

Chapter IV.

Royal Meeker: Statistics in Recession and Wartime

Royal Meeker, the new Commissioner of Labor Statistics, faced a different situation in August 1913 from that of his predecessors. The Bureau of Labor Statistics was now part of the newly established Cabinet-level Department of Labor. The Secretary of Labor, rather than the Commissioner, was labor's primary point of contact. Thus, Meeker's dealings with organized labor were more circumscribed than was the case for Neill or Wright.

The influences on Meeker and the Bureau came from a variety of sources. In the early years, concern with unemployment in a deepening recession led the Bureau to begin studies on the subject and, in 1916, to start a regular series of reports on industrial employment. The Bureau also encouraged the activities of State and municipal public employment offices and the efforts of Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson to establish a national employment service.

Upon U.S. entry into the war in April 1917, government programs for increasing production, mobilizing the labor force, maintaining peaceful labor-management relations, and stabilizing prices and wages influenced the work of the Bureau. With statistics now used in

Meeker: Statistics in Recession and Wartime

planning war programs, the Bureau was called upon to expand its conceptual and technical work in the fields of prices and wages. This led notably to the development of a cost-of-living index. The necessary resources were provided by Presidential allocations from special war funds.

Meeker and the Bureau cooperated effectively with the War Industries Board's Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics, established to monitor and coordinate the mushrooming statistical activities of the war agencies.

The demands on the Bureau continued after the armistice, particularly for information on living costs. But the special funding from the President was now terminated, and the Bureau's budget was cut as Congress sought to return expenditures to "normal" following the war emergency.

When Meeker resigned in 1920, the Bureau had established a substantial place for itself as a provider of widely utilized economic data and had become a prototype of the modern statistical agency.

The third Commissioner

Royal Meeker was born in 1873 in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. As a young man, Meeker worked "on the farms of Pennsylvania and Iowa, in the lumber woods of Pennsylvania, in the foundries, machine shops, and factories, and at casual employments in several States"—all apparently before his graduation from Iowa State College in 1898.¹ He moved on to Columbia University as a graduate student under E.R.A. Seligman from 1899 to 1903, then spent a year at the University of Leipzig before returning to his native Pennsylvania as a professor of history, political science, and economics at Ursinus College during 1904 and 1905. He published his dissertation, "History and Theory of Shipping Subsidies," in 1905 and received his Ph.D. from Columbia the following year.

Meeker's association with Woodrow Wilson began in 1905, when he applied to Wilson, then president of Princeton, for a position as preceptor in economics. He obtained the appointment and taught, among other subjects, money and banking and transportation. He was named assistant professor in 1908.

He was also associated with Wilson in charitable and welfare activities. Meeker served on the executive committee of the New

Jersey Conference of Charities and Correction while Wilson served as a vice president. Also, he served on the Board of Managers of the New Jersey State Reformatory for Women while Wilson was Governor of New Jersey.²

After the election of 1912, Meeker offered his services to the President-elect, suggesting, among other things, a survey of the economic community on the banking reform issue. In this connection, he helped prepare a questionnaire and compiled the results for Wilson. In March 1913, the new President wrote Meeker of the findings, "They are most useful to me, and I warmly appreciate all the trouble you have taken in getting this material together."³

In June 1913, Secretary of Labor Wilson recommended Meeker to the President for the post of Commissioner of Labor Statistics. The President urged his acceptance: "I hope with all my heart we shall see you here a great deal."⁴ Upon Meeker's nomination, *The New York Times* described him as "a close friend of President Wilson," who "has given much attention to labor problems." The *Times* also reported that he was frequently consulted by "Wilson Administration leaders on the currency question." The reference to labor problems may have been an overstatement, for Meeker had said little on the subject before his appointment.⁵

When offered the position, Meeker went to New York to talk with his predecessor, Charles P. Neill. Writing of the meeting, Meeker said that Neill "strongly advised me to tackle the job" but that he also "expressed the belief that the functions of the Commissioner are too many and incompatible." The role of the Commissioner in mediating and conciliating disputes in the railroad industry definitely caused Meeker to pause. He wrote Secretary Wilson, "I feel then that unless I can be assured that the Commissioner of Labor Statistics will be relieved of the duties of mediator in the disputes covered by the Erdman Act, I must ask you to withdraw my name from consideration as Commissioner."⁶

Nevertheless, Meeker wrote the Secretary, "I know the work is hard and the responsibility great; but I should deem it an honor and a pleasure to serve under you and President Wilson no matter what the task." Passage of the Newlands Act, which created a new agency for mediation of labor disputes, cleared the way for Meeker's acceptance, and the President transmitted the nomination to the Senate on July

22. The Senate confirmed the appointment on August 11, and Meeker was sworn in the following day.⁷

Meeker's views

Meeker, like Neill, was associated with the Progressive movement for governmental activism to achieve reform. In 1910, he wrote, "Before all else, the average American must be startled out of his stupefying faith in the divinely ordained destiny of his country. The policy of drift cannot possibly bring the ship of state to any desirable haven, and the sooner the crew are made aware of this, the better."⁸

Meeker carried over into his work as Commissioner his belief in the positive role of government. It was his duty, he said, "to turn the searching light of publicity into the farthest and darkest corners of industry, to make known the successes of enlightened policies of dealing with labor, to show up wrongdoers, whether they be employers of workers or workers of employers, to aid every endeavor to raise the ethical standards that obtain in the dealings between employer and employee, to bring about kinder feelings between master and man, and to foster the spirit of cooperative endeavor throughout all industry." For Meeker, the Bureau's role was crucial to ensuring that "the old policies of antagonism, belligerency, and warfare must give way to the policies of cooperation, mutual understanding, and peace."⁹

Linking morality and business gain, Meeker stressed the need for constructive approaches for dealing with the human factor in industry. As he expressed it, "The dissemination of information bearing on labor, the presentation of the facts which will enable employers to contrast the statistical results of the different systems and methods of dealing with labor, is of the utmost importance and benefit to business." The Bureau's publications "have aided business immeasurably by showing that the employer who deals justly with his workers can produce better goods and services at lower prices than the employer who depends for his profits upon low wages, long hours, and bad working conditions."¹⁰

But much remained to be done. He wrote, "Managers generally seem to regard the workman as a peculiar kind of peripatetic machine which installs and removes itself when and where needed without cost to the employer, needs no oil or attention, and scarcely ever is worth

conserving or safeguarding because so easily replaceable when broken or worn out."¹¹

Meeker viewed unemployment as one of the great hazards of life and felt that government had a larger responsibility toward the unemployed than merely "handing out bread and soup. . . ." He favored the establishment of a nationwide system of public employment offices with "the responsibility for the furnishing of suitable employment for all the unemployed, not merely jobs to the jobless, but economically paying jobs—jobs that pay an American living wage to American workmen."¹²

Meeker set forth his views on this issue in his 1919 testimony supporting a national employment system: "I take it that every man and woman born in the United States is entitled to the privilege of earning a living, and that his job or her job should not be dependent upon any private fee-charging agency whatsoever. . . . It should be the first and foremost policy of our National Government to see to it that every potential worker is an actual worker every working day of the year outside needed vacation time."¹³

He was also concerned with protecting workers against other hazards. Asserting that "social insurance against property losses" was more common in this country than "insurance against personal hazards of workers or those in the lower income groups," Meeker argued that the laboring man should be protected against the hazards of accident, illness, unemployment, invalidity and old age, and death. He came to view such insurance as one of the necessities of life, just like food, clothing, and shelter—and as "essentially a public function" which "should be operated as a social enterprise." "I do not happen to be a socialist," he declared, "but, if it is socialism to provide adequate protection to the lives, health, and well-being of our working population, then let us have some more of the same."¹⁴

