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Social Research Division

RESEARCH BULLETIN

SUMMARY OF  
SURVEYS OF JOB REFUSALS BY RELIEF CLIENTS  
REPORTED IN SIX COMMUNITIES  
(MARCH TO JUNE 1935)

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PREFACE

Assertions have been made that relief rolls are needlessly burdened with many persons who refuse opportunities to become gainfully employed. To test these statements, the Research Section of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration undertook a series of six studies during the summer of 1935 to secure evidence on the extent to which relief clients are refusing to accept private employment.

The communities chosen for study were those in which reports of job refusals had been particularly numerous. They included two industrial cities, Baltimore and Buffalo; a non-industrial city, Washington, D. C.; a southern city, Memphis; a rural area, Allegheny County, Virginia, and a berry picking center, Hammonton, New Jersey. Thus the problem was studied in relation to varied occupational distribution and to seasonal as well as regular employment.

To each community a special investigator was sent who made contacts with the local E. R. A. office, with state and local employment offices, and with other agencies or persons conversant with the problem of transferring persons from relief rolls to private employment.

Field agents then interviewed individual cases in order to discover the facts underlying each reported refusal. Wherever possible, the validity of the explanation offered for failure to accept the job was checked.

Certain difficulties in this type of inquiry were found to vary greatly with the kind of population and with the administrative practices of the local relief agency. Moreover, the degree of justification for turning down a job is often a matter of judgment. After elimination of all clear-cut cases, there remained a considerable number regarding which definite conclusions were impossible. Among them were those based upon alleged disability, upon failure to receive notices or misunderstanding of such notices, and upon the unsatisfactory nature of a particular job.

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Prepared under  
the supervision of  
Henry B. Arthur, Assistant Director  
Division of Social Research  
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## SUMMARY

The series of job refusal studies as a whole reveal common problems in six diverse communities and lead to certain fairly definite conclusions.

One feature common to all of the situations studied was a tendency toward popular overstatement of the number of cases in which relief clients had refused to accept private employment. Out of 943 reports of job refusals in five communities 1/ 340, or more than one-third, applied to individuals who either had never received public assistance or who had been closed from relief rolls before the reported refusal. The extent of the exaggeration due to this faulty classification varied: in Buffalo, where such overstatement was most serious, 42 percent of the reported job refusals pertained to people not on relief rolls; in Memphis, only 5 percent of those charged with refusing jobs were not on relief rolls.

In the six communities, some of them with large relief loads, only 603 relief clients were discovered whose alleged job refusal could be investigated. The investigations showed that relief clients had no prevalent aversion to work but that, on the contrary, most of them were anxious to find jobs. In Hammonton New Jersey, a careful check-up indicated not a single case of an adult relief client who had refused a berry picking job. The number of clearly unjustified refusals was very small in every community; out of the 603 relief clients studied in the five communities only 20 fell in

this category. The highest proportion of unjustified refusals was six percent in Allegheny County.

The reasons given by relief clients for their refusal of employment are often difficult to classify. Even if the different reasons could be clearly separated, there would still be some overlapping because certain clients offer more than one excuse for their refusal of a job. Despite these difficulties, a survey of the three broad classes of reasons is useful in showing the nature of the problem.

1. Two hundred thirty-six relief clients, or 39 percent of the 603 investigated, refused jobs because they were either already employed, because they were permanently or temporarily unemployable, or because they could not do the specific kind of work offered them. Most of the refusals based on such claims seemed reasonable although claims of physical disability were particularly numerous in Buffalo, where nearly one-fourth of all the clients gave that excuse for refusing jobs. Doubt attaches to the validity of some of these claims since all of the cases were registered as employable at the New York State Employment Service.

2. The second type includes clients who did not get jobs because of defects in procedure of notification and contact with employer. This occurred in 160, or about 27 percent of the 603 relief cases investigated. The Buffalo and Washington studies, with 30 percent and 37 percent respectively, revealed the highest percentages of refusals on such grounds. The practice in the six localities is to regard all clients who fail to answer a job notification as having

1/ No numerical records were made of the Hammonton, New Jersey, investigation.

refused jobs. As a result, those who do not receive their notices or who do not respond promptly or who do not realize their obligation to accept private employment are classified locally as cases of job refusals.

3. The third group--slightly more than a sixth of the total--consists of those clients whose refusal is based upon considerations attached to the particular type of job offered. This group is difficult to judge because of its heterogeneous character. It includes: people unable to take jobs because they could not make provision for the care of small children, invalids and other dependents; persons who refused jobs because the employer was seeking to take advantage of the desperate condition of labor by offering sub-standard wages or requiring abnormally long hours; persons unwilling to jeopardize their union status by accepting sub-union standards; and persons who misrepresented their own condition in order to justify refusal of a particular job. The majority of refusals with an indeterminate degree of justification would be found in this group.

Out of the 108 cases giving as their excuse extenuating circumstances of this type, 63 were in Buffalo. In comparison with the other cities the proportion of such refusals in Buffalo was very high and suggests that a number of the refusals in that city were in fact unwarranted.

Some other refusals with doubtful justification were encountered in all the studies. The number of these was indeterminate but probably small in relation to the number of people on relief and the number of relief clients being placed successfully in private employment. In Buffalo, where it is possible to trace the outcome of all job notices issued by the New York State Employment Service, 900 such notices were sent out in May and June, 1935. More than two-thirds of the relief clients answered the job notices and were successfully placed.

Local administrators of relief face extremely difficult problems. On the one hand, it seems to be unavoidable that some employers will try to capitalize upon the desperate situation of relief clients by offering wages which are obviously sub-standard. On the other hand, relief clients cannot be allowed to maintain their relief status just because the conditions attached to direct or work relief happen to be more to their liking than the private jobs offered. The problem certainly is not one that can be solved by sweeping regulations from a central office, although serious attention has been given to the development of relief procedures which will minimize the opportunities for diversion of relief funds to people who refuse jobs they should accept. Abuses within these regulations are a subject for local vigilance and fair treatment.

F E D E R A L E M E R G E N C Y R E L I E F A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section

D-12  
June 13, 1935

R E S E A R C H B U L L E T I N

Subject: ALLEGED REFUSAL BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT JOBS OFFERED

Source: Report of the Study of Alleged Job Refusals by Relief Clients in Baltimore, Maryland.

Supervisor of Study: Edward J. Webster

I

In an effort to discover the basis for complaints to the effect that relief clients refuse to work even when jobs are offered to them, a study was made in Baltimore, Maryland, to determine exactly how frequently and for what reasons persons receiving public relief refuse to accept jobs in private employment.

The first point that emerged was that, in flat contradiction to the volume of complaint, the total number actually reported to have refused jobs was very small and the reasons given for refusal were numerous and varied. It was possible, and necessary, therefore, to take all alleged refusals reported for the months of March and April 1935--a total of 195--and make a case study of each. The sources of information were the registration and complaint files at the public employment office, the central file and district office records of the local relief administration, the case worker on the case involved, a call made at the residence of the case by a special field worker, and many personal interviews by the supervisor of the study, as well as all related data from the social service department and the records of physicians and hospitals, when necessary. In addi-

tion to these, many of the leading personnel men and employment agencies of the city were consulted, and interested private citizens were invited to cooperate. It should be noted, however, that from all of these outside sources not a single additional lead was secured. While it is by no means claimed that every case in the city was discovered, all that could be found were carefully investigated.

A summary statement of the more important findings is as follows:

1. The evidence gleaned indicates that the many broad generalizations about "job refusals" to which the public has been exposed have been based upon a few sporadic incidents and much loose talk.

2. Of the 195 cases against which the accusation of "job refusal" was leveled in March and April, only 4 were clear cases of unjustified refusal. In the remaining cases the charges were unjustified or the refusal was due to extenuating circumstances.

3. Of the total cases, 31 involved domestic servants among whom the problem of "unemployability" by rea-

son of family composition was found to be acute. This group was also peculiarly subject to low wage scales which frequently sank below the minimum subsistence levels established by the relief administration.

