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EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

PO Box 93174,
 2143 Yeoville,
 South Africa.

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The nature of WIP, which is to stimulate debate and present controversial views, ensures that the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

editorial

UNEMPLOYMENT AND underemployment in South Africa currently stands at more than 2-million people, the vast majority of them being African workers. This situation is of capitalism's own making; it is nonetheless of grave concern to those involved directly in the South African economy, as well as those who ensure that society remains fundamentally the same. Businessmen are expressing fear that social unrest may accompany the present level of unemployment, and are calling on the state to implement programmes to alleviate the position. The state, on the other hand, is calling on capitalists to use labour-intensive techniques in production. This involves the use of more workers in relation to machinery and raw material (means of production) employed.

But not many people are looking for the causes of unemployment, and laying blame where it should be: with the development of capitalism in South Africa and in the relationship between South African capitalism and the world capitalist system.

Why unemployment?

It is the nature of capitalist accumulation itself which creates unemployment. The motive force of capitalist production, which is the creation of profits in order to accumulate more capital, is at the root cause of growing

unemployment in South Africa and other capitalist countries. Put simply, there is a tendency for capitalism to utilise more and more productive machinery in order to increase the surplus produced by workers. This tendency means that the organic composition of capital changes as more machinery is introduced, and fewer workers are employed relative to the means of production used. The organic composition of capital refers to the ratio of means of production to living labour in production. It denotes the way in which the money capital advances by the capitalist is split between buying means of production (machinery, tools, raw materials) and labour-power (the capacity of the worker to produce, which is what capitalists buy from workers). The capital advanced to buy means of production is constant capital; that which is used to buy labour-power (the potential or capacity to work) is referred to as variable capital.

One of the ways in which capital can increase productivity is to use more constant capital in relation to variable capital, ie to replace workers with machinery; (this is, of course, not the only way in which productivity can be increased. The organic composition of capital can remain constant while the working day is made longer, or labour can be organised to work more rapidly. But these methods do not concern us here).

With an increase in constant capital relative to variable capital, people are excluded from employment in two ways. Some are directly excluded in that they are 'replaced' by machines and lose their jobs; others are indirectly excluded, in that

when they enter the job market for the first time as school leavers, or recent migrants, they cannot find employment. These people excluded from unemployment are collectively referred to as the relative surplus population. They form a surplus group relative to the average needs of capitalism for labour. But because capitalism's needs in this regard are not constant, the size of the relative surplus population changes under different circumstances. We will return to this question below.

Forms of the relative surplus population.

The relative surplus population takes on a number of different forms. It appears in 1). a floating form. These are people who are pushed out of industry at certain times, and then re-employed during boom periods, only to lose jobs again. For example, during slack periods/cycles the age of retirement may be lowered, and incentives provided for scholars to remain at school. This effectively excludes certain people from employment. During periods of growth, the opposite would apply, thereby increasing the numbers of workers available for employment.

2). a latent form. People who have been engaged in labour-intensive agriculture can easily be forced off the land and into industrial employment with increased mechanisation of agriculture. Those who remain on the land in this form of agriculture are therefore a potential source of labour for capitalist production. Women engaged in domestic work may also be seen as part of this latent form of population that is surplus in relation to capitalist production, *distribution and administration. The provision*

of crèches and 'labour-saving' household devices can release many thousands of women for employment elsewhere, if the need should arise. When that need does not arise, these people join the ranks of the unemployed. 3). a stagnant form. These people are actively employed, but only extremely irregularly. 4). pauperism. These people form the 'hospital of the active labour-army and the dead-weight of the industrial reserve army'. They are the poor, the incapacitated, aged, criminals, orphans, and so on. This group tends to be permanently excluded from any employment. 5). It has recently been argued that a new form of the relative surplus population has emerged - one which did not exist in earlier periods of capitalist development. This is the marginalised labour force, and consists of people permanently excluded from employment in the dominant level of the economy.

