Prevailing wage and work relief need to be determined locally, WPA officials announced at nation-wide radio staff meeting.

For release after four thirty P.M.
Saturday, June 20, 1936.

Prevailing wages and actual need of individual applicants for work relief will be determined locally as the program continues under the $1,425,000,000 appropriation approved by Congress, Works Progress Administration officials announced today at a nation-wide staff meeting conducted by radio through the facilities of the National Broadcasting Company.

Administrator Harry L. Hopkins answered his questioners as to the effect of WPA upon private employers and as to local responsibility for care of unemployables.

The first came in reply to a remark by Chester Gray, Washington representative of the American Farm Bureau Federation, that "there is a lot of talk in the newspapers every spring and fall to the effect that the farmers cannot get help because the Government overpays the workers on its projects."

"I am glad you raised that question," Mr. Hopkins. "You are by no means the first one to do it--it is a tough one. There have been some cases where reputable farmers paying decent wages could not get help because of relief work. But on the other hand, there have been many cases where farmers have raised a terrible rumpus because we did not kick unfortunate people off the
jobs so that they might hire them at starvation wages. However, on both sides of this question there has actually been a lot more smoke than fire."

"But what are you people going to do," Mr. Gray interrupted, "when fellows refuse a decent farm wage, and you know sometimes they do?"

"If a farmer can't get hands," the Administrator replied, "he should state his case to his own local Works Progress Administration officials, because they have already been instructed that nobody is to have a Works Progress Administration job who has refused private employment at a fair wage. You can be equally sure that we are not going to kick anybody out of these low-paid jobs just so some bird can get a lot of cheap labor. And that goes not only for the farmer, but for any private employer."

In response to a question by Gov. George H. Earle of Pennsylvania, concerning the status of those who are eligible for Social Security benefits but reside in States that have not as yet passed pension laws, Mr. Hopkins said there is no arbitrary ruling excluding such persons from WPA jobs.

Explaining that Social Security legislation is up to the States, Administrator Hopkins added:

"But we do say that people who work on our program should be people who in normal times would be supporting themselves on a job—not people who are in need because they are unable to work. Provision for these people is traditionally a state or local responsibility."

Thad Holt, Assistant Administrator in charge of employment, explained the attitude of the Works Progress Administration toward determination of the need of applicants for work relief and the fixing of the prevailing wage, in answer to a question from a WPA project worker.
"The new law indicates that these jobs are for those in actual need," Mr. Holt said. "We in Washington don't decide who is in need. That is done by local people in each community throughout the country."

Robert Dunham, State Administrator from Illinois, then pointed out that, in addition to showing actual need to get on a WPA payroll, good work will be required to stay there. Explaining that he spoke for all State Administrators, Mr. Dunham said:

"We will not tolerate any loafing. If a man loaf on the job we don't hesitate to fire him."

As to payment of prevailing wages, Mr. Holt said the rate per hour prevalent where the project is under way would be paid in each class of work, the employes working only enough hours per month to earn the monthly wage they are now getting.

State Administrator Dunham then said to Mr. Hopkins:

"Will you people in Washington determine what the prevailing rate of pay is for a given locality?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Dunham," Administrator Hopkins replied. Local people are better informed about what the hourly rates are for the particular jobs in their community."

Mr. Holt added:

"State WPA Administrators, like you, Mr. Dunham, will gather the necessary facts to set the rates at once in order to get going. If the workers, or the employers in private industry, or the unions, think a mistake has been made in setting any particular rate, they will be heard."
A project worker then raised the question of political contributions, saying:

"Maybe I ought not to bring this up, Mr. Hopkins, but I have heard a lot of the fellows talking about it and we all want to know about it—Do we have to donate to anybody's campaign or join any kind of clubs to keep our jobs?"

"Absolutely not!", the Administrator emphasized. "I want to make this perfectly clear. No one has to make a political contribution to get or keep a WPA job. No one has to promise to support any particular candidate. No one has to belong to any political party. This goes for administrative employees as well as project workers."

