

177,000 out of work but...

There were 177,000 unemployed people in Hongkong in September last year, according to the first unemployment statistics ever compiled by the Government.

The figures came from the published results of a sample survey which was disclosed by the Commissioner for Census and Statistics, Mr D. S. Whitelegge, yesterday.

However, the unemployment statistics have since been offset by various economic indicators for the fourth quarter of last year (October-December) which showed encouraging signs of improvement in employment.

In a separate official survey of employment for this period in the manufacturing sector, the total of 678,857 people employed in December showed an increase of 51,226 people or 8.2 per cent when compared with the employment figure of 627,631 in September last year (the month when the unemployment figure was assessed in the sample labour force survey).

In putting out the figures, Mr Whitelegge cautioned that the results of the labour force survey was in no way providing any cause for alarm.

He said the overall unemployment figure was significantly less than some of the more pessimistic guesses (which reportedly numbered between 250,000 and 300,000), but was more than the optimistic guesses.

He said the figure of 177,000 unemployed represented 9.1 per cent of the total labour force of about 1.94 million.

The unemployment figure is estimated to include 7.6 per cent of those who had just left school; 3.4 per cent who had a new job but had worked less than the required number of hours under the definition of "employment"; 9.8 per cent who were temporarily laid off

work; 9.6 per cent who were not seeking work because of temporary sickness; and a further nine per cent who were not seeking work because they believed it was not available.

The remaining 60.6 per cent are those simply seeking other work.

Mr Whitelegge also explained the definition of "unemployed" as used in the survey, which broadly covered anyone aged between 14-64 who was not employed but who was looking for work.

Anyone who had worked for more than 15 hours in the seven days prior to the survey date was taken to be employed.

Apart from expressing caution in using the unemployment figure as it was, Mr Whitelegge added that a clearer picture would emerge after a similar sample survey scheduled for next month.

Then, he added, there would be some basis for comparison over a fairly short span of time.

Stress was, however, placed on the more accurate data obtained on employment for the last quarter of 1975 in the manufacturing sector.

According to this employment survey, a total of 678,857 people were engaged in manufacturing establishments as at December 4, 1975.

This represented an increase of 51,226 people or 8.2 per cent when compared with the figure of 627,631 for September last year.

In the industrial sector, the main increases were recorded in garments (up 25,328); electronic products (up 5,611); cotton weaving (up 2,567); miscellaneous fabricated metal products (up 1,519).

By comparison, employment in the manufacture of gloves dropped by 819, in shipbuilding and repairing by 729 and in plastic flower-making by 423.

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177,000 out of work

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In terms of employment, the two largest industry groups remained wearing apparel (238,958) and textiles (112,922).

Electrical machinery, appliances and supplies (66,353) had overtaken plastic products (63,706) as the third largest industry group, while fabricated metal products (57,322) was still in fifth position.

When compared with a total of 600,128 people employed in December 1974, the employment situation in manufacturing establishments in December last year was higher by 79,000 persons or 13 per cent.

Trade unionists, industrialists and other employers think current unemployment in the Colony could still amount to about five per cent or more of the total labour force.

The Chairman of the

Building Contractors' Association, Mr Ho Sai-chu, said there had been an upturn in employment in the building industry, a major employer here in the last quarter.

Mr Ho thought that five per cent unemployment, if accurate, was still "rather high," but three to four per cent might be "healthier" in attracting new investors.

Although the building industry has not done any surveys recently, Mr Ho said some employers have already reported that wage rates for skilled workers have gone up slightly in the last quarter.

The Chairman of the Federation of Hongkong Industries, Mr James Wu, said that there had been "vast improvement" in the employment situation in manufacturing industries since last September, particularly in the textile electronic and toy sectors.