4. Of the 164 cases involving other occupations (including the 4 adjudged to be "flat refusals") 65 were found to be persons who had never been on the relief rolls or who were at the time outside the jurisdiction of the relief authorities; 65 were either at work or were permanently or temporarily unemployable; 15 did not receive the call or did not get the job; 10 refused for extenuatory reasons; and in 5 cases the records were confused but pointed toward the guiltlessness of the client.

5. On the whole, the notion that "forcible measures should be introduced into the relief program to get able bodied persons to work" is a gross extravagance. The findings of this study warrant the statement that for each man or woman who would refuse a job which could reasonably be accepted, there are hundreds who would be willing and anxious to accept work if they could thereby "get off relief".

## II

Analysis of the 195 cases of "job refusals" secured from the public employment office and the local relief office shows that 31 were domestic servants whose situation is so special and important as to warrant separate treatment. The 164 cases remaining were classified as follows after study:

Not within the scope of the study.....	65
Not known as relief clients.....	34
Once relief clients but now inactive.....	16
Living in relief household but not included in the relief budget.....	15
Either not seeking work or unable to accept the job offered.....	65
Already employed when the call came.....	26
Leaving city for farm.....	1
Permanently unemployable.....	8
Temporarily unemployable.....	24
Partial disability or handicapped for the job offered.....	6
Failure to receive call for job or successfully to contact employer.....	15
Did not receive call.....	9
Out of town when call came.....	2
Error in issuing call.....	1
Error in answering call.....	2
Error in employer's report.....	1
Failure to accept jobs due to extenuating circumstances.....	10
Contagious disease in employer's home.....	1
Sickness at home.....	2
Sole caretaker for invalid at home.....	1
Children at home.....	1
Lacked transportation for out-of-town job.....	1
Lacked tools.....	1
Misunderstood nature of work relief job.....	1
Labor trouble.....	1
Unwilling to accept sub-standard wage.....	1
Facts regarding alleged refusal uncertain.....	5

"Flat" refusals.....	
Ignored job calls.....	3
"Through with work".....	1
Total.....	164

Not within the scope of the study. Of the 65 in this group, 34 had, according to the district records, never been known as relief clients. They were persons who, for some reason or other, did not care to accept the employment offered but whose refusal is certainly no concern of the relief authorities. Those who had been on the relief rolls in the past but who were not receiving aid at the time the jobs were offered numbered 16. Fifteen individuals who refused jobs were living in relief households but were not included in the budget and hence their conduct is also no concern of the relief administration.

Either not seeking work or unable to accept the job offered. The willingness to work of 26 out of the 65 in this group is amply attested by the fact that they were temporarily engaged in private employment when jobs were offered. (Not all jobs are secured through the employment office nor are all temporary jobs promptly reported to case workers.) One worker refused a job because the family was on the eve of departure for a farm in the country. Of the eight who were permanently unemployable, three were in hospitals for the insane and two were in tuberculosis sanitoria (prognosis, "incurable"). Three were deceased when the call for work came. Careful investigations of the 24 reported as temporarily unemployable were made and 19 cases were competently certified to be as represented either by

physicians or by hospital authorities, and there seemed to be no reason for doubt concerning the remaining 5 cases. In like manner, there seemed to be no doubt concerning those who were reported as having partial disabilities which disqualify them for the particular jobs offered.

Failure to receive call for job or successfully to contact employer. In view of the facts that the employment office through which these jobs passed has a total file of 105,600 names and an active list of 48,000 names, and that thousands of placements are made in the course of a few months, not to mention the tendency of relief clients to move with relative frequency, this record of only 15 failures promptly to receive job calls is remarkable. Of the 15 cases, 11 were readily verified. The remaining 4 seemed to be as represented.

Failure to accept jobs due to extenuating circumstances. The cases in this group involve the question, "Is it sometimes justifiable or necessary for a worker to refuse a job?" A mother with 4 small children failed to accept a job because there was a contagious disease in the employer's home. Two persons failed to accept temporary jobs because of serious illness in their own homes. A daughter, 30 years of age, could not leave her 75-year-old blind mother in order to accept work. One mother refused to accept a job and leave her two children 9 and 10 years of age. (In this case, further relief was withheld because she had a sister, not on relief, who might have been able to care for the children.) One worker said he had asked for and

was refused transportation for an out-of-town job. (His case was "closed" and further relief is being denied while the case is investigated.) Having had all of his tools stolen, a carpenter was obliged to remain on a work relief job although he had been offered private employment. Another worker failed to leave a work relief job and accept private employment because he did not understand that his work relief job was "relief". (Relief was cut off in this case.) In one case a job was refused because a strike was on in the plant. One worker, whose trade wage was \$1.10 per hour, refused to work for sixty-five cents an hour at the trade. (His relief has been cut off while the case is investigated.)

Facts regarding alleged refusal uncertain. In five cases workers were charged with having refused jobs but conflicting and incomplete records made it impossible satisfactorily to determine the facts. However, the weight of evidence would seem to entitle the worker to the benefit of the doubt in each of these cases.

"Flat" refusals. In only 4 cases of the entire 164 originally reported was it discovered that workers had flatly refused to accept jobs clearly without justification. Three ignored the job calls which they were known to have received. Relief was immediately withdrawn in each case. The fourth, having ignored a call and announced that he was "through with work" received no more relief.

### III

The situation of the domestic servants included in the survey may now be reviewed. Of the 31, 23 were Negro and 8 white; all were females; almost nine-tenths were under 40 years of age; and the educational requirements were low, (one in ten never attended school and not one completed high school.) As to marital status, 13 were married, 6 single, 6 widowed, two deserted, and 4 unmarried mothers. Twenty-four had dependent children.

On analysis, their reasons for refusing jobs were:

Unable to provide transportation for out-of-town jobs.....	2
Failed to secure jobs for which they reported (evidently not acceptable to employer).....	2
Unable to leave home for out-of-town job.....	1
Needed at home to care for sickness.....	3
Unable to accept "live in" jobs due to family responsibilities.....	5
Unable to leave small children (three were unmarried mothers).....	8
Accepted job leaving after first day because not as represented.....	1
Had part-time job paying more than the job offered.....	1
Refused jobs primarily because of low wages.....	8

An analysis of the cases included in the last category follows:

1. A widow with a ten-year-old daughter refused a job, the net wage of which would have been \$2.60 a week.
2. A two-day odd job at \$1.20 per day was refused because it was "over loaded with washing". (The usual wage for such work is \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day.)
3. A seventeen-year-old girl who recently had an operation for appendicitis, who has a serious hernia, and who is an incipient tubercular, refused a job requiring that she do the housework, the washing and ironing, and care for two children at \$5.00 a week.
4. The mother of three small children refused a part-time night job (estimated to require thirty-five hours) paying \$2.50 a week.
5. An unmarried mother refused a full time job netting \$4.60 a week because it would be insufficient to support her and her four-year-old son.
6. A widow, the mother of three small children, refused a job paying \$5.60 a week, on the ground that this wage would not permit her to provide for care of her children during working hours.
7. A recently deserted mother of four small children could not accept a temporary job at \$1.00 a day.
8. A woman, who, unknown to the employment office, was under treatment for syphilis, refused a job at \$8.00 a week because she formerly received \$25.00 a week.

The major significance of the data regarding these cases lies in the extent to which they reveal conditions in the field of domestic service. Those conditions directly affect relief clients and relief policy. The first problem involved is that of employability. Giving due considera-

tion to the attendant circumstances of each case, and adopting common sense as the yard stick of social policy, how many of them could be called employable? As has been noted, 24 of them have dependent children. A large majority are home-makers. Even though they may once have been properly classified as "domestics", is it proper to so classify them now? The public employment office recognizes this problem and, were it not for the failure of some of these women adequately to state the facts when they register, they would be classified as "unemployable!"

The second problem involved relates to the abuses of "live in" requirements. It is known that if a domestic "lives in" the home of her employer, in many cases she is practically forced to render 24-hour service. Even though these incidental circumstances are waived, the fact remains that in at least eleven of the 31 cases under discussion, it would have been impossible for the worker to accept a "live-in" job.

