

## EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE IN 1956

**I**N recent years British industry has seen an expanded working population with a high demand for labour and a low rate of unemployment. The annual report of the Ministry of Labour and National Service (H.M.S.O., 6s.) shows that this was not the case in 1956.

The total working population (which comprises those in civil employment, in H.M. Forces and the unemployed) increased only slightly, small decreases in the numbers in civil employment and in the Armed Forces being rather more than outweighed by a rise in the number of unemployed persons. There was an increase in the number of workers on short-time and some falling-off in overtime. The number of unfilled vacancies at the end of the year was lower than at the end of 1955. The post-war trend of a falling level of employment in the basic industries and a rising level in the manufacturing industries as a whole was checked.

The total working population rose by 14,000 during the year to a total of 24,087,000 at the end of the year, with a peak in November when a new post-war record total of 24,225,000 was reached. By the end of the year the number of men and women in civil employment had decreased by 64,000 to 22,989,000 and the number of H.M. Forces was 761,000, a reduction of 18,000.

There was some easing in the demand for labour during the year, affecting mainly semi-skilled and unskilled workers. This occurred mostly in the manufacturing industries although there was a small increase in employment in some sections engaged largely on exports and capital goods. Within the basic industries, however, the general decline in man-power was arrested. The number in employment in coal mining increased by more than 3,000 and in transport and communication by 9,000; in the gas, electricity and water supply group the labour force remained unchanged; there was a decrease in mining (other than coal mining) and quarrying, and agriculture again suffered a substantial decline. Other industries which increased their labour force during the year were building and contracting, the distributive trades and the chemicals and allied trades.

The average number of persons registered as unemployed during 1956 was 257,000. Although this represented an increase of 25,000 compared with 1955, it was less than in any other post-war year except 1951.

The rising trend in wages continued, although the rise in prices slowed down until late in the year when a further marked rise occurred. The post-war expansion in industrial production as a whole and in the output per man was halted in 1956, the rates remaining approximately at the 1955-level. A large measure of economy in Government expenditure was part of the Government's general disinflationary policy during 1956. By the careful choice of economy measures the Ministry succeeded in making a substantial contribution to the economies while maintaining its service to industry and the public at a high standard.

The Ministry's employment exchange and appointments services continued their primary purpose of bringing together men and women seeking employment and employers requiring workers; they also

assisted in the supply of labour to the undermanned essential industries. Employers were encouraged to offer ex-regular servicemen resettlement in civil occupations, to accept older and disabled people on their merits and to expand part-time working. In spite of some easing of the shortage of labour, there was still a high average number of unfilled vacancies on the registers of the Ministry. The changes during the year in man-power demands by a number of industries, and especially the redundancies that occurred in the motor-vehicle and other manufacturing industries, made necessary a substantial measure of redeployment of labour; in this the Ministry, helped by a number of employers who co-operated with employment exchanges by giving early notice of labour redundancies, achieved considerable success. Following a review early in the year, the Notification of Vacancies Orders, 1952, were revoked with effect from May 7, 1956, and at the same time the arrangements for giving preference to certain classes of vacancies were discontinued. Nevertheless, the number of vacancies filled remained high, the total for the year being 2,354,000.

Vocational training was provided by the Ministry for disabled persons, for ex-regular members of H.M. Forces and for other able-bodied men and women. The total numbers of new applicants for training and those completing training during the year were fewer than in 1955. Training was given, in the main, in the Ministry's Government Training Centres.

As in previous years, special services, including industrial rehabilitation and training, were provided to assist disabled persons to obtain employment. Industrial rehabilitation was provided at the Ministry's Industrial Rehabilitation Units, and about 80 per cent of the 7,800 men and women who completed courses either obtained jobs or began courses of training within three months of leaving the units.

Although there were more stoppages of work arising from industrial disputes in 1956, there were considerably fewer working days lost than in 1955; the total number of days lost was, in fact, the lowest since 1952. Strikes arising from labour redundancies in the motor-vehicle and ancillary industries were a new feature.

At the end of 1956, there were sixty Wages Councils and five Catering Wages Boards, the same numbers as at the end of 1955; one new Council was established and one abolished during the year. Arrears of wages were paid to more than 20,000 workers following action by the Wages Inspectorate.

The increasing awareness in recent years of the need for good human relations in industry was maintained in 1956; the incidence of labour redundancies in some parts of the country during the year emphasized both the need for and the value of such relations. The Ministry's Personnel Management Advisory Service continued to meet requests for assistance from particular firms and to co-operate with their organizations in this field; the value of their work is completely disproportionate to the small numbers employed.

In the international labour and social field the Ministry again made a major contribution to the work of the International Labour Organization.