

Highest unemployment in Germany during an election since 1933

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With two weeks to go before elections to the *Bundestag* (parliament), the Federal Labour Office has published the latest unemployment figures. Not since 1933, the year Adolf Hitler came to power, have the numbers of those without work taken on such a scale.

Almost 4.1 million were officially registered unemployed in August, of these 1.5 million are long-term unemployed without any chance of a job. The figures also include 500,493 young people under 25. The number of youth who have still not gained an apprenticeship place is 152,000, the same as last year.

The official figures translate into an unemployment rate of 10.6 percent for Germany as a whole. However, the situation in former East Germany continues to border on catastrophe, with an unemployment rate there of 17.1 percent.

Compared to August last year, the number of registered unemployed has gone down by 277,000. This was not so much brought about by the small increase in new jobs available, as by two other factors.

Firstly, the tightening up of registration procedures; a stricter definition of what constitutes a 'reasonable' offer of work by the Employment Office, and other more exacting legal regulations for the unemployed which have been introduced since January. Anybody who misses their regular three monthly registration appointments is no longer counted as unemployed and has their benefits stopped. If someone turns down a job because the pay is considerably less than their usual earnings, but it meets the new definition of a 'reasonable' job offer, they face a long suspension of benefits and are no longer counted in the statistics.

The second factor, which has had an even greater effect on the figures, was implemented by the government for purely tactical electoral reasons. To ensure that the public spending conditions for joining

the European Monetary Union were met, the Kohl government drastically reduced the number of job creation schemes and further training/education measures as part of its budget cuts last year. Since spring this year, the government then sharply increased the means available for such programmes. In this way, some 170,000 have been taken off the unemployment register, mainly in former East Germany. However, these new schemes are of limited duration and most will expire shortly after the election.

There are presently some 800,000 people involved in such projects, who are therefore not counted as part of the official unemployment statistics. In addition, there are well over another million who are not registered, either because they no longer receive any form of benefit or because they have had their benefits suspended.

The real level of unemployment can thus be estimated as at least 6 million, if in addition to the official figures those 'hidden' on various schemes and those who are not registered are included.

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For an independent political movement of the working class

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