Finally, the third problem involved--and this is likewise inseparably related to relief policy--is wages. In at least one-half of the 31 cases studied the wage offered was not only under the exceedingly low standard obtained for this service, but it was also insufficient to meet the minimum subsistence needs of the households involved as defined by the relief bureau. Whether workers should be permitted to accept such jobs, even under the pressure of dire need, is open to question on grounds of wise social policy; they certainly should not be compelled to accept them. A number of cases were found in which the prospective employer of a domestic

announced one wage at the public employment office and a much lower rate to the applicant for the job. Meanwhile, the whole situation has been much aggravated by reason of the fact that many families who were unable to afford domestic servants in the past are now offering \$3.00 or \$4.00 a week or less for a maid, expecting to get one, and raising complaint against the relief author-

ties when they do not. That it is difficult to secure domestics for some jobs offered is readily admitted; but that domestics in particular need protection against low wages and unfair conditions cannot be gainsaid. Until reasonable and just standards are established and maintained, merely to affirm that "some of them find more security in relief than in work" is to beg the main question.

## FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section.D-13  
July 11, 1935RESEARCH BULLETIN

Subject: ALLEGED REFUSAL OF RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT BERRY PICKING JOBS

Source: Report of the Study of Alleged Refusal of Relief Clients to Accept Raspberry Picking Jobs at Hammonton, New Jersey

Supervisor of Study: Edward J. Webster

Critical Press Reports

The charge is repeatedly made in press reports that relief clients are refusing berry picking jobs in the Hammonton, New Jersey, area. Widely conflicting accounts estimate labor shortage ranging from 300 to 2,000 berry pickers (or much more than the total number of seasonal workers in the area), crop loss of from \$50,000 to \$400,000, and daily earnings of from 75¢ to \$3.

To determine the true facts in the situation, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration sent an investigator to the Hammonton area. He observed conditions first hand and interviewed scores of individuals, including relief administrators, county officials, growers, buyers, pickers, market agents, and local business men.

Facts Concerning Relief Clients

Careful check-up failed to disclose a single case of an adult relief client in the Hammonton area refusing a berry picking job. All single able-bodied men were removed from the relief rolls several weeks ago and about ninety family cases representing nearly 400 persons, were closed in June.

Speaking of conditions throughout Atlantic County, Mr. L. B. Willits, Assistant Director of Employment of the New Jersey Labor Department, said "In no case did we find either a family or an individual on relief who preferred relief to berry picking. Every able-bodied single man in the county has been cut off relief. If any families fail to report for work in the Hammonton area, that is due to circumstances over which the Relief Administration has no control."

The Atlantic County Relief Administration offered to assist the growers by attempting to recruit pickers among heads of households in outlying parts of the county, if the growers would provide daily transportation from concentration points to the job, since adequate housing was not provided in Hammonton. The offer was not accepted. Likewise, the offer of the Relief Administration to provide adequate living quarters or transportation, was not accepted. The Relief Administration did not offer to recruit families, which would have meant forcing child labor into the berry fields.

Wages and Duration of Work

Berry picking wages were found to be definitely low and the peak sea-

son of short duration. At the present prevailing "piece rate" of  $2\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$  for picking a pint of berries (some growers are paying 3¢, either to compete for labor or to compensate for poor picking conditions in their fields), the top estimates of daily earnings are 75¢ to \$1.25 for children and \$2 to \$2.50 for adults on a ten-hour basis. However, the weight of opinion is that most workers earn appreciably less than the sums mentioned because of the uneven picking conditions and other factors. On the basis of known averages for past years, it is unlikely that the daily average for adults this year will be more than \$1.70 a day. Because earnings are frequently given in terms of the family labor unit, there is a tendency to overlook the low individual daily wage.

As for labor shortage, what appeared to be the best informed opinion was that no more than 500 extra workers could be used in the entire area for the peak of the crop season which would probably pass in eight to ten days. After that time there would be little demand for outside labor, although a few might find employment by remaining through the blackberry season.

The experience of berry pickers in this area in the recent past has not been such as to induce them to return. Small crops in 1933 and 1934 produced much dissatisfaction, both with respect to the amount of work available and the wages received. Last year a number of wage claims were presented to the National Employment Service for collection and some workers, even among those coming from Pennsylvania, were paid in local county scrip which sold at a discount as low as 85.

#### Living Conditions for Berry Pickers in the Hammonton Area.

The extremely bad living conditions to which berry pickers are exposed is perhaps the greatest cause of dissatisfaction. The typical building is a so-called "shanty". It contains one large bedroom in which all members of the family are herded together without regard to age or sex. No bedding is furnished. Sometimes the shanty includes space for cooking and eating, but frequently the workers must cook and eat in the open. Besides shanties, old houses and barns are used. On the whole, the housing falls far below any recognized American standard of decency.

#### The Disappearing Labor Supply

The raspberry crop in Hammonton first assumed importance about fifty years ago. At that time the required seasonal labor supply was made up almost entirely of migratory Italian families, more than 85 percent of whom came from Philadelphia and Chester, Pennsylvania. In recent years, due in part to the fact that many of these Italian families have found their way into other industries and in part to changed immigration policies, it has been necessary to look increasingly to German, Polish, and Negro families for berry pickers.

Formerly, although a few of the growers hired their pickers directly, sometimes employing the same families year after year, most of the labor was obtained through "padrones" (labor agents). With the gradual disappearance of migratory Italian families, the padrone system has rapidly broken down and for more than ten years the difficulty of obtaining the

much preferred family labor units, of which the husband, wife, and children could all work in the fields, has become steadily greater. Meanwhile, the growers complain that the unmarried man who comes to them "won't stay on the job" and that "inexperienced pickers do more harm than good anyway".

It is interesting to note that due to a number of factors, of which change in labor supply is an important one, there has been a steadily decreasing volume in the raspberry crop. It is now only 40 percent as large as it was ten years ago and 20 percent as large as it was twenty-five years ago.

#### Summary

The charge that relief clients in

the Hammonton area are refusing to accept berry picking jobs is not supported by facts. The temporary shortage of labor is not at all as represented by recent news stories. Actually, the situation which gave rise to misleading and inaccurate publicity was a demand for workers during the eight to ten days of the season's peak production.

Possibly more serious than marginal and submarginal wages and the practice of forcing child labor into the berry patches, is the question of housing conditions. To compel workers to accept these crowded one-room shacks, which with their lack of sanitation and conveniences represent the worst housing of fifty years ago, invites encroachment upon family and home life to which no workers should be exposed.

## FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section

D-14

August 6, 1935

RESEARCH BULLETIN

Subject: ALLEGED REFUSAL BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT JOBS OFFERED

Source: Report of the Study of Alleged Job Refusals by Relief Clients in Washington, D. C.

Supervisor of Study: Edward J. Webster

In Washington, D.C., 220 alleged job refusals for the months of April and May 1935 were subjected to careful analysis. This number constitutes the total for which reliable information could be secured. In the absence of large industrial plants with personnel officers, it was impossible to obtain accurate information from people experienced in direct, private employment. Among householders seeking domestic servants, heresay complaints, which could not be tied down to specific relief clients, could not, of course be investigated.

The principal sources of information for this study, therefore, were the U. S. Employment Service records, the local relief administration, and special reports of relief case workers. These sources constituted the only sources of accurate information and it is believed that the cases covered in this report are typical, especially since all employable persons on relief are registered with the United States Employment Service. Additional data were secured by personal interviews with prospective employees as well as with the workers involved.

The outstanding findings, which appear to be conclusive, are as follows:

1. The facts revealed that the indiscriminate and sweeping criticism of relief clients on the score that they refuse to work when given an opportunity to do so is wholly unwarranted.

2. Of 220 cases which for various reasons were reported in April and May as job refusals, only four could with justice be attributed to unwillingness to work. In the remaining cases either the charges were ill-founded, work relief regulations were involved, or the refusal was accompanied by extenuating circumstances which will be described later.

