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THE EMPLOYMENT INDEX, ARRESTS, COURT ACTIONS, AND COMMITMENTS IN ILLINOIS¹

RAY MARS SIMPSON²

It is frequently stated or assumed that any marked downward trend in business conditions is likely to be accompanied by a marked increase in the amount of criminal activity and delinquency. Without going into the facts, surface opinion at present would probably assume that any marked amount of unemployment should be accompanied by fear of economic insecurity in addition to stark necessity which somehow might force those with criminal propensities to violate the law. The material presented in this article shows that, in the main, such blanket assumptions are not in harmony with certain significant facts.

At the present time we are in the midst of a serious panic in business. Coincident with the depression it so happens that our prisons are seriously overcrowded. The co-existence of overcrowded prisons with a vast amount of unemployment might easily lead to the unwarranted assumption that unemployment is a significant cause of crime. However, it should be noted that mere co-existence of two factors does not prove that one is the cause of the other.

For many years the Illinois Department of Labor has been collecting basic data from various industries in the state. In December, 1931, over one thousand industries reported the number of wage earners employed as well as the total expenditures on payrolls. Since 1925 the number of reporting industries has been large enough to give a fairly reliable index of business conditions in the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois. The monthly average for 1925, 1926, and 1927 (combined) is considered as a basic index of 100 by the Illinois Department of Labor. The accompanying charts and tables are arranged to contrast crime conditions with business conditions.

Chart I shows that there has been a consistent tendency for the number of arrests in the City of Chicago to follow the trend of business as indicated by the employment index from 1926 to 1931. The number of traffic summonses also consistently followed the rise and

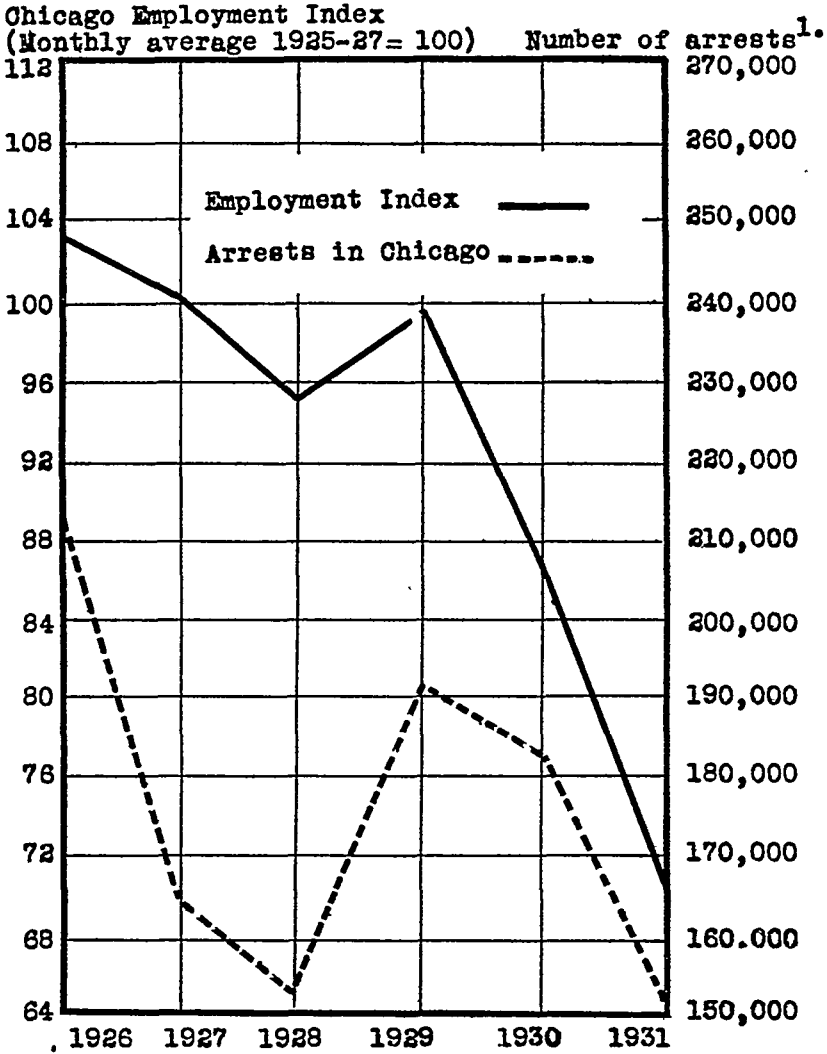
¹Studies from the Institute for Juvenile Research, Chicago, Paul L. Schroeder, M.D., Director. Series C, Number 218.

