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Labor Market News Letter, December 1954

Maine Employment Security Commission

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LABOR MARKET

NEWS LETTER

Maine Employment Security Commission 331 Water Street Augusta, Maine



DECEMBER - 1954

ISSUED BI-MONTHLY



Except for seasonal developments — there have been no marked changes in the Maine labor market during the late fall and early winter periods. The employment picture continues to be spotty with the most pronounced unemployment being concentrated pretty much in some communities which are dependent largely upon textiles or food processing activities. Recent curtailments in various service industries and in outdoor work, including construction, have contributed rather significantly to an upswing in the numbers in the ranks of the unemployed throughout the State, but the rise in joblessness has not been more abrupt than usual, and, in fact, has not been as sharp as a year ago.

Total employment — in nonagricultural industries is lower than last year, according to latest available estimates. Over-all employment throughout 1954 was under 1953 — at times by as much as four per cent. Towards the end of the year, however, there was a noticeable narrowing of the difference, and last month, when 264,600 persons held nonfarm jobs, the level was only two per cent off from the previous year. Fewer jobs in manufacturing industries as a whole accounted for the drop from last year, employment in non-manufacturing activities having run consistently above 1953.

Manufacturing industries — provided jobs for 101,400 Maine workers during the middle week of November. During the same period in 1953, a total of 108,000 persons were engaged in manufacturing work. The twelve-month decrease of 6.1 per cent was attributable to curtailed requirements in nearly all leading production activities, but those experiencing the most extensive reductions included the lumber and wood products, machinery, food processing, and textile industries. Only one major manufacturing industry — paper and allied products — showed an over-the-year gain.

Workers with jobs — in nonmanufacturing activities in November totalled 163,200, as compared with 162,000 a year ago. Strength in non-manufacturing industries during 1954 served to partially offset the curtailments which occurred in manufacturing employment and prevented over-

all unemployment from rising too appreciably. While no one nonmanufacturing industry stood out above the rest in maintaining high employment, it is significant that labor needs in contract construction — an industry which is regarded by many as a bellwether for the economy as a whole — were relatively firm at all times.

The average workweek — for production workers in manufacturing industries, also an accredited indicator of economic trends, has pointed to improving conditions in the fall months. In November the average number of hours worked per week were 39.7 hours, as compared with 39.1 and 38.7 hours in October and September, respectively. Last year in November the average workweek was 38.6 hours. It is apparent that overtime working schedules are not as widespread as they were a couple of years ago. Nevertheless, it appears that more full-time employment is being afforded factory workers than during the last few months.

Factory workers' earnings — averaged \$1.45 per hour in November — the highest hourly average ever attained. The hourly average has been moving upward since August when it was \$1.40. In September it was \$1.43 and in October \$1.44. Last year in November the hourly average was \$1.41. Average weekly earnings also have been rising in the last few months, reaching \$57.44 in November — a \$2.15 increase over September. In November 1953 the average weekly earnings of production workers employed in manufacturing jobs amounted to \$54.61.

As is usually the case — at the end of the fall and in the first part of the winter, claims for unemployment insurance benefits have increased in volume. During the first weeks of December, the average weekly number of persons in an insured unemployed status under the UI program was 12,045. In November the weekly average was 10,695 persons and in October 7,635 persons. The upswing this year, partly because of benefit rights exhaustions, has not been as great as a year ago when the rise between November and the first weeks of December was from 9,595 to 12,998. Incidentally, December is the first month this year in which insured unemployment has been lower than in the corresponding month of 1953.

The supply of labor — available in Maine continues to be adequate qualitatively as well as quantitatively. There have been a few job openings which have been difficult to fill due to localized shortages in special occupational groups, but, for the most part, employers apparently are not encountering serious problems in filling jobs offering standard rates of pay and satisfactory working conditions. On December 1, workers maintaining active applications for work in the local offices of the Maine Employment Security Commission totalled 17,029. Percentagewise, these workers were distributed according to the following broad occupational classifications: professional and managerial — 2.4 per cent; clerical and sales — 8.7 per cent; service — 5.2 per cent; skilled — 15.7 per cent; semiskilled — 26.8 per cent; and unskilled — 41.2 per cent.

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