In Meeker's view, workmen's compensation provided not only a rightful and proper protection for the laborer but also an economic benefit to business and to society at large. Accidents had always occurred in industry, but the workers had had to shoulder the burden of this cost of production. However, said Meeker, the advent of workmen's compensation had wrought a miracle. Because compensation laws prompted safer and more efficient production methods—as managers sought to avoid the cost of claims—they encouraged gener-

ally better business practices. And the bitterest critics of compensation had become its strongest friends.¹⁵

Meeker's recommendations for workmen's compensation could be summed up in two words—compulsory and universal. The plans should be funded by the States and operated as a State monopoly or a State-controlled mutual benefit society from which all private casualty companies were excluded. And the plans should cover occupational poisons and diseases and compensate for permanent disabilities.¹⁶

He laid out six "minimum requirements" for the system. First, industry and government should concentrate on preventing accidents. When injuries occurred, the worker must be assured of adequate medical, surgical, and hospital care to cure or restore him as completely as possible. The injured worker should receive adequate compensation for himself and his family. When ready to return to work, he should be retrained, if necessary, for suitable employment. He should then be placed in an appropriate job. And, at proper intervals, he should be reexamined to make sure that the injury had responded to treatment.¹⁷

Meeker had expressed definite views on child labor before becoming Commissioner, apparently influenced by his work in the charities and prisons of New Jersey. Although, like his predecessor, he opposed child labor on moral grounds, Meeker recognized some fundamental economic necessities. Thus, while supporting restrictions on child labor, he also preached the need to improve education and training. In requiring school attendance and prohibiting factory work for children, society must also assure the quality of their education. "We must be sure that our schools are at least as good educational institutions as our factories," Meeker warned.¹⁸

Meeker advocated a strong, state-controlled school system. In an article in *The New York Times* in April 1913, he called for the compulsory public education of all children through the intermediate grades. All would be "busy preparing for the great business of living," with some beginning to learn trades, others, engineering professions or general culture.¹⁹ He believed that many of the community's problems with crime and pauperism could be traced to an inadequate school system. As part of the remedy, he suggested vocational education, arguing that proper training in conjunction with counseling would help alleviate unemployment problems by giving guidance and resources to the unskilled.²⁰

He favored some form of compulsory civic service for youth and proposed that, as "an antidote and partial substitute for militarism," all youth on completion of secondary or technical school be required to enter the service of the state for a period, serving in private employment, government factories, farms, and mines. In addition to aiding youth "to find themselves and to select more intelligently a vocation in life," such service would diminish industrial strife by "giving sons and daughters of luxury a saving knowledge of blisters, backaches, and hunger, the first fruits of manual labor."²¹

Meeker supported government action to protect workers, viewing the state of trade union organization as inadequate. However, he considered unions to be beneficial institutions, at one time even proposing that the state oblige "every laboring man to belong to a union, discriminating against non-unionism to the extent of actually prohibiting it. . . . Wages and hours of labor would not be fixed by inflexible statutory enactment, but by bargaining between employers and employees in approximately equal terms."²²

Shortly before he left office in 1920, Meeker warned of the growing bitterness in labor-management relations, lamenting the inability to carry over the cooperative relationships of the war years into peacetime. He cited the British experience of securing worker representation on joint industrial councils and works committees. At home, he saw the resumption of employer opposition to unions and little prospect for continuing such wartime efforts as worker representation on shop committees. "We are today exactly where the British were about 30 years ago," he stated. Meeker's conclusion was more an appeal: "Before abandoning ourselves completely to pessimism and despair, we should at least try the experiment of giving the workers a real voice and responsibility in management."²³

Securing the Bureau's place

Meeker entered the Bureau at a time when government agencies were proliferating in response to specialized demands. One of his continuing concerns was to secure a clear jurisdiction for the Bureau, both within the new Department of Labor and in the growing Federal establishment. At the same time, he sought to establish cooperative arrangements so as to avoid duplication and provide uniformity in the statistical work of government agencies.

The Bureau in the Department of Labor

Meeker maintained effective relations throughout his tenure with Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson and Assistant Secretary Louis F. Post and, during the war years, with Special Assistant Felix Frankfurter. To a degree, this was helped by the early establishment of the Department Committee on Correlation, under Post, to coordinate the activities of the bureaus within the Department and to work with other departments and commissions on matters relating to labor.

In the new Department, the Bureau retained its old responsibilities for labor-associated statistics. In addition, it was given some oversight of the statistical work of other bureaus. Also, the Committee on Correlation set up agreements and procedures to avoid disputes between the Department's agencies. BLS negotiated one such agreement with the Children's Bureau on statistics relating to wage-earning children and another with the Secretary's Office on procedures for administering the Federal workmen's compensation system.²⁴

During the period, several bills were introduced to create a Bureau of Labor Safety in the Department of Labor, one as early as July 1913.²⁵ Both the interest of the Department and BLS in the field of safety and their reluctance to see a new agency established were apparent in their correspondence with Congress on the bills. In August 1913, Secretary Wilson wrote Rep. David J. Lewis, Chairman of the House Committee on Labor, that "much useful work would be performed" by such a bureau but emphasized that the Bureau of Labor Statistics had "for a long time" studied accident statistics, accident prevention, and compensation, and had issued many reports and bulletins on the subject. The proposed new bureau was not established.²⁶

Meeker also faced an active campaign by women's groups to establish a separate agency to deal with women's issues. BLS had had a women's division since 1911, but its studies had been limited by the failure of Congress to make appropriations for the work. Further, the women's advocates wanted an agency which would actively promote social reform rather than merely present statistical information. In 1916, Zip S. Falk, Executive Secretary of the Consumers League of the District of Columbia, wrote Secretary Wilson that women wanted to show "the human story of wage earning women." The Bureau, she said, published its reports in "an exclusively statistical form." And Edith Abbott wrote that the Bureau's 19-volume report on working women and children constituted a superior collection of facts, but a

"commission inquiry would in all probability have been vastly more useful in promoting improvements in the condition of the working women and children." Abbott cited the New York State Factory Investigation Commission as an example of what she and her friends wanted—constructive publicity, not just dry facts.²⁷

Initially, Secretary Wilson and the Bureau opposed the creation of a separate agency. Ethelbert Stewart, Meeker's second in command, argued that the Bureau of Labor Statistics had had a women's division for several years and that establishment of a separate agency would cause "duplication or conflict of jurisdiction." Besides, he said, women's concerns were part of general labor issues. The better procedure, he explained, would be to create by statute a women's division within BLS and to appropriate sufficient funds.²⁸

At first, Secretary Wilson supported the Bureau's position, but the arguments of the women's advocates apparently impressed him, for he soon changed his mind. Upon "mature consideration," Wilson wrote to Rep. Lewis, "there is a vast field for investigation and study which specially and peculiarly affects women in industry which could be more effectively handled under the immediate direction of women than under the direction of men."²⁹

The House Committee recommended passage of a bill to establish a separate agency, finding that the lack of statutory support had made for limited funding of the women's division in BLS and uncertainty over its continued existence, finally resulting in successive resignations from the position of division chief.³⁰

Meeker reluctantly altered his views. In 1916 he wrote to Mary Van Kleeck, "As Congress seems disinclined to grant larger appropriations and larger salaries in the Bureau of Labor Statistics, I think the only thing for the women of the country to do in order to bring about the proper consideration of women in industry is to advocate the establishment of a Women's Bureau."³¹