[Special appreciation should be expressed to Dr. Andrew W. Brown and to Dr. Clifford Shaw for several suggestions.]

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CHART I

Arrests in Chicago compared with
Employment Index



^{1.} Figures covering the number of arrests were supplied by James P. Allman, Commissioner of Police, of the City of Chicago

fall of business. The yearly number of arrests in the City of Chicago from 1926 to 1931 was as follows: 211,317; 161,239; 150,885; 194,999; 183,434; and 150,197. The increase in population for the City of Chicago from 1920 to 1930 was 25 per cent. It is significant that there were practically the same number of arrests in 1928 (good business) as in 1931 (very bad business) in spite of the increase in population.

It is evident that arrests, court actions, and commitments to various penal and correctional institutions do not give a complete picture of the crime situation in Illinois. Many other subtle factors must be considered. Therefore, it seems unwise to draw too radical conclusions from the data presented. However, it must be admitted that the criteria of criminal activity used in the accompanying charts and tables are highly significant.

It is a difficult task to weigh the influence exerted by newspaper publicity, increased vigilance on the part of law enforcing agencies, or of changes in political administration. For example, the newspaper publicity which followed the St. Valentine's Day Massacre (1929) and the Lingle murder (1930) might have been responsible, in part, for the increases in the number of arrests in Chicago during those two years (600 policemen were added to the force in 1929). Again, in 1931 the indictment of Al Capone (with 61 others) by the Federal Government might have driven the criminals to cover in 1931. Following careful study the writer has been unable to find any consistent tendency for increases or decreases in number of arrests to follow the dates of taking office by various mayors, chiefs of police, or state's attorneys.

Temporary co-existence does not afford sufficient grounds for asserting causal relationship between two factors. However, continued consistent parallel rise and fall between two factors over a period of years seems to warrant the assumption of a causal connection. Of course, there is the ever present possibility that other factors may fluctuate in such a manner as to create an appearance of causal relationship between two factors. The burden of proof in such an event would seem to rest upon those who support the more radical assumption, namely, that all other factors would somehow appear in an orderly sequence at regular intervals to produce a co-existent consistent variation. In dealing with the number of arrests it is shown in Chart I that there is a consistent co-existent rise and fall in both business and number of arrests. If other factors were equal, one would logically assume that there was some relationship between

these two factors. However, it should be remembered that the number of arrests is only ONE criterion of crime. Since various inconsistent fluctuations appear in later comparisons between significant criteria of crime and the criterion of business used here (see Charts II, III, and IV) the only conclusion one seems justified in drawing from these figures on arrests is that no relationship between unemployment and crime has been demonstrated, in fact, just the opposite relationship seems to be suggested, namely, that crime and "good business" may go hand in hand. However, the full significance of the facts must remain obscure until future studies have succeeded in placing many variant factors under satisfactory control.

In Table I, Chicago Court Actions are compared with the employment index for the City of Chicago. Column A shows that there was a slight increase in the number of cases handled by the Juvenile Court from 1927 to 1930. It is possible that this increase may be due to improved facilities for detection. In 1931 the number of cases handled decreased in spite of the tragic depression in business. Column E shows the employment index computed by the Illinois Department of Labor. The comparisons between Columns B, C and D with Column E shows no consistent tendency for court actions to follow the rise and fall in the employment index.

Admissions to misdemeanor institutions in Illinois are compared with the Employment Index in Table II. Columns A, B, C, and D should be compared with Column E. There has been a steady rise in the number of female admissions (Column B) to the House of Correction in Chicago since 1926. The sharp rise in female admissions in 1930 and 1931 might be attributed to an increase in prostitution

TABLE I
CHICAGO COURT ACTIONS COMPARED WITH EMPLOYMENT INDEX

Year	A	B	C	D	E
1925	2,513	62,250	28,669	5,666	97.6
1926	2,265	94,044	21,862	5,342	103.0
1927	2,197	78,404	19,948	6,560	99.4
1928	2,617	65,936	20,192	7,441	94.9
1929	2,538	32,336	45,544	5,459	99.4
1930	3,095	117,659	22,999	5,428	86.7
1931	2,701	68,178	21,411	6,736	70.1

A—Delinquent cases handled by the Juvenile Court.