3. In spite of the publicity given to the charge that relief clients are refusing to accept work in domestic service, only three persons who could be definitely classified in that occupation were found among the alleged job refusal cases reported for this study. Each of these declined work under extenuating circumstances. The low number of domestic service cases among the alleged job refusals may be due in part to the established policy at the Public Employment Center of filling only responsible job offers and not attempting to supply workers for jobs where wages and working condi-

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tions are clearly unreasonable. Available evidence indicates that practically no well qualified domestic workers either on the relief rolls or off the relief rolls are refusing jobs which offer fair wages and tolerable working conditions. 1/

4. Of the 220 cases, seventy-five were not on the active relief rolls when jobs were offered; seventy were either at work or were permanently or temporarily unemployable; fifty-three either did not receive the job call in time or did not get the job when they responded to the call; twelve refused because of attendant circumstances; and six cases involved defective records or conflicting reports. This left four cases in which refusal appeared clearly unjustified.

5. On the basis of careful examination of the data obtained, it is unmistakably evident that unwillingness on the part of clients to accept work is a negligible factor in

the problem of relief administration in Washington, D.C. The difficulty lies, rather, in distributing a wholly inadequate amount of work among the 16,500 employable persons now in the relief population of Washington who are registered for work.

For purposes of analysis, the 220 cases of alleged job refusals were classified as follows:

Not receiving relief at time job was offered.....	75
Not relief clients.....	6
Not active cases in either April or May.....	58
Cases closed after April 1 but prior to job call.....	11
Either employed or unemployable.....	70
Employed when job call came...	52

1/ Because the records at the Public Employment Center, where all relief clients are required to register for work, are kept primarily for placement purposes rather than for research purposes, it is impossible to distinguish relief client placements from others during the period of this study. However, it is known that a total of 3,414 placements (day work and regular employment) were made in domestic service by the United States Employment Service in April and May

During that period, the number of failures to accept jobs offered, because of the distance of the job from the home of the prospective em-

ployee, because of working conditions which either could not or would not accept (hours of work, "living in", etc.) or because of a wage rate which was deemed too low for the required work, was only 243. Some of these, but by no means a disproportionate number were undoubtedly relief clients. Although it is not the function of the employment office to determine whether a worker ought to accept a job or not, it was known that in practically every case where the distance from the home of the worker did not make it impossible for her reasonably to accept the work, the jobs not accepted were clearly sub-standard with respect either to wages or working conditions or both.

Permanently unemployable.....	4
Temporarily unemployable.....	14
Failure to contact employer successfully or to secure job.....	53
Client reported call was not received.....	16
Client out of town.....	6
Delay in delivery of call.....	22
Responded to job call but did not secure job.....	9
Failure to accept job due to attendant circumstances.....	12
Lacked necessary equipment....	2
Needed to care for children at home.....	3
Violation of N.R.A. code.....	1
Work believed to be in violation of law.....	1
Union relations involved.....	2
Declined job on advice of case worker.....	2
Declined full-time job for subsistence.....	1
Facts regarding alleged job refusals uncertain.....	6
Clearly unjustified refusals.....	4
Refusal of specific job.....	2
Ignored job calls.....	2
Total.....	220

Not receiving relief at time job was offered. Of the 75 in this group, six could not be identified by the local relief administration as having at any time been on the relief rolls. Sixty-nine had formerly received relief, but were not on relief at the time the job was offered.

Either employed or unemployable. The fact that fifty-two of this group of seventy were employed at least temporarily when job calls were received is ample evidence of the willingness of relief clients to accept work. Of this number twenty-four were in private employment, and twenty-eight were employed on work-relief projects.

A basic requirement enforced as efficiently as possible and as consistently as circumstances permit, is that a client must leave a work relief job to accept private employment. However, certain details of this requirement were not always clear. For example, in several cases in which job calls came to clients on their "work relief day" they postponed reporting to the employment office until the following day. But because many placements must be made immediately, the jobs for which they were called were assigned to other workers. It was discovered also that the phrasing of job calls was sometimes confusing to clients who were asked to report "if not now employed". Because they regarded work relief as employment, these clients did not report. Occasionally, failure to report was believed to be due to preference for a work relief job, as was the case, for instance, with two semi-professional women who were engaged in their regular occupation on relief work when called for private employment as domestics. Of the twenty-eight work relief cases in the group, the circumstances attending seventeen were such that no action was taken. In the remaining eleven, work authorization was cancelled and cases were closed.

Of the permanently unemployable there were three: one man 66 years old whose health does not permit even light work; one active tubercular (prognosis, "incurable"); and one deceased. Of the temporarily unemployable there were fourteen: two advanced pregnancies; four hospital cases; five ill and certified; two ill but not certified; and one in jail.

Failure to receive call for job or failure successfully to contact employer. Examination of the fifty-three cases in this group reveals, with few exceptions, conditions over which neither the employment office nor the relief administration had control. Sixteen clients reported that calls were not received. The statements of nine of these were accepted and no action was taken. The statements of four were verified by the telegraph company and no action was taken. The statements of three were not convincing and their work relief authorization was cancelled. Six clients were out of town when calls were sent. In twenty-two cases due to unreported changes of address delivery of job calls was so long delayed as to prevent placements. Nine other clients reported as promptly as possible; they failed to secure work. In four of these cases the jobs had already been assigned; in one the client was asked to make formal application for the job (which he did not subsequently receive); in three the client was rejected as not qualified; and in one the client reported at the wrong place.

Failure to accept jobs due to attendant circumstances. The circumstances surrounding these twelve cases were as follows: A deserted wife, the mother of two small children,

could not accept a job and make the necessary provision for the children's care. The mother of two children, both of whom were ill at the time, could not accept work. The mother of five children of her own and four step-children was obliged to decline a job. A tradesman refused to accept a forty-nine hour-a-week job in violation of the N.R.A. code (then in force). Two workers were unable to report for work because they lacked the necessary tools and clothing. One client, a former psychopathic patient, refused a two-day odd job on the advice of his case worker, who believed it inadvisable for him to undertake the work. One client refused an odd job on the advice of his case worker, because acceptance would have "spoiled his chances for a permanent job." An expert mechanic was sent out on an emergency call, the details of which were unknown to the employment office; when he reached the address, he found himself in a "wild gambling joint" and, on being asked to repair what he believed to be a stolen automobile, he refused the job. Two union tradesmen, one of whom had been a member of his union for thirty-one years, refused to jeopardize their union status and incur the risk of a \$100.00 fine for violating rules with reference to non-union jobs and non-union wages. A woman forty years of age refused to accept a full-time job as a domestic in a large family for her room and board.

Facts regarding alleged refusal uncertain. In the cases of six clients who were charged with having refused jobs, the facts of the case could not be fully established, or conflicting statements reconciled. However, three of these were closed and three were given the benefit of

the doubt.

Clearly unjustified refusals. Of the four cases which may be regarded as clearly unjustified refusals, one women refused to accept private employment in her usual occupation; one man refused a specific work relief job; and two ignored job calls and manifested no interest in work. All four cases were closed.

Although only four cases were adjudged to be clearly unjustified refusals, presumptive evidence was sufficient in seventeen other cases described above to justify action on the ground that the clients involved were not making a reasonable effort to cooperate with the relief administrators. The work relief author-

izations of eleven were cancelled because their pleas of ignorance concerning the requirement that relief clients must, on call, leave work relief jobs to accept private employment were not believed well founded. The work relief authorizations of three other clients were cancelled because their explanations of failure to report to work were not accepted by the relief administrators. Although the established facts concerning three clients were not in themselves conclusive, nevertheless their indifference to the charge of having refused jobs, together with their unsatisfactory relief case histories, was such as to warrant withholding further direct relief, and the cases were closed.

## FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section

D-15

August 6, 1935

RESEARCH BULLETINSubject: ALLEGED REFUSAL BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT JOBS OFFERED, ALLEGHENY COUNTY, VIRGINIA<sup>1/</sup>

Supervisor of Study: Joel C. Hawkins

A study was made in Allegheny County, Virginia, of all cases of alleged refusal of employment by members of relief households during the months of April, May, and June, 1935. Adequate analysis necessitated study of each case by assembling data from the National Reemployment Service Offices, the local Emergency Relief offices, the Public Welfare office, from private employers and others, as well as from case workers and the relief clients. From all sources, 32 cases were discovered against which definite charges of job refusal had been made. Many of the leading citizens of the county and employment officers of local industrial firms were interviewed, but no specific job refusal case was reported by any of them, although numerous rumors were encountered.

