## THE TURNOVER OF FACTORY LABOR

# THE' TURNOVER OF FACTORY LABOR

# SUMNER H. SLICHTER, Ph.D.

BOMETIME ASSISTANT IN POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BX

JOHN R. COMMONS, LL.D.

PROPESSOR OF ECONOMICS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN



Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poons 4.

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# DEDICATED TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

#### PREFACE

This work is called the Turnover of Factory Labor to distinguish it from studies of the turnover among seasonal out-of-door laborers. The turnover among the roving out-of-door workers who wander from one seasonal occupation to another is a distinct problem, requiring separate study. The title to the work, therefore, is only approximate. The study is intended to cover the turnover among manual laborers generally, with the exception of the peculiar class of out-of-door seasonal laborers.

The study was commenced in 1913, and most of the data had been collected previous to the acute labor situation created by the war in 1916, and especially in 1917, and resulting in the unprecedented instability of labor which first focused public attention on the problem. Because the situation since 1916 has been distinctly abnormal, and because it is desired to treat the turnover as a normal rather than as an abnormal problem of industry, as a peace, rather than a war, problem, the illustrative material has been confined largely to years previous to 1916 and the causes of the turnover have been discussed from the standpoint of the situation in peace times.

Although nominally a study of the labor turnover, the
work is fundamentally a study of methods of handling men.
The subject of handling men has been strangely neglected
in works on management. These works deal fully with the
organization for and methods of handling materials and
controlling manufacturing processes, such matters as purchasing, storing materials, planning, routing and scheduling

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work, the numerous devices for establishing simple and reliable central control over operations, but among the processes to be controlled the handling of labor is not included. The idea that a definite and well planned labor policy is as necessary as standardized methods of manufacturing, and that means are necessary to provide for the formulation and execution of such a policy, is lacking. The fundamental thesis of this work is the neglected truism that a definite plan and specific responsibility for creating and executing the plan are as necessary in dealing with labor as in controlling manufacturing operations.

The turnover due to seasonal fluctuations in the volume of employment has been somewhat cursorily treated. The proportion of the turnover due to this cause has been analyzed and the principal methods of regularizing employment briefly discussed. The subject of seasonal fluctuations in employment is a complicated one, however, and can be more advantageously discussed in connection with studies of unemployment.

This work has been made possible only by the extensive and generous cooperation of a large number of persons. I am deeply indebted to numerous executives and employment managers who have granted generous interviews, opened their records for the compilation of statistics, and in many instances have themselves compiled statistics. Not only are these persons too numerous to mention, but to do so would disclose the identity of many establishments which prefer to be unknown. I am especially indebted to Professor J. R. Commons, in whose seminars the preliminary work was done, and who furnishes an introduction: to Mr. C. W. Price, Field Secretary of the National Safety Council, who thoroughly appreciated the problem long before it came to public attention, who had much to do with the study's being undertaken, and who greatly facilitated the study by his encouragement and by providing numerous contacts with interested executives; and to Professor H. A. Millis, of the University of Chicago, under whose direction the study was completed as a doctor's dissertation. Professor Wm. M. Leiserson, of the University of Toledo, under whose direction data were collected for the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, made important suggestions concerning methods of obtaining data. Professor Field, of the University of Chicago, has read Part I, and offered helpful suggestions relating particularly to the tables, but I am responsible for the methods of statistical presentation. Most of all I am indebted to my father and to my wife for encouragement and advice. They have read the manuscript at various stages and suggested important improvements. My wife has read a large part of the proof and prepared the index.

SUMNER H. SLICHTER.

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#### INTRODUCTION.

The several years which Mr. Slichter has devoted to the study of this important subject has now resulted in the first comprehensive treatment of labor turnover. Working as a factory employee in some of our largest industrial establishments, he himself has lived through the machine process which underlies the labor turnover. Then visiting many factories and talking with employers and workingmen; then following this up with schedules and questionnaires so as to widen his basis of information, all of this preparation and collection of material for his work has given us an all-round view of the problem.

In addition to this, his remarkably keen analysis of all the contributing factors, whether they be found in the character of the worker, the kind of work, the character of the boss, or the larger social and economic relations which surround the factory, is a model for all investigators and a guide for all statistical compilations which may hereafter be undertaken in the exposition of this subject.

be undertaken in the exposition of this subject.

More than this, the work is not one of mere compilation and academic interest; it also has the highly important practical purpose of guiding the employer in his efforts to reduce the labor turnover and of showing him how far he may hope to correct it, and what he can gain thereby.

During the past twenty years the so-called science of scientific management has occupied the attention of employers and engineers and those interested in labor questions. It was felt that if the worker could be carefully analyzed in his motions and timed in his processes, and that

if the method of payment could be so devised as to offer him greater incentives and inducements, the efficiency of labor would be greatly increased and the cost of labor greatly reduced.

But suddenly it is found that one of the greatest costs of labor is not the inefficiency of the individual but the lack of goodwill of labor as a whole. Labor turnover, which is a group phenomenon and not an individual question, suddenly looms up as an intangible overhead cost, and the future scientific management must deal not alone with individuals as such but with labor as a class and as a whole.

The employer or superintendent or publicist who fully grasps all that is implied in this profound subject of labor turnover will be in a position to meet the critical problems of the future, and no greater service could have been per-

formed for American industry than that which is now done by Mr. Slichter in his study of the turnover of factory labor.

JOHN R. COMMONS.

University of Wisconsin.

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