

# Latest Job Figures Hide Grim Story

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Washington

The unemployment rate held steady at 8.2 per cent in February because 580,000 persons simply stopped looking for jobs, the government reported yesterday.

The monthly Labor Department statistics showed that, on paper, the jobless rate remained the same from January to February: 8.2 per cent of the labor force, or an estimated 7.5 million persons, out of work.

It was the first break in steadily rising monthly unemployment rates since May-June, 1974, but labor officials said the statistics merely hid some bleak economic trends:

- The stable unemployment rate resulted from a trade-off in which the loss of 540,000 available jobs was offset by the fact that 580,000 persons, mostly women and teenagers, dropped out of the job market altogether.

- The total number of Americans employed has decreased by 2.4 million since September a figure described as "the largest five-month cutback recorded in the postwar period."

- Fifty-five per cent of the 7.5 million persons now out of work are victims of recent layoffs.

- The average duration of unemployment has increased to 11.7 weeks, one week higher than in January.

- The number of available jobs has decreased to 84 million, meaning the economy now has the same num-

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ber of available jobs as it had in May, 1973.

"No one can take any satisfaction from these figures," commented AFL-CIO president George Meany.

The White House issued a statement saying unemployment would get even worse "in the immediate future" before it gets better late in the year. President Ford has said he expects joblessness to level out at around 8.5 per cent, but some economists are predicting nine per cent.

In Congress, the House Appropriations Committee approved yesterday a Democratic proposal to accelerate spending of \$5.9 billion to extend at least 900,000 and possibly up to two million public service jobs.

The money bill would draw on programs authorized by the last Congress. The major proposals cover \$1.6 billion in public service job and \$412.7 million for summer youth employment.

The government report for February showed unemployment in the manufacturing industries had risen to a record 11 per cent.

The Labor Department said all 21 industries counted in its index for manufacturing employment reported decreases, as total manufacturing employment fell by 425,000 to 18.3 million, the lowest level since September, 1965.

Unemployment in the construction industry rose to 15.9 per cent in February, up from 15 per cent in January and 8.2 per cent a year earlier.

*A.P. & U.P.*