A summary statement of the more important findings follows:

1. The facts amply demonstrate that unwillingness to work is very rarely the cause for relief clients refusing to accept jobs.

2. Of the 32 cases studied, there were only two which could be clearly classified as unjustifiable refusal of work. Three cases were not receiving relief when the job was offered. In the remaining cases, the circumstances attending refusal

seemed to indicate that generally it was these, rather than unwillingness to work, which led to the failure to take the jobs offered.

3. The local relief administration is taking immediate action upon all alleged job refusal cases. Of the 32 investigated, ten had been retained on the relief rolls, their refusals have been considered warranted, and fourteen had been closed in response to the general administrative order that all relief clients discovered refusing jobs should be dismissed from the relief rolls, while five others were receiving no relief although their cases were still open for further investigation. Three cases were not actually relief cases at all.

4. The study indicates that the normal channels for investigation and removal from relief or persons refusing jobs are providing an effective and, if anything, an over-diligent safeguard against such abuses as are claimed to exist.

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1/ An additional note concerning alleged job refusals in Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia, is included at the end of this report.

The classification of the 32 cases after study was as follows:

Not receiving relief at time  
job was offered..... 3

Temporarily unemployable or  
already employed..... 2

Failure to contact employer  
successfully or to secure  
and hold job..... 4

Reported at job site but not assigned to work..... 1  
Rejected for the job after a try-out..... 1  
Discharged because he was unsatisfactory after one day's work..... 1  
Rejected because he was a relief client..... 1

Attendant circumstances claimed as reason for failure to accept job, . . . . . 17

Failure to reach share-cropping agreement.....	1
Excessively long hours on job.....	1
Misunderstanding of relief administrative procedure.....	1
Inadequate wages.....	2
Needed to care for dependent at home.....	3
Unable to accept out-of-town job.....	1
Unable to accept odd job when it was offered.....	1
Work too hard.....	1
Charge of unfair treatment under investigation.....	1
Special conditions in the pulpwood industry.....	5

Facts regarding alleged re-  
fusals uncertain..... 4

Unjustified refusals.....2

Not receiving relief at time job was offered. A laborer who refused a job for a road building contractor was erroneously reported as a relief client by the employment office. Another case was closed about eight weeks prior to the reported job refusal. A third non-relief case was that of a young woman who lived in her mother's home but was not included in the relief household budget and was not receiving relief.

Temporarily unemployable or already employed. Because of temporary illness, which was certified by a physician, a road construction laborer could not accept work. When asked to do a day's plowing, another client was found to be busy on numerous odd jobs. His case was closed.

Failure to contact employer successfully or to hold job. One laborer contended that he reported promptly at a P.W.A. read construction job but that he was not given work. However, he was accepted later. Another client was given a try-out as a steam shovel operator and was found unsatisfactory. A skilled mechanic accepted work as a pick and shovel man, but was discharged after the first day because he was unable to do the work. Upon reporting for a two-day odd job, another client was told by the employer, "I will not have anybody who was on relief working for me".

Attendant circumstances claimed as reason for failure to accept jobs. On investigation it was established that the head of a large household who was reported to have refused a job had failed to accept a share-cropping offer, the conditions of which involved so much insecurity that its acceptance did not appear to be justified. Before the local

relief administration had opportunity to pass judgment upon the case, the offer was withdrawn by the landlord. No action was taken.

Because he objected to a 13-hour shift as night watchman, for which he received ten hours' pay, a worker left his job. His case was closed.

Due to his misunderstanding of local relief administrative procedure, a client refused a two-day job. Explanations having been made, this client has since accepted all work offered.

Because they considered the wage too low, a man and his wife refused joint employment out of town--he to tend a filling station and she to cook in a restaurant--at a total wage of five dollars for a seven-day week. The case was closed.

A client refused to accept a temporary job sowing wheat at one dollar a day. The case was closed.

A client refused a "live-in" domestic job because she was needed at home to care for a tubercular invalid sister and her two small children, who were on relief. No action was taken.

A "live-in" job at general housework and the care of two children, wage \$3.50 per week, was refused by a client whose presence was required at home during part of the day to assist her semi-invalid mother. This household received only supplemental relief, and the client was able to accept occasional odd jobs by the day. No action was taken.

A seventeen year old girl in a relief household refused work as a domestic at \$2.50 and board per week because her mother needed her at home. The case was closed.

The mother of a seventeen year old girl would not permit her to accept an out-of-town job. No action was taken. This girl has since secured occasional odd jobs which contribute to the household income.

A work relief client refused a one-day odd job because the work which he was doing in his own garden could not be postponed. The case was closed.

A laborer who was offered a job on road construction said he was unable to do the work. This statement was questioned and, pending further investigation, all further relief was withheld.

Charging that he had been unfairly treated in the past, a client refused to accept work on a P.W.A. road construction job. Because a controversial question of hours is involved, the case is receiving further investigation.

Special conditions in the pulp-wood industry. As a matter of policy shortly after the opening of the season, the local relief administration removed from its rolls all employable persons in the communities where it was believed work would be had cutting pulpwood. Prior to the adoption of this policy, however, five cases were subjected to individual action, and were closed. In these five particular cases, each

worker subsequently found some source of income (for a short time at least) but their experience in this respect cannot be considered typical of all the cases removed from relief:

1. One client said he would not work for the man who offered him employment because there would "be no pay until the job was finished". His case was closed and, after some weeks of unemployment, he secured temporary work on a P.W.A. job.

2. Because the wage offered was only \$1.50 a day and transportation for ten hours of cutting, a client refused to accept it. He is now farming, having been selected for rehabilitation.

3. The stumppage on which one client was offered a job was so located that a horse would have been needed to deliver the wood at a loading point. He had no horse. The case was closed and the worker found temporary employment at a wood-cutting job where no horse was needed.

4. Because the contractor offering the job was "slow pay" due to his failure to deliver wood to the mill promptly, a client refused to work for him. This client, when visited, was found picking huckleberries which he said at least yielded a "cash" income.

5. Poor and widely scattered stumppage, requiring the use of a horse which he did not have, together with the fact that he feared from experience that "pay would not be certain", prompted another client to refuse a wood-cutting job. His case was closed; he later accepted another wood-cutting job, which had three more days to run at the time he was interviewed.

Facts concerning alleged refusals uncertain. In three instances, discrepant reports and defective records made it impossible to settle the cases immediately and they were continued open for investigation. No decision had been reached when this study was completed.

In a fourth instance, although there was much disagreement among the reports concerning jobs said to have been refused, the case was closed and the client soon secured work.

Unjustified refusals. Because a client would not work for the foreman to whom he was assigned on an E.R.A. job, relief was discontinued.

Another client who refused to report for work on a P.W.A. road construction job was immediately cut off relief.

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Recent press stories have charged that relief clients at Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia, have publicly declared their unwillingness to accept jobs as long as relief is forthcoming. Upon the completion of the Allegheny County study, inquiry concerning the Frederick County situation was made through Mr. W.A. Smith, Administrator of the Virginia E.R.A., who reported that conditions with respect to relief there differed in no essential respect from those in the former county. The recent publicity concerning the Winchester relief clients grew out of an incident in the re-employment office where a newspaper correspondent heard two men refuse proffered jobs at 45¢ an hour. Although they were in fact non-relief registrants, the newspaper correspondent mistakenly supposed they were relief clients.

and wrote his story accordingly. The manager of the employment office declares that he has experienced no difficulty in placing relief clients for whom jobs have been available, and a careful check made by the state relief administrators dis-

closes only two cases of job refusals within the last six months, which cases were immediately closed. During the same period, two applicants were denied relief because they refused to accept jobs.

F E D E R A L E M E R G E N C Y R E L I E F A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section

D-16

August 14, 1935

R E S E A R C H B U L L E T I N

Subject: ALLEGED REFUSAL BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT JOBS OFFERED IN MEMPHIS  
TENNESSEE

Supervisor of Study: Armin H. Sterner

In order to obtain a picture of the incidence of job refusals in Memphis, Tennessee, a study was made of all such cases reported during the months of April and May. Similar studies were recently made in Baltimore, Md., Hammonton, N.J., Washington, D.C., and Allegheny County, Va. Sources of information included the records of the National Reemployment Service, the central and district files of the Local Emergency Relief Administration and of hospitals when necessary, as well as personal interviews with case workers, employers, and relief clients.