This dominant level of the economy is formed by companies that have grown large through two processes: concentration (ie growth within one type of productive activity), and centralisation (growth through expanding into a range of activities, normally through taking over existing firms). Furthermore, the companies often compete with each other on an international level, have international financial links, and employ technology which has been developed in the centres of world capitalism (eg USA, Western Europe, Japan). In these centres, technology used is aimed at increasing productivity, primarily through the use of machinery. As explained earlier, this changes the organic composition of capital in favour of constant capital, against variable

capital. Because of this, the rate of growth of employment opportunities within this level of the economy is lower than the rate of growth in the labour force. Those members of the labour force consequently excluded from employment within this dominant monopoly level of the economy are said to have been marginalised. They may still find sporadic employment in the smaller, less capital-intensive, competitive level of the economy, although these opportunities decline as more and more of these firms are taken over, or forced out of business, by the dominant monopoly level of the economy.

Results and implications.

Part of the relative surplus population is referred to as the industrial reserve army when considered in its functionality to capitalism. This reserve army of labour fulfils a dual role within the economy. Firstly, it provides a reserve of people who can be employed when the economy expands rapidly (although in South Africa, even during the economic boom of the 1960s, the level of unemployment did not decrease). It also provides labour when new large-scale activities are undertaken (such as railway extensions, harbours, etc). Secondly, because of competition between employed workers and unemployed workers who constitute the reserve army of labour, capitalists are able to keep wages down.

The industrial reserve army is, therefore, functional to capitalism.

The marginalised labour force is not separable from the rest of the economy; it is, after all, a creation of that economy.

But it is directly functional (in the way that the industrial reserve army is) only to the competitive, non-monopoly level of the economy. The marginalised labour force hardly affects the level of wages in the monopoly level of the economy: monopoly capitalism increasingly needs a stable, semi-skilled labour force with an income high enough to be able to consume some of the products made by this level of economic activity. Rapid turnover of the workforce becomes a threat to productivity in these circumstances, rather than a mechanism to lower wages. The education (albeit low and specific) invested in the labour force employed in the monopoly level of the economy cannot be 'wasted' by firing workers and taking on those at the factory gate, even if it can be done at lower wages.

The growing size of the marginalised labour force has implications for political stability within a society. Firstly, more and more people are competing for fewer and fewer jobs. While this may be of benefit to individual capitalists, the unrest and conflict that accompanies this competition is a threat to the functioning of capital over time. It is especially threatening to monopoly capitalism as this level demands stability - no riots at the factory gates, no blocking of roads, no boycotting of transport preventing 'their' workers from getting to factories and offices.

Secondly, an ever-growing number of people are realising that they probably have no chance of ever finding steady employment. This would be especially prevalent among the youth - those people with high expectations - and those workers being retrenched when their

jobs are taken over by machines. This would apply particularly to farm workers, who when displaced from employment by mechanisation in agriculture, have no qualifications for jobs in industry, especially not in monopoly industry.

These people form a threat to the reproduction of the capitalist system - to the ability to maintain the calm and belief in the system which allows it to function over a long period.

Responses by the state and capital.

The state, acting in the interests of the capitalist system as a whole, has a number of options. Some of these have apparently already been rejected in South Africa as either impractical, or not in the interests of the system of capital accumulation. One of these would be large-scale, labour-intensive activity, such as building, to be undertaken by the state itself. However, the state does not stand outside of capitalism, and the crises which affect the system also affect the regulator of that system. Much as sufficient capital is not available to the private sector for such activity, so the state faces the identical problem.

The local options are limited even more by the racial dimension of the conflict between capital and labour. It is so much more difficult for the state to convince the majority of the population that its actions are in their interests when that state is 'white', and whites are the major beneficiaries of state action.

Control and repression of the unemployed has, therefore, to become more and more direct.

In this, the location of the unemployed is of crucial importance. It can be expected that, as the Riekert Commission advised, those without jobs and accommodation will find it ever more difficult to remain in urban areas. At the end of October, all employers of 'illegals' will face stiff fines (up to R500), while the 'illegals' themselves will be subject to the same prosecution as before. Those who have managed to register will be only slightly better off in that they are now formally migrants with no urban rights. In other words, there will be 'benefits' for those in stable employment - mostly those in jobs with the monopoly level of the economy. On the other hand, reserves/bantustans await migrants and the unemployed.