Congress failed to act, however, and Meeker sought funds for special studies of women in industry and to create the statutory position of chief of the women's division, but with little success. In July 1918, Secretary Wilson established the Woman in Industry Service as part of the War Labor Administration, and, in 1920, with Meeker's full support, Congress created the separate Women's Bureau.³²

The Bureau in the Federal establishment

Shortly after taking office, Meeker wrote Joseph P. Tumulty, private secretary to the President, asking for an appointment with Wilson to discuss his plans for the Bureau. He wanted to know if the Bureau's program "trespasses upon the preserves of any other department or bureau." He also expressed concern that Congress might create additional bureaus and commissions in disregard of the already existing bureaus.³³

For several years, Meeker complained to congressional committees about duplication of work by government agencies. In 1914, he pointed out to the House Appropriations Committee, "There are no less than five governmental agencies that are commissioned by law to investigate the cost of living." And he wrote the President that Congress had ordered the Commerce Department to investigate the cause of rising food prices, emphasizing that only BLS collected retail prices on a regular basis and that, in fact, Commerce had turned to BLS for assistance. A little later, Meeker criticized Commerce for publishing material on wholesale prices: "The work that they do is but a small segment of the work that we are doing in wholesale prices."³⁴

On several occasions, the Bureau complained of intrusions by the Treasury Department's Public Health Service. Stewart charged that the Public Health Service had begun studies of occupational diseases 5 or 6 years after the Bureau had done similar work for the study on women and children. He called the action "a deliberate infringement" and "an act of trespass" upon the functions of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Before the Senate Appropriations Committee, both Meeker and Stewart criticized the Public Health Service: "They are not well fitted to do that thing. . . . Their statistics are extremely inaccurate and unreliable because they do not know the occupations."

In 1918, Meeker cautioned Secretary Wilson about an Executive Order proposed by the Secretary of the Treasury concerning the functions of the Public Health Service, alerting Wilson to the potential threat to Bureau programs. Yet during the war, the Bureau joined with the Public Health Service in a study of health problems arising from industrial poisons. Despite his continuing concerns, Meeker saw "no reason why there should not be full and cordial cooperation between the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Public Health Service."³⁵

Meeker also fought for a role for the Bureau in developing resources for industrial education. In February 1914, he wrote Tumulty that Congress had established a commission to investigate the field and also noted that the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education sought a separate investigation. In view of those activities, he wanted to make the President aware of the Bureau's efforts on the subject. As "the only Federal agency that has ever made a comprehensive study of industrial and vocational education and guidance," his Bureau deserved the work, Meeker argued, pointing out that BLS had made the pioneering studies and had invented the terminology.³⁶

Ethelbert Stewart expressed like concerns in writing the Secretary about the new Federal child labor law. He stated that parents must be convinced that they would profit by keeping their children in school because of the child's increased earning power. This meant that schools must make the hope a reality. Training should reflect employment opportunities, and the Department of Labor should have the functions of developing both the national employment offices and the vocational training resources.³⁷

Early in 1915, at the President's instruction, Meeker wrote a confidential memorandum outlining the major cases of overlapping and duplication in the Federal establishment. He listed six agencies competing with BLS: The Bureau of Mines of the Department of the Interior, for accidents in the iron and steel industry; the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce of the Department of Commerce, for wages and prices; the Public Health Service, for occupational health and diseases; the Forest Service and the Bureau of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture, for industrial poisons; and the Bureau of Education, for vocational education.³⁸ In 1917, the Secretary of Labor pointed out several of these in his report to Congress on harmonizing the work of the various government agencies.³⁹

Meeker used various forums to stress the importance of cooperation. In 1914, he told the National Safety Council, "We must get governmental agencies to work together. I regard that as my principal job." At the American Economic Association meeting in December 1914, he commented, "I sincerely hope that the proposed joint committee of the Economic Association and the Statistical Society to advise with the statistical Bureaus of the government will be appointed. Unnecessary duplication of statistical work should be elim-

inated, and the statistical methods used should be standardized and made uniform."⁴⁰

The Bureau and State agencies

Meeker tried to improve communications with and among State agencies as well. He wanted to make the Bureau "the center for the dissemination of useful information regarding developments in the industrial field, to cooperate with the State agencies, and to secure their cooperation in making labor studies. . . ." ⁴¹ "I have, it seems to me, a very excellent plan which covers cooperation between my Bureau and the various State agencies that deal with labor matters. . . . You do the work, and I will reap the glory," he suggested to the Association of Governmental Labor Officials in 1915. More seriously, he declared his intention to eliminate duplication, to develop information where it was lacking, and to establish uniform statistical definitions and methods.⁴²

When unemployment became a major public concern in 1914, the Bureau began a continuing cooperative relationship with the American Association of Public Employment Offices and regularly published its proceedings. In addressing the association, Meeker cited the need for national and local information on the employed and unemployed, including industrial and occupational detail. He suggested that the States were better able to obtain and furnish such information and indicated the kinds of information to be sought from trade unions and employers.⁴³ In 1916, shortly after the Bureau began its employment series, it arranged with the New York State Department of Labor for the mutual use of the employment data collected by that agency.

The Bureau's work: Meeker's first term

Price indexes

One of Meeker's first projects was revision of the index numbers of retail and wholesale prices. He later commented, "Long before I took charge of the Bureau, I had become very suspicious of the Bureau's index numbers, especially its retail price index. . . . Before I had got settled in the saddle, I set about to revise and recalculate the index numbers published by the Bureau." He called upon his fellow economists; Irving Fisher and Wesley C. Mitchell were among the few who

responded with helpful suggestions. He later thanked them especially: "Had it not been for the sympathy, encouragement, and counsel of Professors Mitchell and Fisher, I should not have had the courage to carry out the recasting of the Bureau's index numbers."⁴⁴

The Bureau expanded retail price coverage in 1914. To obtain a more realistic measure of changes in workers' living costs, it increased the number of food items priced and added several cloth and clothing items. By 1917, retail prices were collected in 46 cities, as against 39 formerly; for 28 food items, as against 15 earlier; for the new category of dry goods, 8 items; and, in addition, for anthracite and bituminous coal and gas for domestic use.

Also, the method of computation of the indexes was altered by shifting the base from 1890-1900 to the most recent year and developing a chain index, making year-to-year comparisons easier. Actual prices, rather than averages of relative prices (percentages), were now used in determining relative change. The Bureau explained the reason for the new method: "When averages of averages of relative prices are thus piled up, it becomes difficult to comprehend the meaning of the final average." Under the new system, "A percentage based on average or aggregate *actual* prices of a commodity reflects more accurately the changes in the cost of that commodity."⁴⁵

The wholesale price index underwent a parallel revision. In 1914, the Bureau increased the number of price quotations to 340, defined the commodities more accurately, and included more markets. Previously unweighted, the index was now weighted by value (price multiplied by quantity marketed) based on the 1909 censuses of manufactures and agriculture. Indexes were rebased and computed in the same fashion as for retail prices. The Bureau published its new wholesale price index in 1915, along with Wesley C. Mitchell's classic essay, "The Making and Using of Index Numbers."

