

The January Review

An important part of *Monthly Labor Review's* readership is made up of labor relations practitioners from both sides of the table. Every year, as a service to these readers and as perhaps under-appreciated background to others, the *Review* has summarized developments in State labor, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation legislation. These laws are the infrastructure of collective bargaining and economic security.

In 1997, reports Richard R. Nelson, the hot topic was the minimum wage. The Federal Government, 31 States, the District of Columbia, and Guam all raised their wage floors. Unemployment insurance legislation in 1997 was dominated by measures to recoup overissuances of food stamps through deductions from unemployment benefits, according to Diana Runner's article. Other significant developments included provisions for withholding of Federal income taxes and providing claims information to Federal and State agencies enforcing child support payments. Glenn Whittington summarizes workers' compensation legislation. Most of the issues he highlights were changes to benefit provisions. There were, however, also interesting expansions of premium reduction programs for employers who maintain drug-free workplaces and extensions of coverage to school-to-work programs and term employment that results from a public assistance program.

This issue introduces a change in emphasis in this column. Labor Month in Review will now focus on recent news from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The briefs on current research that used to appear here will now be carried in their own department, *Précis*. (See page 37.)

Contingent workers

The proportion of workers who hold contingent jobs—basically those jobs

that are not expected to last—declined slightly between February 1995 and February 1997, according to a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). Using the broadest of three estimates of the number of contingent workers, about 4.4 percent of all employment was found to be contingent in 1997, compared with 4.9 percent in 1995.

A total of 5.6 million workers held a contingent job under the broadest definition in 1997. They were younger than other workers; persons under the age of 25 made up about 30 percent of contingent workers, compared with about 13 percent among noncontingent employment. Contingent workers were also more likely than noncontingent workers to be female.

Contingent workers were employed in a wide range of jobs. They were more likely than noncontingent employees to hold professional and administrative support positions and less likely to be in management or sales. They also were over-represented in the services and construction industries.

Injuries and illnesses

A total of 6.2 million injuries or illnesses were reported in private workplaces during 1996, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The resulting rate of 7.4 cases per 100 equivalent full-time workers was the lowest on record since BLS started reporting this information in the 1970s. Among goods-producing industries, the incidence rate for injuries and illnesses per hundred full-time workers fell from 11.2 in 1995 to 10.2 in 1996. In service-producing industries, the incidence rate fell from 6.7 per hundred to 6.2.

Among goods-producing industries, manufacturing had the highest incidence rate in 1996, followed by construction. Within the service-producing sector, the highest incidence rate was in the transportation and public utilities industries.

New wage data

On December 18, 1997, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced the first release of national wage data from the redesigned Occupational Employment Survey. Data for 1996 are available for a comprehensive set of 764 occupations and cover employment, average (mean) wage, and median wage for each. The highest median straight-time hourly wages were found among a select group of health-diagnosing occupations—physicians and surgeons (more than \$60.01), dentists (\$47.66), and podiatrists (\$47.64)—and professors of law (\$45.02), medicine (37.04), and engineering (\$36.29). The half-dozen jobs with the lowest median wages included waiters and waitresses (\$5.37), food-and-fiber farm workers (\$5.41), ushers and ticket takers (\$5.47), fast-food cooks, (\$5.48), dining room attendants (\$5.49), and combined food preparation and service workers (\$5.49).

CPI base years

The Bureau of Labor Statistics will maintain the current reference base of 1982=100 used for most Consumer Price Index (CPI) series. In addition, the 1967=100 reference base will continue to be the alternate base for the All Items indexes. BLS had previously indicated its intention to change the numerical reference base from their present 1982=100 base to a 1993=100 base, and to eliminate the alternate reference base of 1967=100, with release of the January 1999 CPI. Again, these reference base changes will not occur.

Next month's Review

The February issue features articles on the demographic and spending patterns of young adults, the 1997 employment story, and workers in services jobs. □