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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Wage and Hour and Public Contracts Divisions
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File

NUMBER OF LEARNERS AND THEIR WAGES INCREASED IN TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES

Under an order just issued a larger number of learners in the textile and several apparel industries may be employed and the wage rate for those learners is increased from as low as 32.5 to 35 cents an hour.

This was announced by L. Metcalfe Walling, Administrator of the Wage and Hour and Public Contracts Divisions of the U. S. Department of Labor, who signed the order, effective March 22, 1943. The order amending the terms of learner employment under the Wage and Hour Law is for the duration of the War emergency only, and is intended to replace losses arising out of abnormal labor turn-over.

The industries to which the order is applicable are: Textile and Hosiery, Women's Apparel, Single Pants, Shirts and Allied Garments, Women's Sportswear and Other Odd Outerwear, and Belts Divisions of the Apparel Industry, Knitted and Men's Woven Underwear and Commercial Knitting, Knitted Outerwear, and Gloves and Mittens.

The facts upon which the order is based, said Mr. Walling, were presented by representatives of employers and labor at a public hearing held in New York on October 26 and 27, 1942, before Morle D. Vincent, Director of the Exemptions Branch. Mr. Walling found that the present rapid rate of turnover in many localities makes it necessary to train learners in greater numbers than previously permitted. He said there are, however, many localities where experienced workers are still available and certificates will not be granted in those localities.

"Employers in many areas," Mr. Walling added, "are now drawing on a labor supply not formerly included in the groups available for employment. Many of these are middle aged women who are returning to industry, an increasing number are young workers below ages previously employed, and some are Negro workers who were not previously employed in industrial occupations."

The order therefore lifts the restrictions on the number of learners who may be employed at subminimum rates and allows such employment to the extent of actual need. Certain facts must be shown in proof that an employer has an actual need for a larger number of learners than the previous limitation. For example, it must be shown that experienced workers are not available and that learners are available for employment at subminimum wage rates, that competitive advantages will not result from the issuance of a learner's certificate, and that the employer's experienced workers can earn wages substantially above the required minimum wage rate.

The issuance of these certificates is going to be watched very carefully, Mr. Walling stated, and an analysis will be made as to their effectiveness in solving the abnormal labor turnover problem. If it is found in the future that no curtailment of opportunities would result from a minimum rate of 40 cents for all workers and that workers are unobtainable for less than 40 cents an hour, then Mr. Walling indicated that he might consider doing away with all learner certificates for these industries. He added that he found many employers had already increased learner rates and at the hearing some employers recommended an increased rate. In fact, it was brought out that some employers had returned their certificates, stating that they could get no qualified employees at less than 40 cents.

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"Because employers are having an increasingly difficult time in obtaining any one who is willing to work at less than 40 cents as a learner in these industries," Mr. Walling concluded, "I am not at all certain that this order will really solve this problem of abnormal turn-over. I suspect that in the end it will be found that the solution lies in paying not a learner rate but the regular minimum rate of 40 cents an hour. By paying such a rate the industry may be able to stabilize its working forces and reduce its turn-over. However, on the basis of the representations made at the hearing, which indicated, among other things, that this order might be beneficial to war activity, I am anxious not to interfere with war production and to give this order a fair trial as to its effect on the abnormal labor turn-over situation."

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