The influences of both Fisher and Mitchell were apparent in the price index revisions. Fisher advocated chain indexes as more easily comparable than those on fixed bases. Also, Fisher believed that the wholesale price index could be computed from a relatively small number of commodities. Mitchell agreed that chain indexes were more accurate than fixed-base measures and that the series should be an aggregate of actual prices weighted according to the quantities marketed. However, he differed with Fisher about the size of the survey

field: "The more commodities that can be included in such an index number the better, provided that the system of weighting is sound."⁴⁶

Years later, before the American Statistical Association, Meeker recommended further improvements in the wholesale index: "In my view, the best way to achieve the 'best index number' is, first, to secure more trustworthy and more representative prices from (1) producers and (2) jobbers and wholesalers, and, secondly, to obtain more accurate statistics and estimates of quantities of goods produced, imported, exported, and consumed."⁴⁷

Meeker early showed an interest in developing an international system of price statistics. In January 1914, the Bureau wrote to the Senate Appropriations Committee that negotiations were underway with England, France, and Canada. In March, Meeker wrote the President, "Plans for putting international statistics upon a common basis have proceeded so far that I think it highly desirable that I go to Europe to confer in person with the leading statisticians there." He made the trip, but the outbreak of war in Europe prevented any further work on the project.⁴⁸

Wage studies

Shortly after resuming its program of industry wage studies, the Bureau was collecting payroll data for all industries that employed at least 75,000 workers. The Bureau surveyed nine major industry groups: Cotton, wool, and silk; lumber, millwork, and furniture; boots and shoes; hosiery and knit goods; iron and steel; cigars; men's clothing; slaughtering and meatpacking; and steam railroad cars.

The 1913 study on the cotton, wool, and silk industries gave hourly wage rates and nominal full-time hours per week. The 1914 study for the same industries added data on full-time weekly earnings. Moreover, in line with revisions in the retail and wholesale price indexes, the weighting system for the wage indexes was changed. The new industry relative was constructed as an aggregate compiled directly from employment data rather than as a relative of relatives.

Another innovation in the wage studies was the collection of data on the extent and regularity of employment. In a study of the hosiery industry, the Bureau introduced the concept "variation in employment during the year," appearing in other industry studies as "fluctuations in employment during the year" and "volume of employment."

Productivity measures also were introduced. A study of the lumber and millwork industry in 1915 presented output per one-man hour, cost per one-man hour, and cost per 1,000 board feet produced for logging and saw mill operations. For the boot and shoe industry, data were presented on "time and labor cost, by occupations in the manufacture of 100 pairs of welt shoes, the rate of wages or earnings per hour, and the number of pairs worked on per hour."

In 1913, the Bureau published union scales of wages and hours for 1907 to 1912 for more than 40 trades in 39 important industrial cities. The material consisted of time rates as stipulated in written agreements and trade union records made available to Bureau agents by local union officials. Later, the series was expanded to cover 56 cities in 35 States for 11 industry groups, and over 100 trades and occupations. The Bureau also constructed index numbers of wages in the trades and occupations covered, which it compared to retail food price indexes as a cost-of-living measure.

In addition to its regular reports, the Bureau was called upon for special wage studies. In 1914, workers in fish canneries around Seattle requested an investigation of wage conditions which the Bureau had to refuse because of a lack of funds. That same year, the Bureau gathered data on wages and conditions in street railways when a strike in Indianapolis pointed up the lack of available information. During the summer and fall of 1915, the Bureau conducted a special investigation for the Joint Committee on Printing. The Joint Committee was considering pay scales at the Government Printing Office, and the Bureau surveyed wages and hours from employer payroll records in the printing and binding trades in 179 establishments in 26 cities and presented those findings along with the union wage rates for the same occupations and the same cities.⁴⁹

Cost-of-living studies

When Meeker came to the Bureau, retail price data were being used to set wage rates for some government work, as, for example, at the Government Printing Office and the Washington Navy Yard. In testifying on the data, Meeker said, "In order to settle upon what is a fair and reasonable wage, it is necessary to know what a dollar will buy and this is the most accurate information available to both trades-union men and to employers. . . ." However, since the Bureau had last collected expenditure data in 1901-03, the existing budget information

was obsolete: "It is, in my judgment, extremely necessary that, as soon as possible, provision be made for a new budget survey."⁵⁰

In 1914, the Senate Committee on Education and Labor reported in favor of authorizing the Department of Labor to develop information on the cost of living in the District of Columbia. Meeker had indicated that the proposed survey would cover only nongovernment workers, and that existing Bureau resources would not be adequate for the study.⁵¹ The Senate did not take further action, however. In 1916, Meeker testified that a survey would be helpful in determining a minimum wage level but that it would also help answer the pressing question: "What does it cost the American family to live?"⁵² Finally, in December 1916, Congress appropriated \$6,000 for the investigation.

The first phase of the study consisted of the collection of data on budgets of 2,110 families in the District during the first half of 1917. In the second phase, the Bureau studied the income and expenditures of 600 white women earning wages of under \$1,100 a year. As the third phase, in cooperation with the Office of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau conducted a dietary study of 31 families.⁵³

Beginning in October 1917, the *Monthly Labor Review* carried a series of articles presenting the findings, one of which was that ". . . a very considerable proportion of the low-income families of Washington do not buy enough food to maintain the family members in health and strength." Among the wage-earning women, the Bureau found that the majority "were not only working at distressingly low wages, but a very large proportion of them were women who had been wage earners for many years." William F. Ogburn, after an intensive examination of 200 of the budgets, declared that an average family of man, wife, and three children under the age of 10 needed an income of at least \$1,155 to say out of debt.⁵⁴ The Bureau published a cost-of-living index for the District in 1919, and, in 1921, added it to the list of cities included in the national index.

Industrial relations

The Bureau investigated several major labor disputes during Meeker's early days in office. Secretary Wilson called on Ethelbert Stewart in the fall of 1913 to mediate a coal mining dispute involving the Rockefeller interests in Colorado. Later the same year, Meeker sent Walter B. Palmer, who had investigated earlier troubles in Colorado and

Pennsylvania, into Michigan for information on a copper strike led by the Western Federation of Miners. But such assignments became infrequent once the new Mediation and Conciliation Service was fully organized and were not a regular Bureau function as they were under Neill.

The Bureau continued to report extensively on collective bargaining developments. From 1913 through 1916, it published five bulletins on the subject; four of these were on collective bargaining in New York City—three on the garment industry and one on the building trades.

In 1915, the Bureau resumed publication of data on the number of strikes and lockouts, including causes and results, based on public sources.

Employment and unemployment

Meeker's deep concern for the problems of employment and unemployment reflected the growing awareness that the United States lagged far behind other industrial countries in dealing with unemployment as a broad social and economic problem. As Neill had stated in 1912 at an international conference on unemployment, "The subject of unemployment has, up to the present time, received but a limited amount of attention in this country."⁵⁵

The recession of 1913-14 spurred the Bureau to consider studies on unemployment. In early 1914, Meeker met with Gompers and Morrison of the AFL about possible projects on unemployment which the Bureau could undertake. But later in the year Meeker had to inform Gompers that the Bureau had done no work because Congress had failed to provide funds.⁵⁶ In requesting appropriations, Meeker had testified: "We have not anything that is worth the paper it is written on on the question of unemployment in this country, and, my heavens, it is up to this Bureau. . . to find out the facts."⁵⁷

During the winter of 1914-15, however, the Committee on Unemployment formed by Mayor John P. Mitchell called upon the Bureau for a series of field surveys of unemployment in New York City. The committee had collected data from employers on the number employed in a week of December 1914 and for the corresponding week of December 1913. At about the same time, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, in cooperation with the Mayor's Committee, had surveyed its industrial policyholders in Greater New York. At

the request of the committee, with personnel borrowed from the U.S. Immigration Bureau and the New York City Tenement House Inspection Service, the Bureau covered over 100 city blocks and some 3,700 individual tenement houses in January and February 1915. It found an unemployment rate of 16.2 percent, which approximated the 18-percent rate reported by Metropolitan. The results were published by the Bureau in *Unemployment in New York City, New York*.⁵⁸

