

WASHINGTON (UPI) —

Unemployment among American workers declined slightly to 7.3 per cent in May and the number of persons holding jobs reached a record 87.7 million, the Labor Department reported today.

It was the eighth consecutive month without an increase in the jobless rate, the Labor Department said. Not since 1973, just prior to the recession, has unemployment shown no increase over an eight-month period.

The number of persons who work hit a record peak for the fourth straight month, climbing by 300,000 to 87.7 million in May. Women benefited most by the improvement.

Joblessness was down from 7.5 per cent, in April and showed a significant reduction from the recession peak of 8.9 per cent set last May. There has been no increase in unemployment since last September.

The number of employed persons has increased by 3.6 million since the recession low,

but joblessness has shown substantially less improvement. There are now 1.4 million fewer unemployed persons than the recession peak last May.

Strikes had a heavy impact on May's employment picture. A 45-day-old walkout by 60,000 rubber workers caused a slight decline in manufacturing employment. Nonfarm _ payroll employment would have risen by about 150,000 had it not been

for strikes.

Unemployment fell by about 180,000 to 6.9 million in May, a reduction that occurred almost entirely among women. Increased employment for women was explained primarily by an expansion of jobs in the service industries and government — the traditionally female jobs.

Joblessness among women dropped from 7.3 per cent to 6.8 per cent, reflecting a continuing improvement among female household heads. Unemployment meanwhile rose slightly among men.

Teen-age unemployment dropped to 18.5 per cent and joblessness among blacks fell to 12.2 per cent.