

Questions and Answers on Unemployment

(The following is the third of a series of Questions and Answers on the World Crisis, Unemployment and the Tasks of the revolutionary trade unions, issued by the Red International of Labor Unions.—Editor.)

Question 3. Is the recent growth of unemployment a result of the crisis?

A correct answer to this question is exceedingly important, for throughout the whole of the post-war period there has been considerable unemployment practically in all the countries.

Suffice it to say that even when the period of prosperity was at its height in the U. S. A. there were between 2 and 3 million unemployed in this country, unemployment never fell below the million mark in Great Britain, while in Germany the unemployment figures fluctuated between 600,000-700,000 and two and a half millions.

Owing to capitalist rationalization and the displacement of labor by machinery, unemployment during the last few years has shown a definite tendency towards further growth, and the army of unemployed today is no longer a reserve, but altogether superfluous, for there is no hope that these men will ever be absorbed by industry again.

While we see the present day economic crisis developing amidst the general economic crisis of the post-war period, we should note that the exceptional growth of unemployment during the last few months has taken place amidst the growing chronic unemployment which has been so much in evidence during the last few years.

That the crisis will increase unemployment still further is borne out by the following facts. A conservative estimate places unemployment in the U. S. A. at the end of January somewhere over 6 millions, that is to say three millions over the normal "prosperity" figures.

In Germany there are about three and a half million unemployed, who comprise approximately a fourth of the proletariat.

In England there were a million and a half unemployed, a further increase of 382,000 being registered between June and December, which far exceeded the figures for the same months in previous years.

Of the small countries we might call attention to Italy with its 800,000 unemployed (although official fascist statistics claim only 400,000); Austria with its 400,000, Czechoslovakia 400,000, Hungary 300,000, and so on. In the small countries there are more than three millions unemployed today.

Should we add to these figures the 500,000 unemployed in Mexico; the million unemployed in Latin America, the British Dominions and Japan with their million each, then we see that apart from the colonial and semi-colonial countries there are approximately 17 millions unemployed today.

This means that world capitalism is dooming 17 million proletarians, together with their families a total of 70 million people to starvation.

In contrast to previous years we already have at the present time, at the very beginning of the crisis, an increase of unemployment by five or six millions. Since there is every reason to believe that the crisis will spread and be deepened, this of course holds out every prospect of a further growth of unemployment in the capitalist countries.