Summary of Significant Findings

1. The investigation of alleged job refusals in Memphis, Tennessee, confirms the findings of previous studies in more northerly communities: that the number of clearly unjustified refusals to accept work is very small. Out of a total of over 11,000 workers on relief in Memphis, it was possible to locate only 39 instances of alleged refusals to accept work, and the investigation of these revealed only two where no reasonable explanations were offered.
2. Eleven of the 39 cases represent domestic servants; ten of these

cases were Negroes. Placement procedure for such clients is so haphazard that it is practically impossible to make an adequate check upon all rumors and allegations of job refusal. It is not unusual for a domestic worker to make a house-to-house canvass in residential districts to offer his or her services at very low remuneration. Despite complete absence of standards in the domestic service field, there seems to be, with the exception of one case of unjustified refusal, a genuine willingness on the part of the relief clients to accept any job for almost any wage in order to derive some means of support from other sources than the Relief Office. The clients interviewed frequently asked the interviewer to assist them in securing jobs.

3. The remaining 28 cases, only one of which represented a clear case of unjustified refusal, were in occupations other than domestic service. Thirteen were either not employable at the time or, due to attendant circumstances, were unable to accept a job when the call for work came; another group of eight cases did not receive the call, or were unable successfully to contact the employer. In four cases not all the facts concerning job refusals could be ascertained, but available evidence seemed to favor the client. Two clients were not on relief when

the job was offered.

4. In the opinion of the interviewers, the clients seemed to have a genuine desire "to get another job call", "get off relief", and become self-supporting once more.

A detailed analysis of the 28 cases of alleged job refusals other than in domestic service follows. Placement procedures among domestic servants differ so markedly from the more usual methods that the problem of domestic servants is treated separately below.

Not on relief at time job was offered.....2

Failure to contact employer successfully or to secure and hold job.....8

Did not receive call.....1  
Error in answering call.....1  
Unable to contact employer....2  
Job filled when client called.3  
Discharged as incompetent worker.....1

Either employed or unemployable....7

Already employed when call came.....1  
Permanently unemployable.....1  
Temporarily unemployable.....3  
Partial disability or handicapped for the job offered....2

Failure to accept job due to attendant circumstances.....6

Misunderstood nature of work relief regulations.....1  
Unwilling to accept sub-standard wage.....4  
Unable to maintain separate home for children under medical care.....1

Facts regarding alleged refusal uncertain.....4

Unjustified refusal.....1

TOTAL.....28

Not on relief at time job was offered. The two persons in this category were working at the time jobs were offered and had previously been removed from the relief rolls.

Failure to contact employer successfully or to secure and hold job. In three instances in this group of eight cases, clients reported to employers and were told the job had already been filled. On being called to chop cotton, one worker was transported to a plantation to which he had not been assigned; although he actually worked there this was not known to the relief agency, and he was reported to have refused a job. One worker did not receive the notification to report for work on a construction job. Two applicants for commission salesman's jobs made several attempts to see the employer who, however, could not be reached. A male cook who actually began work at his new job was discharged the same day because of being too slow. In none of these eight alleged cases was there an actual job refusal.

Either employed or unemployable. Three cases in this group of seven were unable to accept employment because of illness at the time the job was offered. Hospital records and individuals consulted attested to these claims. Another client afflicted with partial paralysis of the lower extremities was not physically able to perform any kind of manual work. A man seventy years of age reported for work with a construction company; his duties consisted

of carrying material along narrow girders, which work he actually performed for seven hours; he could not go on, however, on account of a severe heart ailment, and his physician advised him against any hard labor. Of the remaining two cases in this group, one was working part-time when the job call came and he did not wish to give up his permanent part-time job for a temporary out-of-town job. The other declined an out-of-town farm laborer's job because of advanced age and unwillingness to live apart from his wife.

Failure to accept job due to attendant circumstances. This group of six cases includes three persons, with dependents, who could not see their way clear to accept jobs as salesmen on a straight commission basis without leads being furnished for the selling of such commodities as electric refrigerators, electrical appliances, and novelty advertising. Each person stated that earnings would not only be very low, but that any earnings at all would be problematical. One person, a union meat cutter, was offered a job in his trade at half the union wage; acceptance of this job would have meant dismissal from the union and would have jeopardized chances for future employment. Another worker ignored a job call from the National Reemployment Service because of his impression that only work relief jobs were handled by the agency. He stated that since he already had a work relief job which suited him there would be no need to change. A farm laborer would not accept a job in his usual occupation in a malaria infested region because it would not yield sufficient income to care for his children who had contracted ma-

alaria and who were under medical treatment in Memphis.

Facts regarding alleged refusals uncertain. The four cases represented workers charged with having refused temporary jobs with construction companies. Information concerning these cases was fragmentary and conflicting and it was not possible to determine facts completely. Available evidence, however, seems to excuse the refusals since jobs offered were temporary out-of-town jobs.

Unjustified refusal. This worker was offered a job chopping cotton. He claimed as his reason for refusal that he was a "city Negro" and had never done farm work before.

Action taken by Relief Agency because of refusals. In fifteen instances of reported job refusals, after proper consideration of facts in each case, no action was taken by the Relief Agency and these persons remained relief recipients. The fact that job calls had been issued by the N.R.S. had not, in 11 instances, been communicated to the Relief Agency and consequently no action had been taken. In two cases persons were dropped from the relief rolls, one for refusing a cotton chopping job, and the other who had accepted and actually worked at his job was thus disciplined unjustifiably since the Relief Agency understood that he had refused a job, whereas in fact he had in error reported to and worked for another employer.

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Because of the present overcrowded condition of the domestic servant labor market, particularly in Southern cities with large Negro popula-

tions, and the widely varying working conditions offered in this sort of employment, it would not be surprising to find considerable numbers of job refusals here. So-called "live-in" servants are, from the point of view of the employers usually considered most desirable. This class of employment, however, presents widely varying hours and conditions of work. Moreover "living-in" is necessarily difficult for workers with family responsibilities of their own. It is not uncommon that servants, after devoting twelve hours to their daily routine, are called upon to extend their working hours, on the occasion of social gatherings in the home of the employer, without additional remuneration. Wages paid for a full-time maid doing general housework, and sometimes cooking also, range from \$2.50 to \$3.50 a week, the first figure, according to the Shelby County case work supervisor, representing the customary wage paid. The small number of cases in this group does not necessarily indicate the total number of job refusals which might have occurred since unorganized employment procedures make it impossible to locate or to investigate all cases. But it is felt that the investigation does indicate that domestic servants are with few exceptions willing to work.

The following reasons for job refusals were found:

Report of job refusal  
erroneous.....1  
Job filled when client called....4  
Not acceptable to  
employer.....1

Unable to accept "live-in" job because of family responsibilities.....	2
Refused because of no regular wages.....	1
Facts concerning case uncertain.....	1
Unjustified refusal.....	1

Of the eleven cases which represent workers classified as domestic servants, ten colored and one white, eight were females and three were males. Only three of these had finished elementary school. Seven of the eight female workers were separated or widowed; five of them had dependent children.

In the first case, the client, who was still in bed from a recent confinement, stated that she had been offered no job during the past year, but that she had refused a maid's job in May 1934 because of a similar condition. Due to failure of employers to report to the Employment Office, four clients had been sent to apply for jobs which were already filled. One employer refused to accept the services of a maid because the wages she could offer were insufficient to maintain the applicant's dependent children, and because the lack of servants' quarters made it impossible for the applicant to "live in", an arrangement which would have been necessary for her to hold the job. Two other cases reported that it had been necessary for them to refuse jobs because no provision could be made for the care of their small children.

The one case of a white servant was that of a middle-aged, experienced housekeeper. She refused a full-

time job which provided only room, board, clothing, and pocket money for incidentals, because it offered no regular wages. It was impossible to ascertain the facts in one case, because of the reluctance of the client to give any information; this reluctance was apparently due to mental deficiency and the case worker reported that the client could not have secured the job because of

her low mentality.