Meeker then contracted with Metropolitan for studies in 16 cities in the East and Middle West and in 12 Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast cities. In August and September 1915, at the urging of the Mayor's Committee, both the Bureau and Metropolitan conducted surveys in New York City for a second time. The results of this work were presented in 1916 in a Bureau publication, *Unemployment in the United States*.⁵⁹

Meeker declared of the program: "These studies constitute the beginning of what should be carried as a regular series of reports. . . . The Bureau of Labor Statistics should be in a position to give the fullest information to employers, employees, and the public as to numbers employed and unemployed." And he complained of congressional parsimony: "It is a great pity that no provision has yet been made for the collection and publication of statistics of unemployment by the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics."⁶⁰

Meeker gave several reasons for the continuing unemployment, foremost among them being immigrant labor which had, he said, poured into the country and had caused congestion in many labor markets. Furthermore, he argued, many corporations followed the deliberate policy of keeping "40 men waiting in line outside the gates of their plants for every possible job that might be open in their establishment." In addition, "overspeeded industries" contributed greatly to labor turnover.⁶¹

The Bureau's work on unemployment was only a temporary effort, overwhelmed by the demands of wartime, which turned labor surpluses into labor shortages. The lasting effect of the work, however, was that the Bureau did undertake a statistical program to reflect changes in employment levels. Beginning with five industries in October and November 1915, the Bureau introduced the monthly series, "Amount of employment in certain industries," beginning publication in January 1916. This was the start of the Bureau's establishment series on employment and total payrolls. Meeker could say later that

these were the only official figures on employment and unemployment.⁶²

The work on unemployment also led the Bureau to the study of labor turnover. As Ethelbert Stewart explained, the Secretary directed the Bureau to study unemployment, and the Bureau found that the problem of unemployment was seriously complicated by "men hunting for jobs, by the shifting of the labor force."⁶³

Labor turnover studies became integral elements of the Bureau's support of constructive employment practices by management. Meeker commented on the abysmal ignorance of employers regarding costs to their companies and to men and machines "of the ill-devised and shockingly wasteful system of 'hiring and firing' men in a steady stream with no attempt to try them out, fit them in, train them and keep them."⁶⁴

Meeker and the Bureau actively supported those employers exploring avenues for the regularization of employment through the periodic national meetings of the Conference of Employment Managers, predecessor of the American Management Association. The Bureau published the conference proceedings from 1916 through 1918. Meeker said that, "Like all meritorious movements, this movement to promote the more intelligent treatment of laborers has spread until it has become nationwide."⁶⁵ He stressed that employers could derive the greatest benefit from their wage payments by "shortening the working-day, providing rest periods at convenient intervals, advancing piece and time rates, cutting out all over-time, re-creating in the employee an interest in the job he is doing and helping him to get the most out of his earnings and leisure."⁶⁶

The Bureau made several additional early contributions to the study of turnover with work on the seasonality and irregularity of employment in the women's clothing industries, in support of an effort by those industries in New York City to obtain better information on the question. Extensive field investigations in 1915-16 and a wartime study in 1918 provided the basis for summaries later published in the *Monthly Labor Review* as "Mobility of Labor in American Industry."

In 1916-17, the Bureau collected information on corporate welfare plans from 430 employers in an effort to spread information on ways to reduce turnover by improving working conditions. Also, the

Review carried many articles on specific plans in various companies and industries.

Social insurance

Royal Meeker's interest in social insurance showed in much of his work at the Bureau, for he defined it very broadly to encompass most forms of protective legislation for workers. In 1916, he wrote the President to suggest "bold action on social insurance" that would include a model law for the District of Columbia and Federal employees as well as protection for all workers in interstate commerce. Pointing to the high infant mortality and accident rates, he urged establishment of national health insurance and made a strong appeal for support for safety programs.⁶⁷

Workmen's compensation. As under Wright and Neill, the Bureau continued to publicize and encourage experiments and improvements in workmen's compensation programs. The Bureau regularly presented materials in the *Monthly Labor Review* covering State legislation and experience. In addition, it published a series of bulletins on workmen's compensation laws and programs in the United States and foreign countries.

Between 1908 and 1916, the Bureau had direct responsibility for administering the program of workmen's compensation for Federal employees. From his earliest days at the Bureau, Meeker sought to have this responsibility transferred. Meanwhile, he suggested improvements in the system. In his 1915 report to the Secretary, he listed several administrative reforms that should be enacted. He also wrote the President about shortcomings in the program. His complaints included administrative confusion, in that Congress had established three separate systems covering different groups of Federal workers. Yet he found "the most glaring inadequacy of the present law" to be its failure to include all employees of the government. The second greatest weakness, in his view, lay in the failure to cover occupational diseases. In 1916, after considering several proposals, Congress created the separate Federal Employees' Compensation Board to administer the system.⁶⁸

Industrial safety and health. Actively continuing the efforts begun under Neill to improve industrial safety and health conditions,

Meeker combined research into effects and exposures with efforts to establish a uniform system of statistical reporting. In a letter to Presidential secretary Joseph Tumulty in February 1914, Meeker set forth his view of the Bureau's role: "It seems to me imperative that the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics should act as a central clearing-house for State agencies, for the purpose of standardizing accident and occupational disease statistics. This Bureau should be in a position to furnish at any time advice as to the best methods of preventing industrial accidents and occupational diseases."⁶⁹

In Meeker's opinion, the Bureau, rather than any other agency or private firm, should be able to say where the hazard lay, just what the danger was, and how best to remedy the situation.

Meeker and Charles H. Verrill of the Bureau staff worked with a committee of the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions to develop standard methods and definitions for reporting accidents. "No one State has yet published statistics that are at all adequate to its own needs, and no two States have produced results that are in any way comparable." To help remedy the lack of adequate statistics, the committee recommended systems for classification by industry; by cause, location, and nature of injury; and by extent of disability. The Bureau offered to tabulate and publish State accident statistics and also provided the committee with the benefit of its experience in developing severity rates for the iron and steel and machine-building industries.⁷⁰

The Bureau established cooperative arrangements for reporting accidents with the States of Massachusetts, Ohio, and New York, hoping to extend such arrangements, and it continued the close relationship with the National Safety Council begun under Neill. Meeker at one time served as chairman of the Committee on Standard Forms for Accident Reporting, and, in 1916, he was elected chairman of the Governmental Section.

With the cooperation of insurance companies, Frederick L. Hoffman produced *Industrial Accident Statistics* in 1915, which presented data from the Prudential Insurance Company as well as from the Census Bureau, several States, and three foreign countries. In 1917, the Bureau published Louis I. Dublin's *Causes of Death by Occupation*, which gave figures from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's Industrial Department.

The Bureau also continued to publish pioneering studies by Alice Hamilton on exposure to industrial poisons, especially in the lead industry. Hamilton also wrote on industrial poisons in the rubber and explosives industries. The publication of the report on the explosives industry in 1917 proved especially opportune, coming as it did when "the enormous expansion in the industry. . . has drawn thousands of green workers into occupations which subject them to serious or fatal poisoning."⁷¹

In addition, the Bureau published a study by John B. Andrews on anthrax as an occupational disease, a report by Lucian W. Chaney and Hugh S. Hanna on the safety movement in the iron and steel industry, and one by Arthur R. Perry on preventable death in cotton manufacturing.

