

INEFFICIENCY IS GREAT PROBLEM

Employees On Duluth Advisory Board See Difficulty in Maintaining Minimum Wage.

MANY GIRLS WILL LOSE JOBS, SAYS MERCHANT

Six Dollars a Week Necessary for Employees' Subsistence, Says Miss Culkin.

Jennie is a factory worker. She lives at home, but there is a drunken father and every cent of her earnings are required to help the family. Laura, next door, does not live at home. She has the problem of room, board, laundry and suitable clothing for her position in a department store. Mary is a "pin money girl." She earns enough to pay for the most of her clothing, and her father must supply room, board and incidental expenses. These are some of the varying conditions which the committees of the state minimum wage commission face, in their investigations to arrive at a definite knowledge of the conditions surrounding the women wage earners of the state.

"The problem of establishing a minimum wage is a most serious one," said I. Freimuth, member of the Duluth advisory board, discussing yesterday the varying angles of the question.

Problem Is Acute.

"From the employers' side the manufacturer's problem is an acute one, as he must come in competition with factories in other states where the minimum wage is not in force.

"In Utah, where the minimum wage law is in operation, I believe they have worked out a scale of 75 cents a day, as a minimum for learners and 85 cents for the partially skilled. In Oregon the minimum wage has been set at \$9.50 a week in the city of Portland and \$8.25 in smaller cities. Massachusetts has an optional measure, used as an advisory plan rather than an arbitrary law."

"Our investigations are at too early a stage for the advisory committee to make a definite statement," said Bentley P. Neff. "There must be a great deal more investigating before it can be definitely stated as to what a fair minimum wage will be, for either the Twin Cities or Duluth. The whole question comes back, in a measure, to vocational training in the schools, which should raise the standard of workers."

Inefficiency Is Problem.

"The minimum wage question has its greatest problem in the girl who, for varying causes, is not capable of earning more than \$5 a week," is the opinion of E. A. Silberstein of the Silberstein & Bondy company. "Many girls will be thrown out of employment with the higher wage scale in action, and while it will not touch the skilled worker or saleswoman the matter is apt to fall rather heavily on the inefficient. It will mean a weeding-out process, and the result will be felt especially by those who are inefficient, either from mental or physical causes."

Miss Addie Smith has been investigating conditions among Duluth working girls with reference to the amount necessary to spend for room and board. The committee report was presented at the last meeting of the advisory board by Miss Margaret Culkin, chairman.

"It is absolutely impossible for a girl to maintain herself under \$6 a week for room, board and clothing," said Miss Culkin. "This \$6 will not give her a cent for carfare, doctor bills, laundry, sick benefits or amusements. She could not afford, on this sum, to buy a nickel's worth of candy."

Forty Cents a Day for Meals.

"This amount assumes that a girl will only spend 10 cents a day for breakfast, 10 cents for lunch and 20 cents for dinner. It gives her \$100 a year for clothes, which is \$80 or \$100 too low if she has to present a good appearance, as in a department store, for example.

"The question of crowding out the inefficient worker, the girl who is not capable of earning more than \$5 a week is another angle," said Miss Culkin. "When a girl can not earn more than this sum it means one of two things—either she is incapable mentally or physically, or she is under age and has not reached her standard of efficiency."

If the former is true, she should not compete and keep down wages for the capable girl. If the latter situation holds it is equally true that the child worker should not be exploited. Where a girl of 20 years is not earning enough money to support herself it means that her father or friends are carrying the burden, or part of it. The \$3, \$4 and \$5 a week working girl is a menace to good industrial conditions.

"Whether the minimum wage question can be worked out satisfactorily in Minnesota is a question not yet answered, but the investigation will be invaluable in ascertaining where the weak points of the labor situation are to be found."

The next meeting of the Duluth advisory committee will be held Friday, May 22.