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Labor Market News Letter, December 1955

Maine Employment Security Commission

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LABOR MARKET



NEWS LETTER

Maine Employment Security Commission 331 Water Street Augusta, Maine

DECEMBER - 1955

ISSUED BI-MONTHLY

Labor market conditions in Maine, because of seasonal influences, have undergone some changes during the late fall and early winter. The volume of unemployment has moved upwards and job opportunities are becoming scarce in some communities, but such developments are to be expected at this time of year and, therefore, are not necessarily indicative of a general downtrend in the State's economy. As a matter of fact, the over-all economic picture appears to be considerably more favorable than a year ago, with adverse trends of the past twelve months in some industries having been more than offset by improvements in other activities.

Total nonfarm employment still is running ahead of last year. According to the latest available information, there were 270,300 workers on the payrolls of nonagricultural employers in Maine during pay periods ending nearest November 15 as compared with 265,100 in mid-November, 1954. Monthly employment levels in 1955 were higher in nearly every instance than in 1954, and it is worthy of note that annual increments were larger as the year progressed.

Over-the-year gains to November 15 were achieved in many different fields, whereas declines occurred only in a few. Jobs in manufacturing industries showed an advance of 4,500, from 103,500 to 108,000, and the total number of persons engaged in nonmanufacturing pursuits increased by 700, from 161,600 to 162,300. The 4.3 percent rise in factory employment reveals that the State as a whole has been able to move forward industrially despite losses — through plant closings — in some areas.

Manufacturing fields in which the most outstanding twelve-month expansions occurred included leather and leather products, food and kindred products, lumber and wood products, and shipbuilding. The leather and leather products group made the greatest gain — jobs in the industry having moved upwards by 2,400, from a level of 19,000 a year ago to 21,400 in November this year. This industry — representing shoe

manufacturing establishments for the most part — has grown in stature to the point where it now is the leading manufacturing industry, employmentwise, in Maine.

Three major industry groups of the manufacturing class experienced employment declines between November 1954 and November 1955. These were: textile mill products, ordnance and accessories, and primary metal products. The most pronounced curtailment, by far, was in the textile industry which a year ago — as the largest manufacturing industry in the State even after having lost ground over the preceding several years — provided jobs for nearly 20,500 persons. Seventeen thousand and seven hundred workers, or 2,800 fewer than last year, are now employed in the industry.

Total unemployment in Maine, judging from unemployment insurance claims load trends, is higher at the present time than early in the fall, but it is apparent that there are not as many jobless workers in the labor market as there were a year ago. Not only were there fewer persons filing claims than in the latter part of 1954, but the number who had exhausted their UI benefit rights for the current benefit year which ends on March 31, 1956 was smaller than the number who had exhausted at the end of 1954 for the benefit year then in effect.

Comparative statistics pertaining to benefit rights exhaustions could be somewhat misleading due to a change in the Employment Security Law, effective on April 1 of this year, which extended the duration of benefits for eligible claimants from twenty to twenty-three weeks within a benefit year. However, even after allowance is made for the Law change, it is apparent that the exhaustion rate is lower this year than last. The number of claimants who have drawn the total amount of UI benefits to which they were entitled within the current benefit year was 3,149 in mid-December. The corresponding exhaustion figure last year was 4,696.

During the middle week of December, a total of 9,000 persons were in an insured unemployed status under the State unemployment compensation program. This represented a fifty percent increase from mid-October when the insured unemployed numbered 6,000, but a nineteen percent decline from the mid-December

level of 11,100 last year. Of the persons currently filing for benefits, relatively large numbers are from the fish processing, contract construction, textile, and service industries. Well over half of the claimants — approximately 58 percent — are females.

Available job openings listed with the local offices of the Maine Employment Security Commission have dropped off in recent weeks, but demand for labor appears to be fairly heavy for this time of year. During November the local offices received orders from employers for 4,209 workers. Last year, job opportunities made known to the offices totalled 2,549 in November. Current labor needs exist in various industries, but comparatively little difficulty is being encountered in finding qualified workers for the openings since the supply of available labor — except in a few occupations in which there are localized shortages — is more than adequate to meet the demand.

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