

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION
Washington

Inactive

RECRUITING AND TRAINING PROGRAMS RATHER THAN LENGTHENED WORKING HOURS
FAVORED BY BRITISH INDUSTRY, REPORT SHOWS

The British Government has turned to new methods of increasing its defense labor supply after encountering serious difficulties as a result of lengthening working hours, according to a study just completed by the Wage and Hour Division of the U. S. Department of Labor.

The study, War Time Regulation of Hours of Labor and Labor Supply reviews British war experience and finds that excessively long hours of work soon resulted in a decline in output, paralleling the experience of World War I. To offset this decline, the British Government urged a reduction in hours, and turned to new methods of augmenting the labor supply--the training of workers for defense occupations, the sub-division of skilled work, and the transfer of labor to defense production.

"This report is a summarization of some of the work which has been done to date by our Research and Statistics Branch in the constant observation and study of the operations of wage and hour legislation, regulation and practice in other countries under the stress of war conditions," General Philip B. Fleming, Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division, said.

"This work is being continued and we will thus benefit by the experience of other countries under the impact of total war.

"The report points out that 'while no conclusions regarding American economic mobilization have been drawn in the text, many significant parallels will be obvious.'"

The report traces the regulation of hours of work from the early days of the British war effort up to recent months. In the late spring of 1940, at the time of Dunkirk, British labor was working 70, 80, and 84 hours a week. In a gigantic effort to produce armaments, the former absolute limits on hours were removed.

Overtime payments remained, however, and are still being paid, the report states. Within a few weeks the long hours led to increased sickness and accident rates, to large scale absenteeism and to a decline in production. As a result, the Government reassumes control of working hours of women, in August 1940, and urged a reduction in men's hours to 55 or 56 a week. It reduced hours in Royal Ordnance Factories with immediate results, a Parliamentary Committee reporting "that as hours were reduced absenteeism declined and production was maintained." In one factory, following the reduction in hours, a peak in weekly production was reached. Despite the Government's suggestion for shorter hours, however, the hours of many workers remained above 60 a week and in December a new Parliamentary Committee report warned that an immediate reduction in hours was necessary to avoid serious impairment of health and a possible decline in output.

As the device of lengthening hours began to show its limitations, the British turned more and more attention to increasing the supply of workers in defense industries, the report shows. The Government set up training centers and encouraged training in factories. As the shortage of skilled workers became acute, the unions in defense industries relaxed their rules to permit substitution of semi-skilled men and women for skilled workers. Restrictions were introduced to prevent the enticing of workers from firms producing essential defense commodities, it was reported.

In the fall of 1940, as the reservoir of unemployed declined, the Government called upon women and workers in other industries to transfer to defense production. In this call, as in the Government's earlier efforts to increase the labor supply in defense industries, reliance was placed upon the voluntary cooperation of workers and employers. In the main the Government's powers of compulsion were kept in abeyance. During the winter and spring of 1941, however, the Government began to put plans for industrial conscription into effect. Workers in key defense industries were prohibited from leaving or from being absent from their jobs without reason; in return they could not be discharged

and were guaranteed a minimum amount of work each week. Rapid steps were taken to concentrate production of non-defense goods in "nucleus" factories, to free workers and factory space for defense industries. Employed and unemployed men and women were registered by age groups, and were made subject to call for industrial service. The Government continued to consult with representatives of both workers and employers in introducing these new measures, emphasizing control and direction rather than compulsion.

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