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THE WORKS PROGRAM

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--Works Progress Administration--

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State WPA Administrators instructed to Avoid Over-supply of Labor in Cotton Fields.

State Works Progress Administrators in the southern states were instructed today by Assistant Administrator Thad Holt that in considering suspension of WPA projects to allow workers to accept employment as cotton pickers, it must be determined whether actual employment at standard wages is available for the labor thus released.

"It is not the policy of the Works Progress Administration arbitrarily to take any action which will make an over-supply of labor available for limited employment, to depress going rates of wages or to force workers to accept sub-standard wages," Mr. Holt stated in his telegraphic instructions to administrators in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma.

Southern civic organizations Wednesday requested the Works Progress Administration to curtail WPA projects in the cotton states to alleviate a pickers' shortage. Officials ruled that WPA workers are expected to accept available jobs in private employment, whether of a temporary or permanent nature, when they are qualified to do the work and when such work is at a standard wage.

Meantime, E. S. Klaiber, president of the Memphis, Tennessee, Chamber of Commerce telegraphed Mr. Holt today that curtailment of WPA projects "would be a serious mistake."

Mr. Holt also received telegraphic messages from Mayor Watkins Overton of Memphis, and R. B. Snowden, chairman of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce committee on agriculture, on the subject.

Press reports from Memphis Wednesday stated that civic organizations were preparing to propose a curtailment of WPA projects for a period of 10 weeks so that workers would go to the fields and harvest the cotton crop.

Mr. Snowden was quoted as saying that he had been informed that "those on relief have refused to work."

In his telegram to Mr. Holt, Mr. Snowden stated:

"Our request to local relief agencies was simply that all relief rolls be combed carefully to the end that non-emergency workers be dropped for release to cotton fields and only emergency workers be retained. We have had a conference with all officials and are convinced that this release has already been accomplished."

Text of Mr. Klaiber's telegram is as follows:

"The agricultural committee of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce at a meeting yesterday decided to confer with city officials as to advisability of relieving WPA workers for cotton picking. After thorough investigation, we are convinced that the thousands of workers on present WPA projects are usefully employed and curtailment of this work would be serious mistake. We are convinced that the WPA has removed from its rolls every qualified person for work in cotton fields. Thousands of skilled laborers, clerks, and so forth, on WPA projects are not equipped for work in fields and could not support themselves and families. We are convinced that any curtailment of present WPA program would be serious mistake as outlined above."

Text of Mayor Overton's telegram is as follows:

"In regard to recent report in connection with need of cotton pickers, city authorities and local WPA officials are urging all qualified persons on WPA payrolls to take these jobs. Local relief authorities have already taken three hundred from relief rolls because able to pick cotton. It must be borne in mind, however, that there are thousands of industrial employees, clerks, office workers and city laborers who have had no experience in picking cotton and could not earn a living at this work, which is paid according to the quantity picked. We cannot expect these people to leave their homes and families to go to the country for a few weeks' work at which they have no experience and could not earn money enough to support their families. WPA rolls in Memphis have been carefully watched and every effort has been used to keep people off WPA payrolls when and as employment is available in private industry, and we are confident the number on relief payrolls will compare favorably with any city of this size in the country."

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