

REPLY

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Since Dr. Bartsch has gone only partially into the history of the United Nations definition of employment and unemployment, let me pursue it a bit further. To begin, the ILO is a Member Agency of the UN and thus automatically subsumed under the latter. I am fully aware that the ILO segment of the UN was given the area of labor statistics as its domain, and hence draws up official definitions, etc. (Except for the industrial composition classification of the economically active, which area was assigned to the UN Statistical Office.)

In any case, a significant part of the input for the deliberations of the ILO (and other UN bodies) regarding the definitions and measurement of employment, underemployment, and unemployment was contributed by the work and findings of the Puerto Rico labor force (or household) survey of about 1952–1954. Although I was not instrumental in starting this survey (it began in 1946), I did play a part in the early 1950s in reorganizing that survey, developing a measure of underemployment, and testing various methods for measuring unemployment.

Then, during the 1960s, I spent considerable time as consultant to the Panama labor force survey, where we also developed a measure of underemployment and tested several ways of measuring unemployment.

A major observation resulting from all this field work is that a survey can be formulated to obtain almost any amount of unemployment. Depending on the questions asked, unemployment can range from virtually 100 per cent (of those above some minimum age) to some small figure such as 5.3 per cent, as Dr. Bartsch reports for Iran.

Furthermore, the mechanics of collecting the data on employment, underemployment, and unemployment are very complicated and difficult. No country has succeeded in solving this problem correctly, efficiently, and at an acceptable cost—if there is a correct solution, which I doubt. Concepts and definitions fade into relative insignificance when compared with: (a) which questions should be asked on the survey among the thousands which might be asked? (b) how do you get the field work done properly? Even when a set of procedures seems to work well in a pilot survey of a small area, there is no guarantee that they will work well if applied across the country. This is what I mean by “administrative failure.” I am not denying Dr. Bartsch’s suggestion that there also may be political motives for minimizing the reported unemployment figures; but that to me is minor compared with the problems of questionnaire and survey design, and data collection.

This situation is a perfect example of the two horns of the dilemma on which we often get stuck. A census or survey should provide statistics which accurately portray existing conditions. Now, if you know what the conditions truly are then you can devise the best survey. But if you do not know what the conditions truly are then you do not need a survey. So, without knowing beforehand what the conditions truly are which you want the survey to measure, how do you design the best set of questions and other procedures?

As for additional literature on the various questions raised by Dr. Bartsch, one should look into:

1. A. J. Jaffe, “Application of Attitude Research Methodology Toward the Problem of Measuring the Size of the Labor Force,” *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1947.

2. A. J. Jaffe and C. D. Stewart, *Manpower Resources and Utilization*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1951.
3. A. J. Jaffe, *People, Jobs and Economic Development*, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959.
4. Various papers presented at the 1961 International Statistical Institute meetings in Tokyo; see Bulletin of the I.S.I., Vol. XXXVIII: Part II.
5. Various papers presented at the 1965 UN World Population Conference in Belgrade see Vol. IV, Meeting B.11.