

This PDF is a selection from an out-of-print volume from the National Bureau of Economic Research

Volume Title: The Labor Force in Wartime America

Volume Author/Editor: Clarence D. Long

Volume Publisher: NBER

Volume ISBN: 0-87014-329-8

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/long44-1>

Publication Date: 1944

Chapter Title: Foreword to "The Labor Force in Wartime America"

Chapter Author: Leo Wolman

Chapter URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c6296>

Chapter pages in book: (p. 1 - 2)

FOREWORD

In this study of the size of the labor force in the United States during the wars that began in 1914 and 1939 Mr. Long has made a contribution of great scientific value. His detailed analysis of the data from which estimates of this country's working population are commonly derived not only suggests the limits that the total number of people available for work imposes upon a nation's war effort but also helps to answer many questions that have always puzzled students of our decennial censuses of occupations.

One of the most interesting of his findings is the contrast between the strain on our labor force in the first and second world wars. During World War I Mr. Long concludes that net additions to the normal labor force were "few or non-existent." Presumably losses to the armed services were then made up by transferring men and women from non-essential to essential activities. But in this war the situation has been altogether different. The labor force increased substantially. "Little or no net increase took place during the two years before the United States entered the war, despite fuller employment. During 1942 and 1943, however, there was a rise of nearly six million men and women, of whom more than four-fifths came in independently of the growth in working-age population." Of these nearly five million, "more than two million were women, all but a quarter of whom were 25 and older. More than two and a half million were men, all but a fifth of whom were 24 or younger."

As concerns the possibility of further increasing the net labor force of the United States at present, when our military program contemplates inducting more than a million additional men and manpower problems are becoming more pressing in several of our most important industrial areas, Mr. Long offers little hope. The only untapped sources of new labor supply are children at school and women with children under 14. Efforts to draw upon these reserves, Mr. Long believes, will encounter strong and effective resistance. If, therefore, the war goes on and further increases in the armed forces are deemed necessary, it may be inferred from these figures that maintaining, or increasing, war production will require large transfers from civilian to war work or more hours and harder work, or both.

No striking difference is observed in the degree to which Britain

and the United States has exploited, so far in this war, their potential labor forces, at least so far as numbers are concerned. On their face the statistics seem to show that England has done a much more thorough job. For, of the English population 14 to 65 years of age, 70 per cent were in the labor force, while in this country the percentage was only 60. But this marked excess is explained by "the traditionally smaller percentage of British children 14 and older in school and the smaller percentage of British women with children under 14." In fact, "so far as the relative sizes of the labor forces are concerned, the propensity in Britain exceeded that in the United States just as much before the war as at the time of the most recent comparison."

In addition to the indispensable information this study affords about the problems of manpower in war, it sheds much new light on the normal behavior of the labor force and changes in it over long periods. For many years, estimates of the amount and rate of unemployment in the United States have been based upon estimates of the size of the labor force. As Mr. Long shows, these estimates are subject to large errors and, in this monograph, he has already gone far in correcting them. When Mr. Long finishes a coordinate study of the aggregate volume of employment, whose completion is deferred for the period of his service with the Naval forces, we shall have the materials for much more precise and reliable estimates of unemployment than it has hitherto been possible to make.

For Mr. Long's services, the National Bureau is greatly indebted to the Institute for Advanced Study, to Wesleyan University, and to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Under their auspices Mr. Long has for some years been engaged in a major inquiry into the history of unemployment in this country. He was loaned by them to the National Bureau to write this paper in its series *Our Economy in War*.

Leo Wolman