

traditional areas of unemployment still bear the biggest burden today. The present government's planned cuts in regional aid can be expected to create further unemployment in these areas.

Which industries are the hardest hit? According to the D of E the highest unemployment rate is in the construction industry. This stood at 10.7% in November 1979 and is bound to increase with the cuts in public sector housebuilding. In mining and quarrying the rate was 6.9%. Those fortunate enough to work in the gas, electricity and water industries faced an unemployment rate of only 2.1%. The D of E's analysis covers very wide industrial categories and the picture will vary from specific industry to specific industry. The overall picture which emerges however is of higher unemployment rates in the primary industries (agriculture and mining) and construction and lower rates in the finance and services sector.

Which occupations are hardest hit? This varies between male and female unemployment as their employment patterns are different. For instance over 40% of all male unemployed are general labourers. Female unemployment is more concentrated in clerical and related occupations as most women work in these areas. These are occupations which will be badly hit by new technology. The occupational structure of unemployment as you would expect tends to follow the structure of employment.

What age groups suffer most from unemployment? This again differs by sex. A higher percentage of female unemployment is concentrated in the under 25 age groups, in fact over 50%. For males the greatest single concentration of unemployment by age is in the 25 to 34 age group. Young people are especially badly hit by unemployment. The national unemployment rate for 16 and 17 year olds is more than twice the national average at over 11% and would be much higher if the temporary employment schemes did not exist.

A growing problem has been that of long-term unemployment (those out of work for more than one year) and by the end of 1979 it accounted for a quarter of all unemployed persons.¹ It is now higher than at any period since the war. The types of worker most vulnerable to this sort of unemployment are the older unskilled or semi-skilled.

The female unemployment rate nationally is lower than that for males. The rate of course will vary according to occupation, region, age and occupation and in some cases region and age, and in some cases will be higher than the corresponding male rate.

Unemployment is a sensitive political issue. Most governments since the war have

felt the need to be seen to be trying to do something about it. When the level of unemployment began to rise sharply in the mid-1970s the Labour government introduced a series of temporary schemes to keep



people off the dole queues. They have been aimed at all age groups, but mostly at young people. An example of such a scheme is the Youth Opportunities Programme (launched in April 1978) which aims to give unemployed young people (16 to 18) experience of work and some training. At the other end of the spectrum, the Job Release Scheme allows older men and women to give up their job and receive an allowance, provided their employer replaces them with an unemployed person.

Figures from the D of E show that in August 1979 the number of people covered by special employment and training measures was 329,000.² This total represented about 23% of the unemployment total in that month. Had these schemes not been in existence the unemployment would have been higher by about a quarter.

Although these measures have been welcomed by the labour movement because of the part they play in alleviating unemployment they are open to criticism as being temporary, short-term projects which do little to provide secure long-term employment. Their effectiveness will be lessened by actual and planned cuts in the schemes inaugurated by the present government. In the last budget £172 million was cut from their expenditure for 1979-80.³ The government expenditure White Paper for 1980-81 set out plans to hold expenditure on these schemes at the reduced 1979-80 levels and to close down three schemes at present operating.⁴ On February 14th

¹ The long-term unemployed; Some new evidence. Dof E Gazette Jan 1980.

² *Labour Research* Nov 1979.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The government's expenditure plans 1980-81 Cmnd 7746 HMSO.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is a personal tragedy, a waste of skilled productive resources and a source of concern to the labour movement, whose members are its chief victims. The latest unemployment figures announced on February 26th make a dismal reading. Almost 1.5 million people are now registered as out of work. The seasonally adjusted increase of 46,000 over the January figure was the largest February increase for 5 years and the fifth monthly rise in a row. The total number of job vacancies fell for the eighth month running. Unemployment now seems firmly set on an upward trend and is bound to increase as the recession deepens. Predictions of 2 million unemployed by 1981 seem increasingly likely.

That's the general picture, but what is it like on closer inspection? Who suffers most from unemployment? In which areas and occupations is it most prevalent? What is and can be done to combat it?

Looking first at the regional distribution of unemployment, the latest figures available from the Department of Employment show a wide and growing disparity in unemployment rates between the regions, from a low of 3.6% of the available labour force in the South East, to a high of 11% in Northern Ireland. In general the further north one goes the higher unemployment rates become. The position gets more complicated if we look at local areas. Take for instance two towns in the South East, St Albans and Ramsgate. St Albans has an unemployment rate of 1.8% while Ramsgate has a rate of 7.7%. Similar variations are to be found throughout the various regions.

Many inner-city areas whose traditional industrial base is shrinking have high levels of unemployment. Unemployment in Liverpool is currently running at over 12% and areas of East London have similar rates. It is difficult to draw a consistent picture for unemployment over the whole of the UK but it is still true to say in general that the

however it announced a revision to these plans by projecting an expansion of the YOPS programme and continuing the Temporary Short-Time Working Scheme which had previously been marked for closure.⁵

The present government's policy of letting market forces decide the economic fate of the country cannot and will not provide full employment. As British industry loses out to foreign competition at home and abroad this is bound to mean fewer jobs. This coupled with an increasing labour force and the introduction of micro-chip technology could mean previously unseen levels of unemployment will be with us in the mid-1980s.

It is vital therefore to campaign for and win an understanding and acceptance of the alternative economic strategy throughout the labour movement, this strategy having as its core the idea of full-employment. This of course means creating the conditions in which the present government's policies can be rejected and a future Labour government committed to a genuine programme of social and economic advance. The question of unemployment and the fact that it exists within the context of capitalism is a key issue in convincing people of the need to restructure society.

⁵*British Business* 22 Feb 1980.