Only one case represented unjustifiable refusal. This client stated that the address which had been given her was a vacant lot. A check up revealed that this was not true. The report of the case worker was that this client was unreliable and irresponsible and not interested in obtaining work.

F E D E R A L E M E R G E N C Y R E L I E F A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

Division of Research, Statistics and Finance  
Research Section

November 7, 1935

R E S E A R C H B U L L E T I N

Subject: ALLEGED REFUSAL BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT JOBS OFFERED IN  
BUFFALO, NEW YORK.

Prepared by: Doris Carothers and A. Ross Eckler

Summary

A detailed investigation of 262 relief clients reported to have refused non-relief jobs in Buffalo, New York, during May and June 1935, revealed a considerably higher proportion of unjustified or doubtful cases than had been found in earlier studies where the percentage was very low.

While in many instances there were excellent reasons for refusal (as when the worker had accepted private employment, but was still on relief until his first pay day), there were a number at the other end of the scale (where a relief status was preferred to private employment). It is impossible to set up clear-cut categories of justified or unjustified refusals, especially where the doubt is greatest and where plausible pretexts are devised to cover up deliberate efforts to take advantage of relief agencies. Therefore, the analysis called for a sorting process which would segregate the blameless cases and leave those where justification was in doubt.

The most acceptable reason for refusing work would seem to be that based upon inability of the worker to accept the job. Such inability may be the result of other private employment, of physical disability or temporary unemployability, or of failure to meet the requirements of the employer. Ninety-two of the Buf-

falo cases, or 35 percent, fell in this category. However, the majority of these 92 consisted of persons claiming some degree of disability. There were 56 individuals, or nearly one-fourth of the 262 under consideration, who asserted that they were physically unable to do the specific kind of work offered. Asserted physical inability to accept a job thus accounted for a much larger proportion of the refusals than was found in the job refusal studies conducted in Washington, D. C., and Baltimore, Maryland<sup>1/</sup>. All of the 262 cases were registered with the New York State Employment Service and were regarded as employable so that doubt attaches to the validity of many of the claims.

Probably the most striking feature of the Buffalo inquiry is the large number of cases involving some degree of procedural failure or misunderstanding. There were 80 cases, or about 31 percent of the total, where the asserted failure of the client to get the notice, his failure

<sup>1/</sup> It should be noted that the Buffalo N.Y.S.E.S. placed 638 relief clients in private employment in May and June 1935. The total number of relief clients served was therefore 900. Only slightly more than six percent of these refused jobs specifically because of physical disability.

to act promptly, or his ignorance either of the difference between P.W.A. and work relief, or of the E.R.B. policy requiring acceptance of P.W.A. or other non-relief jobs accounted for the refusal. The large proportion of foreign-born in the population of Buffalo is probably a factor in explaining the considerable number of cases involving some kind of misunderstanding. Even after allowance for this, the proportion of such cases seems unduly high. The responsibility for this situation is doubtless attributable in part to the indifference of relief clients, in part to the failure of the agencies to establish routines and forms of notification which minimize the chances for misunderstanding, and in part to the infrequency of disciplinary measures which might deter clients from turning down private employment.

The third main group to be considered covers those cases in which refusal was based upon a consideration of the type of job offered. A definite statement regarding this class is not possible, because it is a heterogeneous group including such extremes as: (1) the individual who turns down a job offered by an employer seeking to take advantage of the present desperate condition of labor (a type of case rarely found in the Buffalo survey); and (2) the individual who intentionally misrepresents his qualifications in order to justify his refusal of a particular job.

Sixty-three of the 262 Buffalo refusals were reported to turn upon

the nature of the particular job offered. Comparison with findings in similar studies conducted in Baltimore, Md., and Washington, D. C., suggests that this proportion is high and that the group probably contained a number of refusals which were actually unwarranted.

Finally, there were eight persons who based their refusal of private employment solely upon preference for their work relief jobs. This constitutes a small percentage of the total number but it must not be interpreted as including all those whose refusals were based to some extent upon this kind of preference. The lack of ingenuity or imagination shown in the use of so transparent an excuse might be taken as evidence of lack of understanding of official regulations rather than of intended wrongdoing.

In some respects the Buffalo findings resembled those of other cities: the cases investigated did not reveal a prevalent aversion to work on the part of relief clients. Moreover as in the earlier studies, the number of refusals originally reported was considerably swelled by cases involving workers not on relief. Nevertheless, the fact remains that workers on relief in Buffalo were taking greater liberties than elsewhere in weighing the relative advantages of a relief status as against an offered non-relief job. If work relief jobs are too frequently found to be more attractive than opportunities offered in private employment, stricter work relief procedures would seem to be called for.

SURVEY OF REPORTED REFUSALS BY RELIEF CLIENTS TO ACCEPT NON-RELIEF JOBS  
OFFERED BY THE NEW YORK STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE  
IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK, DURING MAY AND JUNE 1935

The investigation of job refusals in Buffalo was restricted to those reported by the New York State Employment Service, since this was the only agency with which the Emergency Relief Bureau had a cooperative arrangement for placement work<sup>1</sup>. There was obtained from the records of the N.Y.S.E.S. a list of all the reported job refusals<sup>2</sup> by relief clients during the months of May and June 1935.

The study covered 457 cases, a considerably larger number than was included in any of the five previous surveys of this type<sup>3</sup>. Of these cases, 195 were found to be outside the limits of the study. One hundred and fifty were former relief clients whose cases had been closed before the date of job notification, and hence were not subject to the charge that they preferred relief to pri-

vate employment. The forty-five others included a variety of special situations mentioned in the tabulation below. A number of them were not on the relief rolls of the Buffalo City Emergency Relief Bureau, while the records which showed others as having refused jobs in May or June were erroneous. After the elimination of these 195 cases, there remained 262 relief clients from whom were secured explanations regarding refusal to accept private employment.

The following tabulation shows, in summary form, the facts regarding the 457 cases. Some blurring of detail is inevitable in this attempt at classification but it is not believed that this defect is serious.

I

Reported refusals..... 457

Not on relief or not actual  
May or June refusals of  
non-relief jobs..... 195

Formerly relief clients; cases closed at time of job notification.....	150
Formerly relief clients; deceased at time of job notification.....	2
Others not receiving relief from Buffalo City E.R.B.....	18
Placements (erroneously reported as refusals).....	8
Jobs offered in April (reported as May refusals). 10	
Work relief jobs offered..	7

1/ Buffalo, with a population of approximately 625,000, had a relief population of about 120,000 to 130,000 during the period of the study; 128,032 persons (34,591 cases) on April 30th; 124,519 persons (33,374 cases) on May 30th; and 118,436 persons (33,182 cases) on June 30, 1935.

2/ Job refusals as defined in this study include cases in which individuals failed to answer a summons of the N.Y.S.E.S. as well as those in which individuals refused a specific job in private employment.

3/ See Research Bulletins on: Baltimore, Md. (D-12), Hammonton, N.J. (D-13), Washington D.C. (D-14), Allegheny County, Va. (D-15), and Memphis, Tenn. (D-16).

II

Relief clients at time of job notification..... 262

Already employed or rejected by employer:

Working at private employment.....	27
Rejected by employer.....	4
Temporary unemployability...	5
Asserted physical disability.....	56

Procedural and administrative difficulties:

Alleged failure to receive job notice.....	42
Misunderstandings of work relief policy.....	26
Delay in applying for job..	11
Failure to contact right employer.....	1

Refusals based upon nature of specific job:

Denial of qualification for the job offered.....	8
Lack of tools.....	1
Refusal of jobs because of duration, location, or pay.....	18
Refusal of jobs out of trade or profession.....	34
Refusal of referral because of previous trouble with employer.....	2
Preferred work relief jobs..	8
Facts indeterminate.....	19

Prior to consideration of the details of the table, mention should be made of two factors bearing upon an interpretation of the data: First, refusal, as defined in the N.Y.S.E.S. records, may be: (a) failure to respond to a notice from the employment office (even though the call might not have lead to a referral); (b) refusal of a referral to a job;

or (c) refusal of a job after referral. Second, a high proportion of the refusals pertained to P.W.A. jobs; about 63 percent of the 262 refusals by relief clients were of this type.