Meeker acknowledged, however, that much remained to be done. In 1920, shortly before leaving office, he told the Pennsylvania Safety Congress, "It is a shameful confession to be obliged to make, but we don't know whether the net result of our efforts to reduce industrial accidents has been more accidents or fewer accidents, a greater or a smaller loss in disability time." He then urged more effort to establish uniformity in definitions, statistics, coverage, and compensation, work which the Bureau continued.⁷²

The second term: Statistics for wartime needs

When the United States entered the war in April 1917, the state of Federal statistics was "woefully incomplete and inadequate." Bernard Baruch, Chairman of the War Industries Board, later observed that "the greatest deterrent to effective action" during the war was the lack of facts.⁷³ Problems in gathering timely statistics were complicated by the competing demands of the many independent statistical bureaus. The multiplication of questionnaires became so great by mid-1918 that complaints from respondents mounted.⁷⁴

The need for coordination became increasingly evident, but there was debate as to which agency should have the responsibility. Both Baruch's War Industries Board and the Labor Department's War Labor Policies Board, headed by Felix Frankfurter, discussed the issue. One proposal called for establishment of a temporary organization in the Bureau of Labor Statistics to collect, compile, and distribute labor statistics for the needs of the various departments and war agencies.

However, the gathering and distribution of industrial statistics—including labor statistics—was placed under the charge of the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics of the War Industries Board, with arrangements for coordination between the Central Bureau and Meeker.⁷⁵ While BLS did not obtain the principal coordinating role, its responsibility for labor statistics was recognized and enhanced.

Cost-of-living studies and standard budgets

The demands of the wartime economy finally permitted Meeker to achieve his long-sought goal of a new, comprehensive consumer expenditure survey. Throughout the war, the government was concerned with the manner in which wages could be adjusted for the rising cost of living. Thus, the August 1917 agreement between the Emergency Fleet Corporation and the AFL Metal Trades Department, which established the Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Board, stated that the Board would “keep itself fully informed as to the relation between living costs in the several districts, and their comparison between progressive periods of time.”⁷⁶

Great Britain had set an early example for revision of cost-of-living measurement during wartime. At first, wage adjustments were based on the retail prices of food, but these were found unsuitable in a time of rapidly changing prices, even with more frequent publication. In June 1916, the British Board of Trade produced a new index number covering all groups of expenditures and representing the “average cost of living of the working classes.”⁷⁷

In the United States, proposals for adjustments tied to an index figured prominently in policy discussions. Some means of achieving stability in purchasing power had been discussed by economists even before the war. Meeker and Irving Fisher had corresponded on the subject as early as 1912. At that time, Fisher had promoted the concept of a “stabilized” or “compensated” dollar to obtain constancy in purchasing power by adjusting “the number of grains [of gold] which go to make a dollar.” The change would be determined, according to Fisher, “by index numbers of prices, such as those of . . . the United States Bureau of Labor.”⁷⁸

Fisher again promoted the idea as the war economy heated up, focusing on the use of a price index to adjust wages for the increased cost of living. In May 1917, he wrote Assistant Secretary of Labor Post to propose a “half-way” plan for salary adjustment. Fisher suggested

that, since food prices rose twice as fast as general prices, adjustment should be set at half the rise in the Bureau’s retail food price index number. This would, he argued, secure “rough justice.” Meeker rejected the assumption that all items rose at one-half the increase in food prices, recommending instead that wages be adjusted up or down according to the full rise or fall in the food index. That is, until a further investigation into the retail prices of nonfood commodities could be made, the index numbers of retail prices of food should be considered as representing changes in the cost of living.⁷⁹

In the meantime, Meeker pressed to begin work on surveys of the cost of living of families in shipbuilding centers for the Shipbuilding Board. In December 1917, he estimated his need at \$50,000 to conduct the surveys, and the President allocated the sum from his National Security and Defense Fund. In May 1918, the President granted Meeker’s request for another \$25,000 to complete the surveys.⁸⁰

During the early months of 1918, the Bureau scrambled to conduct the surveys in 18 shipbuilding centers, covering family expenditures in 1917 and 1918. The Shipbuilding Board put the results to immediate use in setting uniform national wage rates for most of the skilled shipyard trades.⁸¹

In February 1918, Henry R. Seager of the Shipbuilding Board wrote Post that the Board relied on the Bureau of Labor Statistics for authoritative data on changes in the cost of living and that it would seriously consider using index numbers if the Bureau decided officially to establish index numbers of changes in the cost of living of wage earners in different parts of the country. He noted, however, that Meeker was not yet prepared to undertake the task because of the technical difficulties and said that the Board would wait for the Bureau to take the initiative.⁸²

In March, the policy was developed under which the tripartite National War Labor Board was to administer wartime labor-management relations. Strikes and lockouts were prohibited, and, of particular significance for the Bureau’s programs, prevailing wages and working conditions in localities were to be considered in fixing wages. But the “right of all workers, including common laborers, to a living wage” was declared, with minimum rates “which will insure the subsistence of the worker and his family in health and reasonable comfort.”⁸³

By August, the Secretary of Labor supported an indexing scheme as the way of standardizing and stabilizing wages. He wrote the President, expressing the need for "properly weighted family budgets prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and a record made monthly of the changes in the cost of living, the wage rate to rise or fall during the ensuing month one cent per hour for each change of eight cents per day in the cost of living shown by the investigations made by the Bureau."⁸⁴

By June, the National War Labor Board was calling for nationwide data on the cost of living, and the Bureau, with an allocation of \$300,000 from the President, began on the larger task. Meeker pointed out how the new survey would provide much better information than the earlier surveys of shipbuilding centers. Those studies were done in haste, he said, with time not available to calculate new weights based on quantities consumed, so the old 1901 weights had been used. Also, the number of articles priced was not adequate; miscellaneous items of expenditure were not priced at all. Further, specifications for individual items had not been adequately developed to insure future pricing of identical or closely related items. And the shipbuilding centers were too few and too untypical to be representative of the country as a whole.⁸⁵

The national study was conducted in 1918-19. Some 12,000 families with incomes of about \$900 to \$2,500 in 92 cities in 42 States were surveyed. More than 300 agents visited the homes of wage earners and "small" salaried workers, and, on the basis of interviews with housewives, obtained information on expenditures and income for a 1-year period between July 1917 and February 1919. Data were collected on quantities purchased, as well as costs, in contrast to the 1901 expenditure study, which had covered only costs. Information obtained by interview was frequently checked against daily expense accounts maintained by the housewives over at least a 5-week period.

The first results of the survey appeared in an article in the *Monthly Labor Review* in May 1919, with others following for the several regions. These presented "average yearly expense per family" for food, clothing, rent, fuel and light, furniture, and miscellaneous, along with "total average yearly expenses per family."