B—Convictions by the Municipal Court for violations of municipal ordinances.

C—Convictions for misdemeanors by the Municipal Court.

D—Cases held to the Criminal Court by the Municipal Court.

E—Employment Index for Chicago factories (Monthly average 1925-27=100).

TABLE II
ADMISSIONS TO MISDEMEANANT INSTITUTIONS COMPARED WITH
EMPLOYMENT INDEX

Year	A	B	C	D	E
1925	20,471	1,551	650	22,672	100.5
1926	15,245	1,315	718	17,278	103.3
1927	16,684	1,537	1,181	19,402	96.1
1928	14,774	1,658	1,181	17,613	95.4
1929	13,980	1,860	1,249	17,089	101.0
1930	14,792	2,144	1,403	18,339	89.3
1931	15,687	2,861	1,663	20,211	75.0

A—Male admissions to the House of Correction in Chicago.

B—Female admissions to the House of Correction in Chicago.

C—Admissions to Vandalia State Farm.

D—Admissions to all Misdemeanant Institutions.

E—Employment Index for the State of Illinois (Monthly average 1925-27=100).

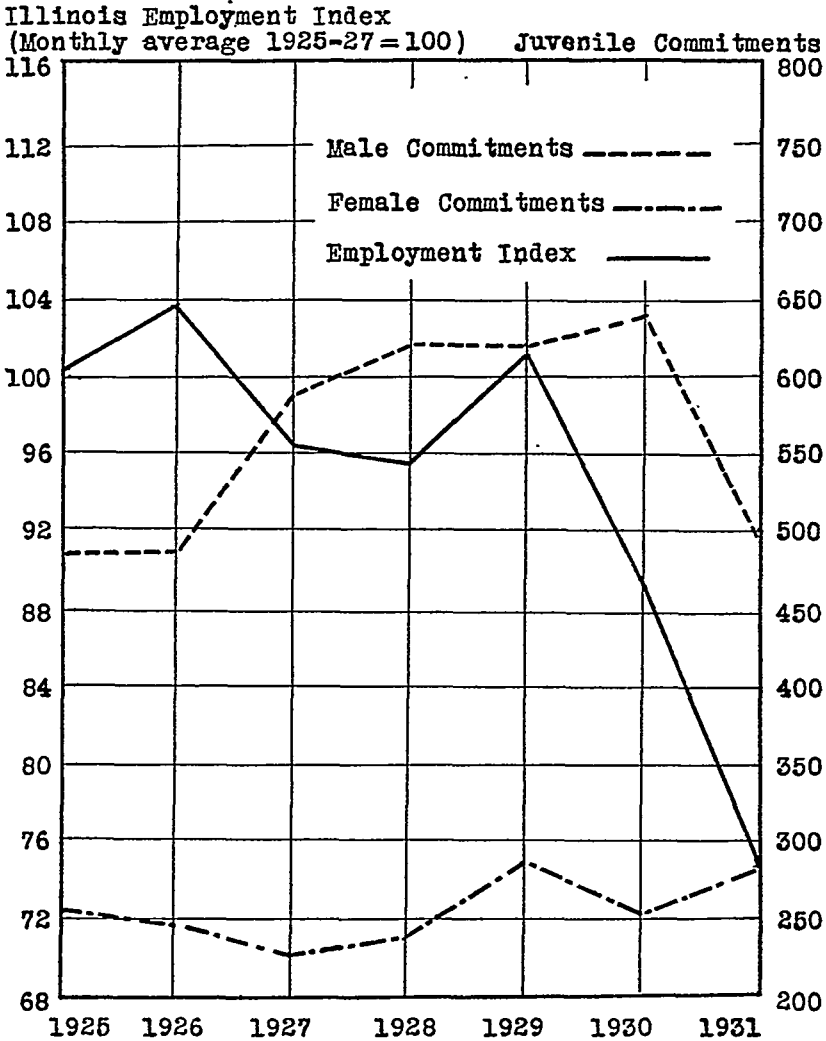
due to the business depression. However, this assumption is weakened by the fact that the increase started in 1926! The number of admissions to Vandalia State Farm also shows a steady increase from 1925 to 1931. Here again the business depression in 1930-31 cannot be blamed *per se* since other factors certainly were influencing this trend as far back at 1925. For example, the increase between 1926 and 1927 was greater than the total increase between 1929 and 1931. Probably there has been an increased inclination on the part of Judges to commit men to Vandalia State Farm for minor felonies rather than to send them to the Penitentiary. At any rate the total admissions to all misdemeanor Institutions (Column D), when compared with the employment index (Column E), fluctuates from level to level in a manner which leads one to question the causal relationship between unemployment and the number of individuals admitted to misdemeanor Institutions.