Mayor Angelo Rossi of San Francisco, and member of the Executive Committee of the Conference of Mayors of the United States, raised a question concerning the continuance of work projects and the submission of new ones under terms of the bill just passed by Congress. Lieut. Col. F. C. Harrington of the Army Engineering Corps, Assistant Administrator in charge of engineering operations, replied:

"Fortunately, Mr. Mayor, the law for the extension of the program provides that work on projects which have already been approved can be continued without resubmission of those projects to Washington. Enough projects have already been approved to keep the work going. New projects must be originated by local communities and submitted just as they have been."

Henry Dennison, President of the Dennison Manufacturing Co., Framingham, Mass., asked why Works Progress Administration rolls do not shrink faster.
Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator in charge of finance, research and statistics, explained that there has been a decline of 700,000 employees on WPA rolls, or almost 25 per cent in four months, adding:

"One would naturally expect some lag between reemployment and the number on relief. We know that there are many unemployed who are not on relief rolls. These unemployed have been maintained by relatives and friends, by accumulated savings and by part-time jobs. In general, those unemployed not on relief rolls are the ones who get the first call when industry needs men." Mr. Gill also called attention to the problem created by labor-saving devices in industry.

"I'm afraid many business men have overlooked these points," Mr. Dennison remarked, "but what about the high administrative cost of running a work program?"

"The administrative cost of WPA is less than 4 per cent," Mr. Gill replied.

The manufacturer then asked about the relative cost of the work program and direct relief. Mr. Gill asserted that the difference is much less than is generally believed and "a large part of the extra expense goes for the purchase of materials from American business." He also pointed to the permanent national benefits created by work projects and the value of maintaining the work habits of the unemployed.

Fannie Hurst, author, praised the value of WPA projects employing the jobless in professional ranks, particularly in cultural lines such as writing, painting, music and drama. The social usefulness of this work is increased, she said, by the development of characteristic American arts rather than copies from European models.

Aubrey Williams, Deputy Administrator of WPA and Director of the National Youth Administration, reassured a worker on one of the NYA projects that this program will continue and asserted:
"I think that the young people coming of age this year have a 50 percent better chance of getting a job than they had three years ago."

Mrs. Ellen S. Woodward, Assistant Administrator in charge of Women's Activities, outlined the work of her division and answered the questions submitted by a worker on one of the WPA sewing projects.

In conclusion, Mr. Hopkins said:

"I want those of you who are members of the WPA staff wherever you may be to know how greatly I appreciate the fine service you are rendering to the government and to the unemployed. No government activity can be any better than the men and women who manage it. You have been given a great responsibility for the expenditure of large sums of public moneys. We trust in your integrity and your devotion to this program. In the counties, cities and towns of this land, you are the ones, who by your action day by day, bring to this government activity not only a sense of achievement but of a public trust faithfully discharged.

"The Nation has a perfect right to expect this type of service from its employees. I know you are discharging that trust faithfully, ungrudgingly and effectively.

"To the thousands of unemployed men and women who are part of this great enterprise, and who are working on the 90,000 WPA projects throughout the country, I am glad to say that we are going to continue this Works Program. We
consider that American citizens who are unemployed through no fault of their own are entitled - not to a benefit under the guise of charity, but to a job given by the government. We believe the Nation has a responsibility to provide opportunities for real work to those who through no fault of their own cannot find a job.

"I know that you must find great satisfaction in building schools, roads, great public parks, and a myriad of other projects which add to the wealth of the local community. These projects belong to your town and city. This product of your labor becomes the property of all of the people forever.

"We know you will continue to do an honest day's work in return for wages. We who have the responsibility for the management, promise in turn to administer this program sympathetically, with a genuine understanding of your needs and a deep conviction that all you ask is an opportunity to earn your living honorably.

"We go forward into the next year with you, determined to improve our work and to keep faith with the American people who through their Congress have made this program possible.

"On behalf of the President I wish to thank you - whether you may be an administrative employee or a worker on the project - for your earnest cooperation in making the program the success it is."
The radio staff meeting was broadcast over 60 stations of the NBC red network from 4 to 4:30 p. m. EST, and was heard at meetings of administrative employes, project workers and interested citizens in 315 cities where the WPA has a state or district office, in addition to hundreds of other cities where meetings had been arranged because of the wide interest in the effect of new legislation upon the work relief program.

The radio meeting was arranged to avoid the cost of travel to a central point of assembly for a general discussion of the new program.