The first section of the table presents information regarding those who were not within the scope of the study as defined. Most of them were closed cases at the time of job notification. In addition, there were eight placements which had been erroneously reported as refusals and ten refusals which had been recorded in May whereas the job actually had been offered in April. There were 18 individuals who were not receiving relief from the Buffalo City Emergency Relief Bureau. Of the other 9 cases, 2 were deceased, and 7 were offered work relief jobs rather than private jobs.

A thorough analysis was undertaken of the 262 remaining cases. From the records of the N.Y.S.E.S. and the E.R.B., data were secured relating to the job offered and the reason for the refusal. Supplementary information was derived from interviews with the clients and with the employers reported to have offered the jobs. The broader aspects of the problem were studied by means of consultation with leading industrialists, personnel men, civic and labor leaders, prominent social workers, and key persons in various nationality groups.

The main divisions of Section II of the tabulation reveal broad categories of reasons given for the refusal of jobs offered. The arrangement is somewhat arbitrary but is presumably in rough accordance with the probable justifiability of the reasons for refusal. A brief description of the several classes

will serve to clarify the plan by which the job refusals were tabulated. The general conclusions expressed in the summary rest upon a detailed consideration of the various factors affecting each situation but it is obviously impossible to present all the data that were assembled.

Working at private employment. The cases of eight clients were closed on receipt of their first pay and 19 others were receiving supplementary aid for insufficient income. Most of the 27 clients were probably justified in refusing the new jobs. At any rate, these persons were working for at least a part of the time and were thus demonstrating their willingness to accept gainful employment. Nevertheless, there was evidence in a few cases that workers were satisfied with part-time or inadequately paid jobs and were comparatively indifferent to opportunities to render themselves economically independent.

Rejected by employer. Despite conflicting statements by officials of the agencies, by clients, and by placement men connected with P.W.A., which make it difficult to evaluate the merits of the four cases in which employers were reported to be unwilling to accept a particular applicant, still it seems likely that most of these workers did report for work and were not at fault in their failure to be placed.

Temporary unemployability. This group of five consisted of three clients who were in prison at the time the job notice was sent and of two others who were unable to accept work because of illness in the family.

Asserted physical disability. Since all of these persons were registered at the N.Y.S.E.S. and regarded as employable, it is rather surprising to find that 56 persons refused jobs because of advanced age or some degree of physical disability. An attempt was made by the investigator to ascertain the merits of these claims wherever possible. In 22 cases such inquiries yielded fairly satisfactory proof of physical disability, sufficient to rule out the particular job offered. The remaining members of this group were unable to furnish conclusive proof of their good faith in refusing private employment and there was doubtless a certain amount of malingering among them. Such a condition is likely to persist until careful medical examinations are given all relief clients who refuse jobs because of asserted physical disability.

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Prior to a consideration of the next large group of refusals---those involving procedural or administrative difficulties---mention may be made of certain special factors in the Buffalo situation. The first of these is the large proportion of foreign-born in the population. The city includes large groups of Poles and Italians, some of whom are unable to read or speak English. Second, it is apparent that insufficient effort has been expended in acquainting people in Buffalo with (a) the distinction between work relief and jobs with P.W.A. or in private industry and (b) the L.R.B. policy requiring the acceptance of P.W.A. or other non-relief jobs. There is evidence that some of the clients failed to realize that their work relief jobs were not permanent

forms of employment. Third, the method of notification used by the N.Y.S.E.S. was not sufficiently specific to remove the danger of misunderstanding. Notices sent by mail contained the following statement: "This card is not a notice or a promise of employment; it is only a request to call for further interview". Notices sent by telephone or through policemen were apparently no more effective than the printed form. Finally, insufficient explanation and emphasis was given those phases of E.R.B. policy which promised to those giving up work relief jobs in favor of private employment: (a) priority rating for return to work relief in case of loss of private employment and (b) supplementation of private earnings when insufficient to provide for budgetary needs.

Alleged failure to receive job notice. Incorrect addresses and temporary absences account for a number of the failures to receive job notification, but there were also a number of cases where the notices were inefficiently handled or where the excuse of failure to get the notice was used unjustifiably. An investigation of the 42 cases revealed 17 in which the explanation was substantiated, and 25 for which proof was unavailable.

Misunderstandings of work relief policy. It is likely that many of the 26 who refused jobs because of misunderstandings actually did fail to understand the difference between P.W.A. and work relief jobs or were unaware of the E.R.B. ruling requiring acceptance of P.W.A. or other private employment. Nevertheless, it appeared that there were a number of individuals who found it convenient to profess ignorance in order to be able to retain their work relief status.

Delay in applying for job. Eleven clients were too late in making application for jobs--most of them on P.W.A. projects. Some of these individuals stated they did not realize that according to E.R.B. policy, they would be excused from work relief duties to answer calls for private jobs.

Denial of qualification for job offered. Eight clients claimed they were not qualified for the jobs offered. Efforts made by the investigator to appraise the validity of these excuses led to the conclusion that there were at least three clients who were not justified in their refusal of private employment on this basis.

Refusal of job because of duration, location, or pay. Among the 18 people who refused jobs because of such factors as pay or duration, there were at least 11 who preferred the relative permanency of work relief jobs. Priority rating for return to work relief was promised to those who accept private employment, but there is some question as to the promptness with which such returns can be in fact accomplished.

Refusal of job out of trade or profession. There was a comparatively large number of relief clients who were employed as skilled workers or as foremen on work relief who refused to consider jobs either as laborers on P.W.A. projects or as workmen for private employers. A few of these were union members, although most of them were in arrears on their dues. It may be noted that here, as elsewhere, there were undoubtedly a few cases of refusal which were attributable to lack of understanding of the necessity of the transfer from work relief to private employment. Moreover, income

(at prevailing wage rates) in some cases was as large for two days of work relief as the earnings of a full week at private employment in the less skilled occupation.

Refusal of referral because of previous trouble with employer. The two people included in this group can at least be charged with lack of aggressive initiative.

Preferred work relief jobs. Preference for work relief was the sole reason given for the action of the eight clients who fall in this group. As indicated at various points above, this number by no means represents the aggregate of the people whose action was really based upon a preference of this sort.

Facts indeterminate. The final 19 job refusals could not be definitely classified on the basis of the facts available. A few of the clients could not be reached, while in other cases conflicting statements and confusing records obscured the actual reason for refusal.

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It is evident from the survey that has been made of the various classes of reasons for refusal to accept private employment that sufficient doubt is attached to many of the categories to justify an investigation by E.R.B. of every refusal falling therein. Among the most important categories for which such investigation is warranted are those covering physical disability, failure to get notices or to understand the requirement of acceptance of private employment, and refusals based upon the nature of a particular job.

Whether a systematic check of all refusals had been made in accordance

with the stated policy of the E.R.B. could not be determined from available information. Some of the case workers presumably made inquiries into refusals and failed to record the results.

For 65 cases there were records showing that a check of the reasons for refusal had been undertaken. The accompanying table shows the actions taken by the agency following the check-up.

Stopped aid.....	2
Removed from work relief and put on home relief.....	8
Removed from work relief and subsequently reinstated.....	2
Aid continued with warning.....	7
Physical examination given, or referred to hospital.....	5
Clients questioned, or sent back to N.Y.S.E.S.....	24
Report made by E.R.B. to N.Y.S.E.S.....	9
Held for decision of committee to be appointed.....	1
Clients retained on lighter work relief jobs.....	2
No action taken because of illness of client's wife.....	1
Other jobs obtained and no disciplinary action taken.....	4

Since the reports made on these 65 cases do not apply to any specified portion of the refusals they afford no basis for judging the degree to which illegitimate use was made of any particular type of excuse. It may be noted that the relief status of only twelve persons --those in the first three classes-- was altered following the check-up. The fact that about two-thirds of the cases were merely given a warning or were referred back to the N.Y.S.E.S. suggests that the disciplinary effect must have been small.