In releasing the results, Meeker acknowledged their shortcomings. It was unfortunate, he said, that the study had to be conducted in an abnormal period. "Many families not only economized on clothes

and house furnishings but actually skimped themselves on food," Meeker stated, "both because of the high prices and because of the intense Liberty Loan drives."⁸⁶

The data showed, Meeker stated, that there was no American standard of living that provided "all the necessaries, many of the comforts, and a goodly supply of the luxuries of life." Instead, there were many different standards depending on the income and size of families. The lot of lower income families was especially hard. They needed, he said, higher wages and cheaper food, clothing, houses, medical treatment, and insurance. He concluded, "Let us make the minimum living standard in America one that will support life in decency and health."⁸⁷

While finding the cost-of-living report "generally illuminating," *The New York Times* disagreed with Meeker: "The Bureau of Labor Statistics cannot be accused of countenancing an unjust wage for the American workman. Quite the contrary, its tendency is to raise an ideal standard, a standard incapable of being realized in any nation, and especially in the present acute industrial crisis."⁸⁸

In 1919, shortly after publishing the results of the expenditure survey, the Bureau issued its initial report on changes in the cost of living—its first comprehensive set of cost-of-living indexes for the Nation and for major industrial and shipbuilding centers. Thereafter, indexes were issued semiannually for the Nation as a whole and for 31 cities. Pricing for 1913-17, the period preceding the expenditure survey, was based on records of retail establishments in the 18 shipbuilding centers. Beginning with December 1917, the Bureau regularly collected data in the 31 major industrial and shipbuilding centers for about 145 commodities and services. Washington, D.C., was added in 1921.⁸⁹

Later, an academic critique of cost-of-living studies in the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* concluded that, while economists had for several years debated the difficulties of constructing a cost-of-living index, the substantial correspondence of the Bureau's numbers with those of a wartime pilot study by the National Industrial Conference Board was the best proof that such a measure was practicable.⁹⁰

Meeker described the purposes of the nationwide expenditure study as including the formulation of standard budgets for use by adjustment boards in setting minimum and fair wage awards. To deter-

mine the adequacy of the market basket utilized in constructing the cost-of-living indexes, he declared, "A standard minimum quantity budget must be agreed upon which will allow a sufficiency of all necessary commodities and services, food, clothing, housing, fuel, furniture, house furnishings, and miscellaneous to enable the standard family to live healthfully and decently."⁹¹

After the war's end, the Joint Commission of Congress on Reclassification of Salaries called on the Bureau to formulate standard budgets for government employees in the District of Columbia. The commission found, using the Bureau materials, that rates of compensation had not kept up with increases in the cost of living.⁹² The main Bureau work for the commission was published in two articles in the *Monthly Labor Review* in 1919 and 1920. One presented a total budget, at market prices, necessary to sustain a level of health and decency for a government employee in Washington, D.C., with a family of five. The budget represented "a sufficiency of food, respectable clothing, sanitary housing, and a minimum of essential 'sundries'"; but did not include "many comforts which should be included in a proper 'American standard of living.'" No provision was made "for savings other than insurance, nor for vacations, nor for books or other educational purposes." The cost of the budget was estimated at \$2,288 in October 1919. The second budget provided similar material for single men and women.⁹³

The data from the 1918-19 expenditure survey were further used to develop a standard "minimum quantity budget necessary to maintain a worker's family of five in health and decency." Constructed with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture and the National Conference of Social Work, the standard reflected requirements for food, clothing, housing, heat and light, furniture and furnishings, and miscellaneous items. The costs of the budget were not calculated by the Bureau.⁹⁴

The Bureau's cost-of-living and budget information was cited frequently and used extensively by parties to wage disputes and by Congress, Federal agencies, private companies, and international conferences. Its value was recognized by such groups as the Industrial Conference called by President Wilson in December 1919. In their report, the conference participants stressed that "it is vitally important that the government maintain and even extend its machinery for investigating and reporting" on changes in the cost of living. As

important as the wartime investigations were, "Exact and reliable information is equally important during the period of reconstruction through which we are now passing."⁹⁵

Yet, despite appeals by President Wilson and Meeker, Congress was determined to return appropriations to normal after the war. In 1919, the Bureau sought a deficiency appropriation of \$475,000 for cost-of-living work. Congress allowed \$12,000.⁹⁶ Meeker had developed the cost-of-living and budget programs to a most promising level of utility—only to have their future threatened by congressional budget cutting in the postwar retrenchment.

The industrial survey

Wartime demands intensified the need to speed and expand the gathering and tabulation of information on wages and hours, strikes and lockouts, and labor requirements. Requests came from various Federal agencies and from State wage adjustment committees and departments of labor. These requests, and especially those of the War Department for wage information in the vicinity of cantonments, required sending agents into localities not previously covered in the Bureau's wage surveys. Meeker's attempts to secure funds for expanded surveys between 1916 and 1918 were unsuccessful.

In October 1918, with the encouragement of the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics of the War Industries Board, Meeker and others again stressed the need for more complete wage statistics. The Bureau's regular program permitted only about 10 industry studies on 2-year cycles, and these were largely of "historical or antiquarian interest" when finally published. Meeker proposed that 30 or more industries be surveyed at least once a year.⁹⁷

Shortly thereafter, the President allotted \$300,000 for an integrated study of occupational hours and earnings to reflect wartime conditions and help resolve disputes. Almost immediately, Meeker wrote that, while the work was being planned and organized as quickly as possible, "it is becoming increasingly difficult since the signing of the Armistice to get needed information from employers."⁹⁸ The information was obtained, however, and in May 1920 the Bureau presented the results of the survey, which covered wages and hours during 1918 and 1919 for 780 occupations in 28 industries, covering 2,365 establishments in 43 States. Unfortunately, as the Bureau acknowledged, with the sudden change in production requirements

following the war's end, the data in the report reflected the unsettled conditions of postwar reconstruction.

The Bureau declared that it "could render no greater service to the country" than to have such information continuously available and pleaded for the support of "accurate, reliable, and strictly impartial" investigations such as the industrial survey. By that time, however, Congress had already refused further appropriations to maintain the program, and only the more limited wage survey program was continued.⁹⁹

Administration

The many activities of the Bureau under Meeker were conducted with only modest increases in congressional appropriations (table 3). Limited funds made for low-paying job classifications and few opportunities for advancement, sources of constant complaint by Bureau officials and others. In surveying the Bureau's work, Wesley C. Mitchell wrote that the field work in collecting price and wage data was "better on the whole than the office work of making these data into finished bulletins." While the clerical force "stood on a level rather above that common to government offices," BLS lacked an "adequate staff of skilled statisticians." The weakness of the organization, as Mitchell explained it, arose from the fact that the Bureau could not offer a satisfactory career to capable men.¹⁰⁰

In 1916, Stewart stated, "The one criticism always levelled at the Bureau of Labor Statistics is that the value of our material is greatly decreased and, as some of our very warm friends insist, destroyed by the lapse of time between the gathering and the final issuing of the material. Now, it is simply impossible for us to get our work out in reasonable time with the office force we have."¹⁰¹ And Congress threatened action that would, in the Bureau's opinion, make matters worse by prohibiting employees from taking outside jobs for pay. Stewart stated that such an amendment would force "fifty percent of the best men in the Bureau" to resign.¹⁰²

The wartime emergency increased the pressures. Late in 1917, Stewart commented that most of the Bureau's positions had not been re-rated since the founding of the Bureau in 1885 and that "our men who are able to supervise statistical work have left us or are leaving us for better pay in the war agencies." Turnover increased so much that,

Table 3. Funding for Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1914-20 (in thousands)

Fiscal year ended June 30 —	Appropriations		Special Presidential funds
	Total ¹	Salaries	
1914	\$185	\$102	-
1915	206	138	-
1916	209	138	-
1917	212	138	-
1918	213	148	\$75
1919	243	173	² 625
1920	322	217	-

¹Includes miscellaneous and deficiency appropriations, but not allocations for printing and binding.

²\$50,000 of this was returned.

