Why do we have so much disaffection or so many disaffected youth today? Answers to this question are diverse, as shown by the various articles in this issue. Yet I believe there is one basic cause underlying a specific aspect of the problem. This is the fact that our economy does not need so many young people, and has not had enough places for them in the work force during the decade of the 1970's.

Youth Oversupply in a Recession Period

The abnormally large age cohort born between 1955 and 1965 has become an abnormally large group of youth aged 12-22 in 1977, while we are in the midst of a major economic depression. When young people arrive at the beginning of their adulthood and meet this situation, many of them become disaffected. We all know young people who have completed their training to be teachers and cannot find places in the teaching profession. We know that many of them are disaffected. To see this situation more clearly, let us look at Table 1, which shows the percent of youth aged 15-19 as a percentage of the total population since the beginning of this century.

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<td>Percent of Youth Aged 15-19 as Percentage of Total Population</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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For the first 40 years, with the proportion between 9.9 and 9.0 percent, the growing economy, together with a large agricultural work force, needed the labor of young people until the Great Depression of 1930-1940. With the coming of World War II, the labor of youth was needed again and those of military age went into the armed services. A period of relatively low birth rates in the 1930's and 1940's provided the small-sized 15- to 19-year-old cohorts of the 1950's and 1960's, which coincided with an economic boom that provided jobs for all young people who wanted jobs. Then came the "baby boom" of the 1950's, when more than four million babies were born each year from 1954 through 1964. This was followed by a drop in the birth rate, with only 3.1 million babies born in the United States in 1975. We see, then, in the 70's, a relatively large youth population ready to enter the labor force. In 1975, we had 41 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24, compared with only 22 million in 1960. In 1980, the situation will be equally difficult, with 41 million in the 15 through 24 age group. By 1985, this age cohort will drop down to 38.5 million and will be reduced even more as the relatively low birth rates of the 1970's take effect.

The "official" unemployment figures published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics state that in 1973, the unemployment rate of youth (defined as the 16 through 19 age group) was three times as high as the rate for the total labor force, and the unemployed 16- through 19-year-olds made up 30 percent of the total unemployed of all ages. The official unemployment statistics are not very reliable for minority group youth, especially the black and Spanish origin groups. For example, early in 1975, the Chicago Urban League estimated that about 50 percent of all black youth in Chicago aged 16 through 19 were unemployed.

Young People Want Jobs

Teenage youth want jobs. The National Association of Secondary School Principals published a report entitled The Mood of American Youth: 1974 based on a survey of a national sample of high school students made by the Gilbert Youth Research Corporation. Asked whether the high school is doing a good job of educating the respondent, 77 percent said "yes." But 94 percent said that high-school-age students should
be employed at least part-time. The favorite work program is a part-time, year-round job, favored by 84 percent of the high school students.\(^1\)

I believe that practically all young people over 15 years of age want to be needed by the adult society. Having a job is for them a sign that they are growing up. Of course there are other ways of gaining the symbols of maturity.

I... there are too many mediocre and poor students, whom we call ‘non-academic types,’ who cannot see their school achievement as evidence that they are preparing to meet adult responsibilities.”

One way is to have a child. Many teenage women do have babies, some unexpectedly but generally not with disaffection. Currently, one fifth of all babies are born to teenage women from age 12 to 19, and half of these babies are born out of wedlock. But, very few of the young mothers offer their babies for adoption, and very few of those who become pregnant ask for abortions.

One may ask why a boy or girl who is doing well in high school or junior college studies cannot perceive this fact as assurance that he or she is growing up and getting ready to serve society and to make a career. There is no question that some young people do see their academic performance in this light, and they are not disaffected. But there are too many mediocre and poor students, whom we call “non-academic types,” who cannot see their school achievement as evidence that they are preparing to meet adult responsibilities.

What Kinds of Disaffection?

These facts, so clearly visible to educators and counselors who work with youth, as well as to many parents, cause some adults to become disaffected. This disaffection of adults may take the form of demanding a new social order with jobs for everyone. This is a kind of “left-wing” disaffection that does not seem to be gaining much political strength in the United States. I, personally, would vote for a mild form of socialism with the hope that it would give more societal participation to youth and would produce a more equitable distribution of income. However, I do not see any real prospect that a Marxist revolution will take place in this country during the next 25 years—whether it be a mild or a violent one.

On the other hand, there are many disaffected adults whose political views are to the right of center, who believe that the welfare of the present generation of youth as well as the welfare of the entire society requires a major cutback in government spending, a reduction of public expenditures for education, and a return of society to a 19th-century enterprise system with rigorous mental and moral discipline in the schools, the economy, and the family. If these moves cause more poverty than we now have, they feel that that is a necessary price to pay.

Schooling: Incomplete Context for Maturation

Neither of these two political groups is likely to grow strong enough in this century to move the country from its present middle-of-the-road course. In this situation, I take with strong conviction the position of the Panel on Youth, headed by James S. Coleman, which reported in 1974 its

basic premise that "the school system, as now constituted, offers an incomplete context for the accomplishment of many important facets of maturation." In its report, entitled Youth: Transition to Adulthood, the Panel stated the following "objectives of social relations" that are not now achieved through the agency of the educational system:

1. Experience with persons differing in social class, subculture, and in age. For a society that is committing itself to a democratic cultural pluralism, as ours is doing, it is essential that young people expand their social and moral horizons to include a concern for people with a diversity of life-styles.

2. Experience of having others dependent on one's actions. Full adult responsibility as a spouse, parent, and citizen requires caring for others who need assistance.

3. Experience of interdependent activities directed toward collective goals. A healthy society requires cooperation and coordination of the activities of many people. The young person needs experience in the roles of leader and of follower.

In brief, we need to inject into the experience of youth a generous service- and work-oriented program that will enable young people to experience adult society first-hand even though some of them may have to wait until their early twenties to find a proper place in the work force.

The new Congress has the opportunity to put such a program into action, with safeguards for protecting the adults who are now unemployed from having their places in the labor force usurped by teenagers. On September 29, 1976, Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced the Youth Community Employment Act of 1977 (S.3869). The bill defines youth as between the ages of 16 and 21. It proposes a fund of $1.25 billion for the year commencing October 1977. Future appropriations would be pegged to the unemployment rate and would fall to a minimum of $250 million when the unemployment rate drops to four percent or less.

Organized labor would be closely involved in the development of such a program. Just before Senator Humphrey's move, Leonard Woodcock, President of the United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Workers of America, recommended the creation of a Young Adult Conservation Corps as proposed by Senator Henry Jackson and Representative Lloyd Meeds, both of the state of Washington.

Such programs would obviously need close cooperation between senior high schools and community colleges and the federal and state agencies set up to administer them. I believe, therefore, that the time is ripe for this kind of major cooperation between educational, governmental, and social institutions.


3 National Service Newsletter No. 31, November 1976. Description of Humphrey and Woodcock actions on behalf of Youth Service.

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