

THE WORKS PROGRAM--- Works Progress Administration ---

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Col. Westbrook praises WPA supervisors for cold-weather action, raps critics of "lost time".

Praising the ingenuity with which WPA project supervisors have kept work going during recent cold weather, Col. Lawrence Westbrook, Assistant Works Progress Administrator, today declared that Works Program critics who have "set up a hue and cry about the wages paid for lost time" haven't the slightest understanding of the program's "security wages."

"Our current reports from the cold-weather States reveal a high degree of ingenuity and determination in carrying on thousands of projects in the face of bitter weather," Col. Westbrook said. "Wherever possible, supervisors have had scaffolding erected around buildings under construction so that inside of canvas enclosures the workmen are protected. Sand, water, and cement have been heated so that concrete work may go on. On many out-door projects, part of the men have been assigned to cutting wood and keeping fires burning. Temporary shelters with stoves have provided others with a chance to warm up from time to time.

"We are getting a substantial percentage of productive time, considering the weather. It isn't high. No outside job is showing anything but the usual cold-weather production results, whether it is under the WPA or private construction work.

"Security wages for the workers go on as usual. That is a basic

"It is being provided until such time as private employment in commerce, industry, and agriculture is able to take back the workers it fired from its payrolls.

"We have wiped out the dole for 3,700,000 needy unemployed by providing the Work Program. The security wages wipe out the handout system of direct relief. We pay the wages for work, when the weather permits work. We pay the wages, anyway, if weather prevents work.

"Having scaled the security wage as a steady income during the period the worker is under the Works Program, it would be impossible to stop wages when foremen have to send the workers home because of inclement conditions. The wages are not scaled to permit savings to tide over workless periods.

"The security wage is a new principle. I am not surprised that critics who are used to thinking from the point of view of the prevailing wage scale take a crack at it. It is a sharp contrast with the usual practices in construction work. The construction industry, as carried on by private employers, is noted for its irregularity of employment. During the course of a year, if a worker is able to get in half his time at paid work, he is lucky. If he gets in two thirds, he is a marked exception.

"The worker under private industry is up and down in his income when he is on and off his job, whether the reason is his fault or not.

"Under the Works Program, through the security wage, we are providing what amounts to employment assurance for the needy, ex-employees of industry, commerce, and agriculture.

"We have said to 3,700,000 able-bodied workers who are broke and in need: 'You can earn your own needs by working on useful public projects for security wages. You will be paid regularly until you get a job in private industry. This job isn't as attractive as a job in private industry. It isn't supposed to be, but you don't have to live on a dole and a handout like a pauper when you can work.'

"This principle of security wages is a new thing. It hasn't been done before. It means that we pay wages for work, instead of relief. So when the mercury goes down to a point where men can't work outside, or it rains too hard, or materials don't get to the job, or any one of the hundred things happen that have always affected outside work, we don't penalize the workers for it.

"Under the security wage policy the worker gets credit for a day's work and a day's pay, if he shows up on the job, whether the job goes on that day or not, so long as it isn't his fault. He is assured of a much more stable income than under ordinary construction customs. The security wage is worked out with lost time taken into consideration.

"The people under the Works Program, with very small exception, are from the relief rolls. They have no savings and no reserves of credit. Stop their security-wage income, and they are destitute. Who will feed them, clothe them, pay the rent? Will the critics who don't understand the principle of the security wage take care of them?"

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