PATHFINDER

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Storm Over WPA

In the City Hall of Pleasantville, N. J., town of about 10,000 population, a band of women sat through the night darning socks, mending clothing for their children, making sweaters, and now and again stopping to brandish their knitting needles as they voiced their opinions of city officials.

The women were conducting a "siege" in relays as they protested their dismissal from relief jobs for which they got salaries of $57 to $75 a month for work on WPA sewing projects. As they continued their vigil, the women dispatched part of their group to picket places which they said were politically protected gambling centers, demanding that gambling be discontinued or their projects re-established.

The "siege" was perhaps the most unusual incident in a variety of turbulent events which burst in a storm



Hopkins Sees Relief Through Local Boards

around the issue of paring down WPA rolls. At various points there were strikes, protests, statements, explanations, interpretations, and a good deal of confusion.

The Pleasantville incident was caused by failure of the town to provide for relief continuance. The other incidents were touched off as local administrators in different parts of the country received instructions from Washington to bring down the number of work relief recipients. Preliminary calculations indicated that relief costs were being reduced at a rate of about $15,000,000 for the month. It was understood that an ultimate goal was set of reduction of costs from $168,000,000 in November to an average of $100,000,000 a month.

As workers were handed dismissal notices and WPA strikes mounted, Acting Relief Administrator Aubrey Williams declared relief shortage of funds caused in part by expenditures for drought had made it imperative

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to drop about 175,000 persons by December 15 and to transfer 250,000 from drought relief to the Resettlement Administration. He said it was up to the cities to take over a goodly part of the cost of WPA work.

Opposing this viewpoint were members of the executive council of the United States Conference of Mayors headed by Mayor LaGuardia of New York City. They cabled an appeal to President Roosevelt in South America to countermand orders for reduction in relief. They argued that their communities could not well afford to shoulder the additional burden for relief. And, finally, LaGuardia hustled to Washington for a "showdown."

There Harry L. Hopkins, WPA administrator, who had returned to the capital, clarified the situation last week. He pledged that "no person who needs relief will be dropped," and said that those who were dropped and in need of aid would be able to "get back on relief through local relief boards."

Dismissals, he continued, will be confined to administrative staff aides, non-relief project workers and relief workers who have outside sources of income. He saw no fear that "any downward adjustment in WPA is the beginning of demobilization."

Following this statement, the mayors mapped a drive to get Congress to appropriate funds to carry on work after the finances are depleted late in January. Meanwhile, around the attitude of the President there was interest and speculation as one of the first tests of the New Deal's second term was at work.

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