

WASHINGTON (AP)

The nation's unemployment rate dropped from 8.3 per cent to 7.8 per cent in January, the largest monthly decline in the jobless rate in more than 16 years, the government said today.

The Labor Department said total employment in January increased by 800,000, the largest monthly job increase since early 1960. Total employment in the economy in January was 86.2 million, which was close to the prerecession peak employment in July of 1974.

The Labor Department figures are sure to win the Ford administration support for its economic policies in 1976.

The gains in employment were widespread throughout the economy, with only the teen-age jobless rate failing to improve.

The Labor Department gave the following unemployment breakdown:

~Adult men, 5.8 per cent, down from 6.6 per cent in December.

~Adult women, 7.5 per cent, down from 8 per cent.

~ Whites, 7.1 per cent, down from 7.6 per cent.

Blacks and other races, 13.2 per cent, down from 13.8 per cent.

~-Heads of households, 5.1 per cent, down from 5.7 per cent.

~Married men, 4.1 per cent, down from 4.8 per cent.

~-Full-time workers, 7.3 per cent, down from 7.9 per cent.

~-White collar workers, 4.7 per cent, down from 4.8 per cent.

~Blue collar workers, 9.4 per cent, down from 10.7 per cent.

~~Teen-agers, 19.9 per cent, up from 19.6 per cent in December.

The Labor Department said total employment in January was 2.1 million above the - recession low of last March, when the unemployment rate was 8.5 per cent. The peak unemployment rate during the recession was 8.9 per cent in May, when the labor force had shrunk to a low level.