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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1943
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Withdrawal of Workers from Food Distributive Trades: Special
Schemes for Wholesale and Retail Provision and Grocery Trades

Owing to the great and urgent need for men and women for the fighting services and for vital war industries, the Government has decided that there must be a further release of labour from the food distributive trades.

The total number of persons involved will not amount to a very high proportion of those engaged in these trades - perhaps about 7 or 8 per cent - but owing to the very large number of persons employed in food distribution the contribution to the war effort will be a useful one.

The burden of this fresh release of labour will be spread over the different branches of food distribution so that people are taken from where they can best be spared; and the method of determining which persons shall be released will differ with different trades.

The grocery and provisions trade is being dealt with first and to ensure that little or no additional inconvenience shall be caused to the general public in doing their shopping the Ministry of Food, in consultation with the Ministry of Labour and National Service, has prepared a special scheme for dealing with this trade. Every wholesale firm and every retail shop will be required to make a return giving details of its staff as at March 1. Forms on which the return must be made will be sent to them during the next few days. The smaller retail firms will be dealt with in groups by their local Food Office. Large multiple organisations and co-operative societies will be dealt with separately. Wholesalers will be dealt with as members of the new war-time associations of wholesalers which are in course of being established. The present scheme does not apply to first-hand distributors or food manufacturers.

When the returns have been received the total personnel of each group of shops or wholesale firms will be ascertained and the release of about one person in twenty will be required from each group. The proportion is fixed at this relatively low level in recognition of the fact that this trade is bearing a great part of the burden of the food rationing schemes.

Men who were under 35 when they registered, other than key men, and single women born in the years 1918 to 1923 will be the first choice, but they will be taken from the shops and firms which, according to the staff they have and the nature of their business are best able to release them. The extent to which it may be necessary to call upon higher age groups to make up the quota can only be determined when the returns have been examined.

It is fully realised that the maintenance of food distribution is of the utmost national importance and that due regard must be paid to the long hours being worked by so many people and the consequent shopping difficulties. It is hoped, however, that when this release of labour has been made it will not be necessary to ask the traders concerned to make further releases during 1943, and that those employees who are left in the trade will remain in their jobs in the knowledge that they are doing work which is essential to the war effort and that they are not likely to be disturbed at any rate during the remainder of this year. The two ministries concerned are confident that with the co-operation of traders and some forbearance on the part of shoppers it is possible for this additional contribution towards meeting vital war needs to be made without serious inconvenience either to the trade or the public.

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