The business depression in 1930-31 has actually been accompanied by a decrease in the number of boys committed to the St. Charles School for Boys. This is shown in Chart II. From 1926 to 1928 there was a marked increase in commitments to St. Charles School; from 1928 to 1930 the number of commitments remained at practically the same level; while in 1931 there was a sharp drop³ to the 1926 level. The admissions to the State Training School for Girls

³An unpublished follow-up study of boys paroled from St. Charles School for Boys made by Owen C. Connorton showed that a very large proportion of these boys continued in crime following release. When the results of this study were brought to the attention of the judges in the Cook County Juvenile Court in the year 1931 there was a tendency to reduce the number of commitments to St. Charles.

CHART II

Juvenile Commitments compared with
Employment Index



(Geneva) has been slowly increasing since 1927. In 1931 there were 265 girls admitted while in 1929 there were 277 girls admitted. In fact, the business depression has been accompanied by a slight decrease in the number of girls admitted to the State Training School

for Girls. Chart II affords a striking commentary upon the relationship between unemployment and delinquency.

Since 1926 or 1927 there has been a marked increase in the trend of yearly admissions to the Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet and to the Illinois State Reformatory at Pontiac. This is shown clearly in Table III and Chart III. The yearly admissions to the Southern Illinois Penitentiary at Menard have remained at about the same level since 1926. Since an average of 71 per cent of Illinois State Penitentiary (Joliet) admissions (1925-31) came from Cook County (in

CHART III

Admissions to Penal Institutions compared with Employment Index

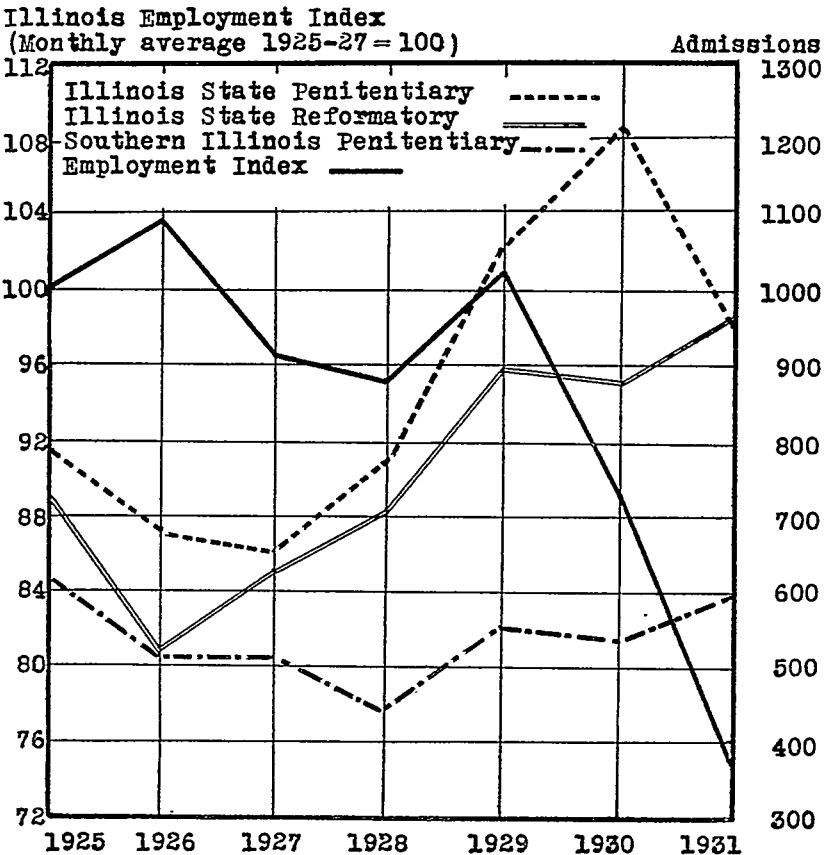


TABLE III

ADMISSIONS TO PENAL INSTITUTIONS COMPARED WITH EMPLOYMENT INDEX

Year	A	B	C	D	E
1925	770	611	725	2,106	100.5
1926	679	517	519	1,715	103.3
1927	669	513	626	1,808	96.1
1928	768	445	710	1,923	95.4
1929	1,054	547	895	2,496	101.0
1930	1,204	535	889	2,628	89.3
1931	964	594	966	2,524	75.0

A—Admissions to the Illinois State Penitentiary.

