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Labor Market News Letter, February 1954

Maine Employment Security Commission

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LABOR MARKET



NEWS LETTER

Maine Employment Security Commission 331 Water Street Augusta, Maine



FEBRUARY - 1954

ISSUED BI-MONTHLY



The Maine employment picture — has had few bright spots in the last few months but many reliable indicators tend to support the contention that the impact of the current general economic slump has not, to date, been exceptionally severe in this State. At the moment, employment conditions might be described as sluggish; job opportunities exist but in limited numbers; and unemployment, although high, is by no means at peak levels.

Unemployment — as measured by claims filed for unemployment insurance benefits is running approximately 57 per cent above last year — the average number of persons in an insured unemployment status during the first two weeks of February totalling 14,655 as compared with 9,355 in the same period in 1953.

The current UI claims load — is slightly above the load of the first weeks of 1949, but it is considerably below the corresponding period in 1950 when winter unemployment was at a post-war peak. The present load is, however, at a four-year mid-winter high, exceeding not only last year but also 1951 and 1952.

Since the first of January — the volume of claims received has dropped off seasonally — average weekly insured unemployment having totalled 15,165 in January. This downward trend, while not unusual for the time of year, may at least be taken as an indication that the State's economy is not being subjected to exceptionally adverse pressures at the present time.

Newly unemployed workers — have shown up in the claimant group in fairly sizable numbers, 6,990 having filed claims for the first time within the current benefit year (April 1, 1953 — March 31, 1954) during the five weeks following January 1. However, separations from the claims rolls have exceeded accessions.

Benefit rights exhaustions — have removed many from an insured unemployed status. In the five-week period ending on February 13, claimants exhausting the total amount of benefits to which they were entitled in the present benefit year numbered 1,814. A part of the claims load decline also could be attributed to claimants being recalled to their regular jobs.

Demand for labor — reflected in job openings listed with the local employment offices of this Commission, has however, been comparatively light. During January the offices received requests to assist employers in filling 1,599 vacancies, and at the present time have only 391 unfilled jobs available in which resident workers are needed.

Nonagricultural employment — although down 3.6 per cent from a year ago, is in a much stronger position than in several of the post-war years. In January the total number of nonfarm workers with jobs was 263,400. Four years ago, January nonagricultural employment was 235,300.

Downward employment trends — over the past several months have been due in part to seasonal influences. Nonseasonal factors, on the other hand, have been responsible for rather appreciable declines in a number of industries — notably: textiles, shipbuilding, shoes, lumber and wood products.

(OVER)

The textile industry — primarily because of extremely drastic curtailments in woolen mills, has experienced the greatest employment losses. Employment in the industry, totalling 20,700, was at its lowest post-war level in January. Indicative of the seriousness of the effect of developments in textiles on the State's economy is the fact that in the past twelve months jobs in the industry have dropped by 3,900.

The average workweek — for production workers in manufacturing industries as a whole was 40.5 hours in January. This was only two-tenths of an hour under the average for December, but compared with figures for past years, it is apparent that scheduled hours of work last month were off noticeably from the usually high January average.

Factory workers' earnings — dipped slightly in January when average hourly earnings amounted to \$1.399 as compared with \$1.421 in December. Weekly earning averages for December and January were \$57.81 and \$56.60, respectively. The indicated declines were attributable primarily to the reduced average workweek.

What course labor market trends — will take in this State during the next several months depends largely upon nation-wide economic developments. Viewed in the light of past trends, tempered by informed prognostications regarding probable labor requirements in key industries, it would appear likely that over-all employment in Maine will continue to decline in the next two months and then move upwards, primarily due to seasonal factors, in the summer months.

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