

# Answer to World Unemployment Sought

*Representatives of governments, workers and employers are to meet soon in Geneva in an effort to find ways of combating world unemployment, a scourge now affecting more than 300,000,000 people. This Asian News Feature raises some of the broad issues that will confront representatives of some 120 member countries of the ILO who are expected to set the principles that will shape the strategy for the Third World.*

Started in 1974, Kenya's ambitious rural works programme is at present providing some 250,000 man-days of work annually in small, labour-intensive projects in road building, soil conservation, afforestation and the like.

The Kenyan experience in employment creation may well be crucial for all developing countries. Well over 300,000,000 people around the world are unemployed or engaged at starvation wages.

Several countries have already made job creation the major single priority of their national economic plans. Representatives of governments, employers, and labour from both the poor and wealthy countries are to examine employment within the global development framework at an important conference in Geneva from June 4-17 this year.

The conference could lead to the formulation of an international employment strategy, but regional experience will point the way. The delegates are likely to examine in detail such recent innovations as Kenya's access road programme which is planned to provide something like 5,000,000 man-days of short-term employment a year.

As in the case of the rural works programme, its constraining factor is not finance but technical personnel capable of running, planning and supervising this work. This, indeed, seems to be the tune of the times to come.

Most development strategies since World War II have relegated employment creation to a secondary

role. Economists put their faith in the rapid growth of gross national product. They hoped that the stimulus provided by the leading economic sectors would create what they called a "trickle down" effect, pulling the more backward sectors of the economy along in their wake.

Some developing economies of the world have paid a price for this policy. For it has brought increasing affluence during the past quarter century to some, but at a price of profound social and economic imbalances, resulting in chronic unemployment over vast regions. The gap in living standards has widened, not only between the developing and industrialised countries but also between the rich and poor within national societies.

Despite considerable economic growth, about 700,000,000 people lived in severe poverty at the beginning of this decade, and 500,000,000 were chronically hungry. Another 800,000,000 will be added to the potential labour force between now and the end of this century in the developing countries alone—without a hope, under present conditions, of finding adequate employment.

Is there a solution? The World Employment Conference will cast its

net widely in the search. Much of the discussion will be based on a dual assumption.

Firstly, employment without an equitable income distribution can only contribute to the present gap between poverty and wealth within national societies, retarding job creation.

And secondly, the continuation of existing distortions in the international division of labour would condemn the poorest countries to generations of bitter poverty and widening unemployment.

In this context representatives of some 120 member countries of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) will examine national employment strategies and policies, international movements of man-power, the role of multinational enterprises, technologies suitable for productive employment creation in developing countries and problems of man-power adjustments.

"The starting point of the conference is an elaboration of the problem", explains a spokesman for the Geneva-based ILO, "and its finishing point, it is hoped, will be the endorsement of a set of principles that should help to shape the international strategy for the Third Development Decade".

## Major ILO Event for 1976 says Director General

ILO's Director General, Francis Blanchard sees this year's Employment Conference as a major ILO event for 1976. One billion jobs he says are needed and sums up the situation in the developing world as follows:—

"Today's employment problem has at least three distinctive aspects. The first, of course, is "open unemployment" where there is no work at all for the workers and no income from work. Although extremely serious, "open unemployment" is not the most important aspect of the problem in the developing countries. Far more dramatic is the second dimension—the large number of people who derive only poverty levels of income from their work on farms and in other types of family employment or wage-earning employment. Underemployment means low incomes, low productivity and under utilization of the labour force. A third dimension is the "mismatch" between employment opportunities and expectations of job seekers. That affects a small but growing part of the labour force.

As a rough estimate, it can be said that the "employment problem" affects between 25 and 30 per cent of the

labour force in the developing countries. In other words, there are some 300 million people who cannot obtain work or who barely eke out a living from their daily toil. Over-all with the developed countries included, at the beginning of this decade, despite widespread economic growth there were between 600 and 700 million people living in severe poverty.

In the developing world alone, it is estimated that we will have to find more than 1 thousand million new jobs by the end of this century.

Until now, development strategies have mainly stressed on the growth factor in development, and have given only secondary importance to employment creation. A key objective of the World Employment Conference is to put employment in its proper perspective within the over-all development framework.