B—Admissions to the Southern Illinois Penitentiary.

C—Admissions to the Illinois State Reformatory.

D—Admissions to all Penal Institutions.

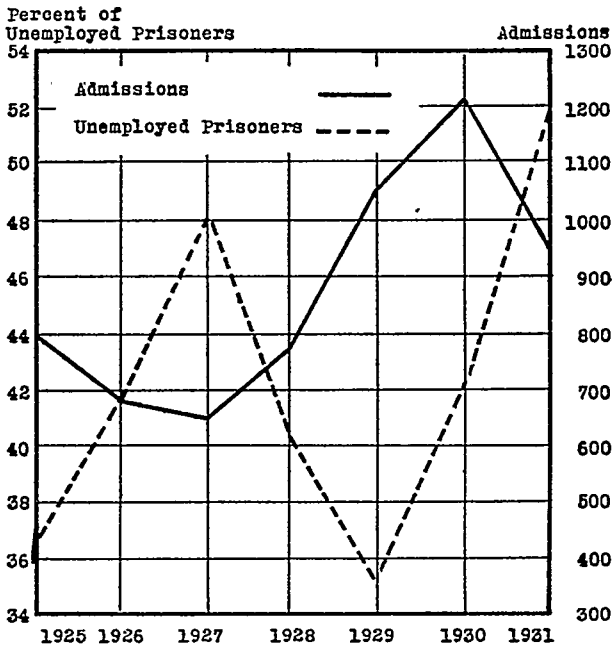
E—Employment Index for the State of Illinois (Monthly average 1925-27=100).

which Chicago is located) while the Southern Illinois Penitentiary admissions came mainly from smaller towns and rural districts, it seems possible that there might be factors at work in the larger cities which are operating somewhat independently of the employment index. Certainly there is little support here for those who maintain that unemployment causes crime. The significant point here is that the sharp rise in admissions started as far back as 1926 or 1927. It also seems highly significant that the number of men admitted to the Illinois State Penitentiary in 1931 fell considerably below the number admitted in 1929. The foregoing figures are even more significant when it is noted that the population for the State of Illinois increased 17 per cent from 1920 to 1930.

If unemployment were a significant cause of crime any marked increase in admissions should be accompanied by a corresponding increase in the percentage of those who were unemployed when the crime was committed if all other factors were the same each year. Chart IV shows that the number of admissions to the Penitentiary does not rise and fall in unison with the rise and fall of the percentage of prisoners who were unemployed when the crime was committed. For example in 1929 there were 1,054 men admitted to the Illinois State Penitentiary (see Table III) of which group 37.0 per cent were unemployed when the crime was committed; in comparison, during 1927 there were 669 men admitted of which group 48.0 per cent were unemployed when the crime was committed. Furthermore, the index in employment for 1927 was only slightly below that for 1929. During 1926-1927 (good business) the percentage of unemployed increased in about the same proportion as in 1930-31 (business depres-

CHART IV

Percentage of prisoners who were unemployed when the crime was committed compared with yearly admissions to the Illinois State Penitentiary



sion). In short, yearly admissions seem to depend very little upon the percentage of unemployment.

The following conclusions may be drawn from the facts presented:

1. The yearly rise and fall in the number of arrests in the City of Chicago shows a consistent tendency to follow the rise and fall of business as indicated by the employment index.
2. The trend in court actions does not consistently follow the trend in business as indicated by the employment index.
3. The trend in admissions to misdemeanor institutions does not consistently follow the trend in business as indicated by the employment index.
4. The trend in Juvenile commitments does not consistently follow the trend in business as indicated by the employment index.
5. The trend in admissions to penal institutions does not consistently follow the trend in business as indicated by the employment index.
6. Yearly admissions to the Penitentiary seem to depend very little upon the percentage of men who were unemployed when the crime was committed.