

ROBERTA LYNCH

Our national secret: A troubled society destroying its children

YOU KNOW THEM. THEY'RE the kids a recent TV documentary called "bad boys." You see them on street corners and in playgrounds. They may even hang out in schoolyards, though they seldom go to school. ¶The drop-out rate among Latino high school students in Chicago is now near 70 percent. In the Bronx, New York, 50 percent of the children are not in school on any given day.



They are not the suburban hot rodders who are into burning rubber and making minor trouble before going off to college. They are not even the segment of working class kids who may form rival gangs and occasionally brawl, but who retain, through however slender ethnic, neighborhood, or trade ties, some sense of their place in the world.

No, these young people are something else. They may be black or white or Latin, but they're almost all children of poverty in a land of plenty. They are children raised on the American dream that promised them everything and gave them nothing.

They are frequently the products of frustrated and overworked parents, of disinterested or hostile teachers, of churches that offer no more than peace after life,

of streets that offer the only peace in life—in the form of powder and pills. If they are black or Latin, they are also the products of racial discrimination.

There are few jobs for these kids now and small prospects for the future. The jobs that do exist seem too bleak to hang anybody's star on. Fewer and fewer young people are willing to put up with the physically exhausting and mentally deadening pace and conditions of much of this work.

Many try: they stand in line for jobs, they show up for work, they want to make good. But the money is hardly enough to live on and the work is too much to live with. So they're back on the streets.

For teenage girls things are no better, only at times different. An image comes to mind: It is a cold winter Chicago morn-

ing and I climb out of my car parked by an alleyway under the el tracks. There are two young kids walking out of the alley and I think, god they must be freezing, they don't have any coats on. Then they come into focus and there is one of those flashes of understanding you wish you didn't have. They are putting their clothes back on. He is zipping up his pants. She is buttoning hers. They cannot be more than 12. Her face is blank. In nine months she could have a child.

They have babies. Nearly 800,000 unmarried teenagers become pregnant each year, and the children of these pregnancies have an exceptionally high rate of infant mortality and nutrition deficiencies.

The experts don't really know why yet. Maybe I'm too literal, too simple, but as I see it, if you feel empty you look for something to fill you up. And there is little else that can do that quite so clearly. While you may pay for years to come, it costs nothing to get pregnant. And anyone can do it—biology alone in our society does not discriminate based on class or race.

The real problem is not petty crime or pregnancy; it is this terrible emptiness, an absence even of any real combativeness, that afflicts boys and girls both. It is a change, I think, even from a decade or two ago when a popular song could still promise: "We've got to get out of this place...girl, there's a better life for you and me."

These last ten years have witnessed some elemental erosion of hope. For millions of young people there is no longer any sense of possibility—no belief in the future.

Is it any wonder, then, that these kids live in some netherworld, neither youth nor adult? They obliterate the normal rites of puberty because puberty is a time of preparation, of transformation, and they have nothing to prepare for, nowhere they are going. For them, there is only the finest of lines between adolescence and adulthood—and the tragedy is that they never completely have either.

They spend their teen years living semi-adult lives: many of the boys taking the

risks of crime; many of the girls taking the burdens of motherhood. And they will spend their adult lives, in many cases, up against the bureaucratic paternalism of a system that constantly acts to keep them from maturity and responsibility, from becoming full members of a social community.

If we have a national secret, it may be this massive smothering of the spirit that finds us a society in danger of destroying its children.

Those who try to break through this silence are few. There is a small number of dedicated men and women who try to work directly with young people, but they face enormous obstacles and have few resources at their disposal.

Jesse Jackson's "Push for Excellence" campaign is important simply because it has helped to bring the problem into the open. Although Jackson's emphasis on self-improvement as opposed to institutional change has its obvious limitations, his is one of the only voices trying to force parents, educators, and politicians to face the reality of what is happening to these kids.

But the real solutions are so complex, so costly, so radical that our leaders don't want to hear, let alone speak of them. They would entail a reorganization of our economic structures and a reorientation of our national purpose.

They would require breaking the cycle of poverty, providing useful jobs at fair wages, ending discrimination, and altering our ways and means of education. But most basically, they would require a social system that is committed to people developing themselves to their fullest potential as our greatest natural resource.

Until we begin to move in these directions, the problem will remain. Children with painful pasts and empty futures. As the Music Man said of the kids of that fictional River City, "We've surely got trouble." (©1978 In These Times)

Roberta Lynch is a national officer of the New American Movement, a democratic socialist organization. Her column is syndicated in 32 publications with an aggregate circulation of over 200,000.

