

Labor in Focus by Mel Klenetsky

A national security problem

The shifts in the U.S. labor force not only debunk the myth of recovery, but threaten U.S. status as a superpower.

The most crucial area in determining a nation's economic vitality is its steel industry. In this and other basic industries, the United States is in rapid decline, and the Soviet Union on the rapid rise.

In 1972, the United States produced 3 million more tons of steel yearly than the Soviets. By 1982 the Soviets produced 80 million tons more than the United States.

American employment statistics tell the story. From 1979 to June 1985, employment in the steel industry fell from 418,300 to 187,000, a loss of more than 240,000 jobs. Our steel labor force is now less than 45% of what it was in 1979.

Since 1974, at least three steel companies have gone bankrupt, shutting down 200 steel plants. In 1984, Bethlehem closed its Lackawanna plant causing 7,000 layoffs, and U.S. Steel closed 71 facilities with 15,000 workers.

For railroads, the United States has gone from producing 1,141,000 metric tons in 1972 to 611,000 metric tons in 1982, almost halving its output. Meanwhile, the Soviets increased their output in the same time-frame by more than 1,000,000 metric tons, thus out-producing America four to one.

One of the Soviets' latest ICBMs is the rail-based SS-24. The United States doesn't even have the rail system to match what the Soviets have now available for immediate SS-24 deployment.

The Soviets lead in wheel and axle production has gone from three to one in 1972 to ten to one in 1982, and so on.

From a broader standpoint, they have increased their industrial labor force to 65 million, more than twice that of the United States. The U.S. industrial workforce has gone from 30.8% of the workforce in 1972 to 25.8% of the workforce in 1984. This decade-long trend has accelerated in the recent period.

Since 1979, more than 11 million workers have lost their jobs due to plant closings and slack work. In a report by the Full Employment Action Council and the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, surveys show one in four of these remains jobless, even after five years, and one of seven have dropped out of the labor force. Of those with jobs, 45% are earning less than they earned before.

Employment in manufacturing is now 1.7 million below what it was in 1979. 35 states have failed to recover all the jobs lost in manufacturing in the past five years.

Now, look at industries other than steel. In copper mining, smelting, and refining, employment fell from 44,000 in 1979 to 20,000 currently. About 50% of the nation's copper mines were closed between 1981 and 1984.

From 1979 to 1983, in the electrical and electronics industries, jobs fell by 183,600. The jobless rate is 86% higher today than in 1979. Since 1979, 92,000 jobs dropped out of the textile industry; farm equipment lost 62,000 jobs; auto employment declined 28%, or 218,429 fewer jobs between its 1978 peak and 1985.

In Michigan, more than 100,000 auto workers were laid off between 1979 and 1982. Of those surveyed in

the summer of 1984, 30% had not been recalled. Among those still on layoff, 47% had found new jobs, 43% were still unemployed or working part-time, and over 9% gave up looking.

This shift of the labor force out of basic production is reflected in an overall decline of U.S. manufacturing output since 1972, across the board and by as much as 50% in many areas.

The Soviets produce more than 20 times the excavating machines the United States produces, almost 5 times the bulldozers, and 4 times the number of freight cars. To the 700 diesel locomotives that the United States produced in 1982, the Soviets produced almost 1,300.

These trends for Soviet advantage hold true for cement production, fertilizer production, sulfuric acid, and many other areas.

The United States has shifted out of industry and into the fast food businesses and service industries. From 1950, when 26.7 million or 46% of the workforce was involved in service industries, to 1984, when 69.3 million made up more than 61% of the labor force, the service sector has jumped a staggering 25%.

Last March, the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed 20 million mothers at work, most in the service industries, a jump of a half-million from 1984: 62% of mothers with children under 16, 61% of mothers living with spouses, and half of all mothers with children under 3 are now in the labor force, up from one-third a decade earlier.

These alarming statistics show the collapse of traditional family life and go far toward explaining our youth's susceptibility to the drug epidemic, and demonstrate how living standards have collapsed—as both parents now work to survive. Most importantly, if these trends continue, the Soviet Union will be the only superpower left by the end of the decade.