inflation, such an emergency program should do much to give us much more productive employment with the coming of peace.

# THE DANGER FROM STRIKES AND WAGE INFLATION

Any extensive shutdowns in industry during the transition period as a result of strikes will undoubtedly lead to a falling off of production and final depression. The same can be said of further nominal wage inflation, which had its beginning with the start of the war. Such increases in money wages can only lead to further price inflation, the very thing

which the government has been trying to prevent. It is perfectly obvious that our industrialists are not going to absorb such increases in labor costs when they can pass them on to the consumer in higher prices. Buying power in the aggregate would not be increased one penny by further wage boosts, for as we have previously pointed out, what some might gain, the balance of the community would lose. Those with fixed incomes would be the heaviest losers. With production costs going higher, our chances of regaining the foreign market would be even less promising. Price inflation might easily get so out of control as to precipitate the nation into another cycle of deflation and depression. We can only hope that organized labor will heed sound advice in time to avert another disaster.

# WE MUST PREVENT DEPRESSIONS

The only trouble with any economic remedy that fails to go to the root of this unemployment problem is that it will not prevent periodical slumps in production which are commonly referred to as industrial depressions. Economists well know that anything that makes for pronounced industrial activity invariably brings on inflation and a speculative boom, sooner or later. These booms finally collapse causing such a shock to business as to paralyze it for a time. Until deflation has run its course and confidence has been restored, the nation is sure to experience serious unemployment. Unless these speculative booms are prevented by the proper use of taxation and other anti-inflation measures, there is little chance of avoiding these periodical slumps in employment. Unless the government is successful in holding down inflation following the war, which has already been showing its ugly head, another depression in the near future is inevitable.

# IN CONCLUSION

Unless we want to return to the futile and dangerous political pump priming experiment of the last depression, as we likely will, it is necessary that the government do one of two things. Either it must take industry under its wing and be prepared to give it financial and other assistance, at least during the transition period, or it must proceed to remove the obstacles to production so that it can help itself. Any other course leads only to the weakening of our system of private enterprise and its ultimate replacement by a socialistic economy. With our "capitalistic" system so handicapped, socialism is inevitable. If there is a growing

FOOTNOTE: Under the guarantee of market plan, the government would agree to buy unmarketable surpluses up to a certain amount of cost of production prices. In other words, it would underwrite the market.

FOOTNOTE: A speculative boom in both urban and form land has already reached a dangerous peak.

sentiment in this country for a greater measure of socialism, let us not put the responsibility entirely upon those who preach the socialistic doctrine. Much greater blame rests upon those who, because of their shortsightedness and selfishness would perpetuate institutions and laws which handicap our present economic system. It is no longer a "free" enterprise system and it hasn't been for many decades. Until we do make it free we have no right to contend that it has failed us.

# The End.

Whatever interferes with production—that obstructs the growth of industry, makes for unemployment. Such interferences or obstructions are the only cause of this most serious economic malady.