

The March Review

Our annual review of the employment and unemployment statistics make up the first two articles in this issue. Emy Sok analyzes the Current Population Survey data in detail. In broad strokes, all the measures of labor underutilization declined, led by the unemployment rate's continued downtrend to 5.0 percent.

Robert Stephens, David Langdon, and Brady Stephens consider the data coming from several of the Bureau's surveys of business establishments. Despite a modest gain of just over 2 million jobs, the payroll survey's measure of employment finished its recovery to the pre-recession peak and entered a period of expansion. The steady pace of payroll growth reflected a generally positive gap between hiring and separations. Job openings began to trend upward in the second half of the year.

Ian D. Wyatt and Daniel E. Hecker survey the sweeping changes in occupational structure that have transformed the way we work; more of us are professionals, managers, or white-collar workers and far fewer are domestics or farmhands.

James H. Moore, Jr., synthesizes a wide variety of data to project retirement income distributions within the baby-boom generation.

Recessions and long-term unemployment

The incidence and persistence of long-term joblessness associated with each of the last four downturns varied. In November 1975, the share of persons jobless for more than half a year peaked at 2.1 percent of the labor force, 8 months after the end of the 1973–75 recession. In June 1983, 7 months after the official end of the

1981–82 recession, the long-term jobless rate peaked at 3.1 percent, the highest recorded in the post-World War II era.

Although the downturn of 1990–91 more closely resembled that of the mid-1970s in terms of the magnitude of the long-term unemployment rate—just over 2 percent in October 1992—the rate did not peak until 19 months after the official end of the recession (March 1991). Following the 2001 downturn, the long-term jobless rate peaked at 1.4 percent in September 2003, 22 months after the recession officially ended. For more information, see “A glance at long-term unemployment in recent recessions,” Summary 06–01, *Issues in Labor Statistics*, January 2006.

Fewer in work stoppages

Major work stoppages idled 99,600 workers in 2005. This measure declined from the prior year despite an increase in the number of work stoppage events. In 2004, there were 170,700 workers idled due to major work stoppages. There were 17 major work stoppages that began in 2004 and 22 that began in 2005. (Major work stoppages are defined as strikes or lockouts that idle 1,000 or more workers and last at least one shift.)

The largest work stoppage in terms of worker participation in 2005 involved the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Transit Workers Union, Local 100 and idled 35,000 employees. The second largest was the Boeing Company and the International Association of Machinist, District 751 where 18,300 workers were idled. Learn more about work stoppages from “Major Work Stoppages in 2005,” news release USDL 06–363.

Revised international productivity data

After routine updates to the BLS estimates of manufacturing productivity, Korea, Sweden, Japan, and the United Kingdom still held the top four places in the table for 2004. The Netherlands, for which data were not available in the first round, had the fifth fastest rate of productivity growth. The United States edged up one place over Taiwan and Germany was revised up a tick to a draw with Taiwan for seventh. Additional information is available in “International Comparisons of Manufacturing Productivity and Unit Labor Cost Trends, Revised Data for 2004,” news release USDL 06–268.

Do you use the monthly tables?

The *Review* staff would like to hear from all users of the Current Labor Statistics tables that are featured at the back of each issue. In the next few months, we will be making some decisions on design changes to the *Review*, and we'd like to have the input of our CLS users. Basically we'd like to know: Which tables do you use? How are the tables used for your line of work? And would you be willing to access the data electronically from the BLS Web page? Please send all comments by May 31, 2006, to: mlr@bls.gov

Communications regarding the *Monthly Labor Review* may be sent to the Editor-in-Chief at the addresses on the inside front cover. News releases discussed above are available at:

www.bls.gov/bls/newsrels.htm