SOURCES: National Archives Record Group 257, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Appropriations Ledger, 1887-1903. Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Appropriations.

whereas in 1916 it had been necessary to hire 150 people to fill the 101 permanent positions, in 1917, 222 people had to be hired to fill 108 positions.¹⁰³

The extensive wartime studies on the cost of living and the industrial survey had been conducted through allocations from the President's special fund. The Bureau lost this source after the armistice and had to cut programs to meet its peacetime budget. In March 1920, a *Survey* article, "Let There Be Darkness," stated, "Apparently the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics is to be hamstrung by Congress. Its appropriation has been so cut that some of its most important work must be stopped."¹⁰⁴

Both Stewart and Meeker testified in favor of plans to solve some of the long-range personnel problems. In 1916, Stewart spoke in support of a pension system for civil servants, arguing that the government pays elderly, inefficient employees anyway, pension or no pension. Many corporations had established pension programs, he said, "because they had a water-logged pay roll that they had to fix up. In other words, they had a pension roll without a pension system, and they had to devise a pension system in self-defense."¹⁰⁵

Congress did pass a wartime bonus for government employees, but Meeker noted that it did not cover the increase in the cost of living. He argued that wages should keep pace with living costs and

with raises in private industry. In fact, he drafted a bill to provide automatic adjustment of government salaries to changes in the cost of living as measured by Bureau of Labor Statistics cost-of-living studies and retail price surveys.¹⁰⁶ Congress established a pension system in 1920, but it was many years before the concepts of comparability and periodic adjustment for government salaries were incorporated in statutes.

Publications

Meeker instituted a new publications policy in 1915 with the launching of a monthly journal to supplement the bulletins published on an irregular schedule. The Bureau had felt the need for some way to present materials that were important but too brief for publication as separate bulletins. Also, in introducing the *Monthly Review*, Meeker sought to give more frequent and wider publicity to labor-related activities. He asked officials of Federal, State, municipal, and private agencies to notify the Bureau of their business so notices and reports could be published in the *Monthly Review*. The periodical, he said, would present the current work of the Bureau, the Department, other Federal agencies, and the various State bureaus. In addition, it would publish materials from such bodies as State industrial commissions, factory inspection commissions, and temporary investigatory committees. Furthermore, one of its special features would be notes and summaries from foreign countries, particularly valuable in providing information on wartime labor policies and experience in the warring European nations. To emphasize the nature of the subject matter, the Bureau changed the name of the periodical to *Monthly Labor Review* with the issue for July 1918.¹⁰⁷

The *Review* encountered difficulties during the war. In July 1918, the Joint Committee on Printing resolved, "That during the continuation of the war [the Public Printer] be directed to print only such publications as are required for the essential work of the Government and which do not delay necessary war printing." This attitude resulted in cuts in the BLS printing appropriations, and also in later charges that Congress tried to squelch publication of information about prices and the cost of living. Meeker complained that the cuts could force the discontinuance of the *Review* and asked for a deficiency appropriation. Secretary Wilson replied that the Department would cover the

shortage from its funds rather than ask Congress for additional money.¹⁰⁸

Despite the emergency pressures, the *Review* expanded greatly over its prewar size, publicizing the first results of new Bureau surveys on the cost of living, the new budget studies, and other original work as well much information on conditions in belligerent countries. Its popularity prompted a change in policy. With circulation up from the initial 8,000 in July 1915 to 19,000 in June 1920, the *Review* was put on a subscription basis in July 1920. Meeker cited the shortage of paper, the high cost of printing and supplies, and the necessity to economize.¹⁰⁹

During the war, the Bureau cooperated with another agency in the Department, the Woman in Industry Service, in the preparation of publications. The bulletins of both agencies were edited by the Bureau and issued as joint publications. Reporting on this arrangement to Secretary Wilson, Meeker cited the saving of cost and time and suggested that other departmental units also take advantage of the "expert Editorial Division in the Bureau of Labor Statistics."¹¹⁰

International activities

Interest in labor developments abroad, a concern of the Bureau from the time of its founding, increased during Meeker's tenure, although efforts at developing international standards for statistics were aborted by the war. In 1914, the Bureau issued a bulletin on labor laws and factory inspections in six major European countries and reported on how the start of the war affected food prices in 18 countries. From its beginning, the *Review* carried articles on the effect of the war on wages, hours, working conditions, and prices in European countries. In 1917, at the request of the Council of National Defense, the Bureau issued a series of bulletins on British munitions factories, covering hours of work, fatigue and health, welfare work, and industrial efficiency, as well as on the employment of women and juveniles and on industrial unrest.

These and other studies provided important background material for the establishment of war labor agencies and policies in the United States. The importance of the information was evidenced by the stationing of a special representative in Great Britain to keep the Bureau in constant touch with developments there.¹¹¹

After the war, at Frankfurter's request, the Bureau prepared reports on the labor situation in foreign countries for the use of the U.S. delegation to the Peace Conference. Early in 1919, Meeker went to England as economic adviser to a group of employers for a study sponsored by the Department of Labor on the British reconstruction experience. Ethelbert Stewart was also sent to England to help prepare for the Washington meeting of the International Labor Conference.

The U.S. contribution to the quasi-official International Association for Labor Legislation and its Labor Office through a congressional appropriation to the Bureau for the purpose was continued throughout the war. However, with the establishment of the League of Nations and its International Labor Office, Congress discontinued the subvention.¹¹²

Resignation

On May 5, 1920, Meeker wrote President Wilson of the "flattering offer" he had received to head up the Scientific Division of the International Labor Office to perform work similar to that of the Bureau. He felt that this was a fine opportunity to help organize the new ILO, a major office in the League of Nations. At the same time, he recommended Allan H. Willett of the University of Pennsylvania, who had directed the industrial survey, as his successor. In his formal letter of resignation to the President a month later, Meeker expressed his commitment to the Wilsonian ideal of a League of Nations. "I regret very much to sever myself from your Administration, but it seems to me that I can best serve the ideals for which you stand by accepting this position."¹¹³

President Wilson supported Meeker's decision to go to the ILO but reserved his decision on his successor. The President wrote that, after consultation with Secretary Wilson, he had "come to agree with him that a better appointment would be Mr. Ethelbert Stewart of Illinois." He went on to say, "I know you would be gratified by the terms in which the Secretary of Labor speaks of your own work at the head of the Bureau."¹¹⁴

In commenting on Meeker's resignation, Secretary Wilson described him "as an exceptionally efficient administrator of the Bureau of Labor Statistics." He cited as Meeker's accomplishments, in addition to the Bureau's regular fact-gathering, which "he has handled

with sound judgment and quiet determination," first, coordination of the Bureau's work with that of the States and standardization of industrial terminology and methods; second, reorganization of the cost-of-living work on a family budget or market basket basis; and, third, his wartime studies of wages and living costs, accepted by all the wage boards. The Secretary concluded that, while Meeker's sympathies "were always with the workers, he never allowed these sympathies to distort the facts."¹¹⁵

Later years

Meeker continued his activities in social and labor economics for the next quarter century. From 1920 to 1923, he served as Chief of the Scientific Division of the International Labor Office of the League of Nations in Geneva. He returned to the United States to serve as Secretary of Labor and Industry for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under the Republican progressive Gifford Pinchot from 1923 to 1924. In 1924 also, he went to China under the auspices of the Institute of Social and Religious Research of New York as a member of the Commission on Social Research in China. In 1926 and 1927, he was a professor of economics at Carleton College in Minnesota. In 1930, he became associated with Irving Fisher as president of the Index Number Institute in New Haven, a position he held until 1936. During this period, he also directed a survey of aged persons for the State of Connecticut and became a special agent of the Connecticut Department of Labor. In 1941, he was named Administrative Assistant and Director of Research and Statistics of the Connecticut Department, from which he retired in 1946. He died in New Haven in 1953.