This strategy will possibly make it easier to control the unemployed with the aid of 'homeland' governments, but will also create greater divisions within the working class between employed and unemployed.

Assisting in this policy of the creation of 'urban insiders' and 'rural outsiders' are a host of organisations engaged in 'improving the quality of urban life', providing housing for those in employment, offering the unemployed and homeless cheap solutions (cheap to capital) to the 'housing problem', soothing consciences with schemes providing employment for tens of people, etc. Some of these organisations were set up directly by capital.

This is not to say that some of these 'solutions' are in themselves bad. It is rather that they are offered as 'solutions', and as an end in themselves, when they are measures to alleviate, not solve, the overall

problem of over 2-million unemployed. They are, in most cases, solutions to the problem of how to maintain the present system which is itself responsible for the problems.

Responses of the working class (employed and unemployed).

There are a wide range of responses which the working class engages in to act against the effects of unemployment. The most widespread effect of unemployment is that wages and subsistence goods have now to be spread even more thinly than before. Along with this, it has been shown that wages are forced down for a large section of the working class in employment, because of competition for jobs.

A direct response by the working class would be to demand jobs and to act in support of that demand. This kind of response is infrequent and really only possible if the working class is organised politically.

However, indirect responses directed against increasing hardship is an everyday occurrence and a way of life for many. Theft is one response, and so is 'informal sector' activity (see the articles on Winterveld and Soweto in this issue). There have been many reported incidents of stock theft in the rural areas, wherever scattered pieces of reserves/bantustans border on wealthier 'white' rural South Africa.

Indirect responses include issues where communities have mobilised strongly. Here one thinks of bus boycotts (see the article in this issue of WIP), and action against increased rentals. In the past, the working class has also mobilised in protest over food price rises.

Those in employment have their labour to withdraw as a weapon in attempts to improve their position and those who rely on their wages (immediate family as well as unemployed friends and relatives). This weapon, although surprisingly frequently used during the present crisis (see 'Labour Action' in this and previous issues of WIP) is blunted during periods of mass unemployment.

These are all responses by the working class to the manner in which the capitalist system develops. They are specific responses to the current situation in South Africa. They are real issues to the working class, but apparently sometimes seen as 'problems' by working class organisations. For example, some trade unions seem to perceive themselves as organisations of the employed working class only. Thus, the union involved in the Eveready strike (see WIP 7) spoke of the 'lack of dignity' of the unemployed women who gathered at the gates of the factory to apply for the jobs of those dismissed.

Unemployment is not a point of production issue; neither are transport cost increases, rent rises, exploitation in any of the 'informal sector', etc. But then neither are a number of the factors which determine the size of working class wages. The definition of the working class cannot be confined to the point of production and the factory floor; and neither can working class interests, activity and organisation.

A few practical comments remain to be made on the 'Work In Progress' project. WIP has thusfar managed to function on donations

received from those who have been able to contribute financially in return for each copy. These donations have been in the region of 60c per copy, with the exception of a few individuals who have been able to contribute considerably more. This has enabled us to distribute WIP free of charge to those who cannot afford contributions. However, because of increasing size and production costs, we have lost some money on the last two issues of WIP.

We are therefore going to have to ask for contributions of approximately 80c per copy from next year. For those who can afford to give more, we ask for a donation of R10,00 per year. This will enable us to increase distribution in those areas where we cannot expect to receive financial contributions.

Our next issue of WIP will be out in the first quarter of next year. Contributions are encouraged. An encouraging sign has been the number of contributions received over the past five issues, and we aim to solicit and provoke even more contributions for future issues. Please submit your material, test your ideas, and share your information.

We publish, in this issue, an index of the major material which has appeared in the first 10 issues of WIP. We hope that this will make it more accessible, and request our readers to make this index available to people who have not received any or all copies of WIP produced.

We thank our contributors and readers for their ongoing support which we believe is making WIP a successful and growing project.

-THE EDITORS.