MANNING MARABLE

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Demands for equality breaking up those old party lines

THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, there is a growing demand from the grass-roots levels of society for a new definition of economic equality. ¶The reasons for this are not difficult to unearth. The Humphrey-Hawkins bill, which was initiated to create full employment as a national goal, was destroyed by the Carter administration. True, a version of Humphrey-Hawkins was passed during the final hours of the last Congressional session, but a clause on inflation within the bill will make it inoperative.

Health care insurance, supported by Sen. Edward Kennedy and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, has gone nowhere. Carter refused to support a watered-down version of the Labor Law Reform bill in the Senate. The overwhelmingly Democratic Congress passed a conservative tax bill which gave major incentives to corporations and investors while providing almost no tax relief to average, working Americans.

Taking the lead from government, big business has aggressively attacked labor on all fronts. As A.H. Raskin noted in a recent issue of *The Nation*, "employers



are on the attack in labor relations" to "an extent without parallel" since the desperate days of the Great Depression. "Management, for its part, smells blood."

None of these assaults on the rights of grassroots people have gone totally unchallenged. William Winpisinger, the president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, openly accused Carter of betraying his electoral mandate of 1976. "We will no longer contribute to our own demise—pay for votes against us. We will withdraw this support," Winpisinger warned, "even if it means isolation and defeat for some of our spotted friends, not to mention the wolves in sheep's clothing. There are alternatives." Similarly, Doug Fraser,

the president of the United Auto Workers, declared this summer that business is waging "one-sided class warfare" against the working class, minorities and the poor.

For the first time in recent memory, top labor union leaders are threatening to break from the Democratic Party's ranks, unless there are sufficient political guarantees that promote a more equal and beneficial standard of life for working Americans. Fraser called together progressive politicians, labor leaders and activists to discuss political strategies for promoting full employment and health care on Oct. 17. (ITT, Oct. 25).

The revolt against the Democratic Party's conservatism has spread to local levels. In New York state, for example, the Civil Service Employees Association refused to endorse incumbent Gov. Hugh Carey or his Republican counterpart, Perry Duryea. In Washington, there is growing talk of running one or two progressive candidates against Carter in the 1980 Democratic Primary in an effort to force the administration to move toward the left. The names of Ron Dellums and Michael Harrington are most frequently heard as potential challengers.

Few labor leaders, however, are now prepared to carry through the logic of

their position. If the Democratic Party's leadership is nonresponsive to reforms, where does labor throw its support? The Republican proposals on jobs, tax reduction, unemployment and health care are simply disastrous and anti-humanistic.

The solution toward building a society based on real economic equality calls for the establishment of large, autonomous political formations independent of both major political parties. So long as almost all black leaders and labor remain wed to the Democratic Party, Carter can afford to dismiss their demands.

Finally, the creation of a more egalitarian society transcends electoral politics and involves a profoundly cultural and social transformation in ourselves. Working people, not the corporate dictators and federal bureaucrats, create the profits essential in running all businesses and the government. It seems only fair that common working people, not their bosses, should also have a greater share in determining how the country is run. This is the meaning of economic equality.

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IN DEPTH

PART TWO OF TWO

Official jobless rates flunk reality test

By Harry Brill

SERIOUS METHODOLOGICAL DEFECTS CONTRIBUTE TO DEFLATING the official unemployment rate in the U.S. The selection of a representative sample is obviously critical. A sample with a mix of households skewed toward those with lower rates of unemployment will underestimate the aggregate unemployment rate—and this is what actually occurs. Dr. Sar Levitan, chairman of the President's National Commission on Employment and Unemployment Statistics found that when measuring unemployment of black workers in a given city, the sample of blacks included in the survey may be only two or three households. Counting such disproportionately small numbers of blacks (whose unemployment is higher than the average) depresses the official aggregate unemployment rate.

In 1975, a study sponsored by the St. Louis Office of Manpower revealed serious problems in the household sampling. The Labor Department's household sample, based on the 1970 census, is supposedly revised each year to reflect changes in housing patterns as a result of new construction and demolitions. Yet the St. Louis Manpower Office found that the Census Bureau has never updated its sample, resulting in a substantial undercount of the unemployed.

The Office of Manpower hired economists to conduct an independent survey in St. Louis. They replicated the Labor Department's own conservative definitions of unemployment in the questionnaire, only varying the sample design, to make it more representative. They counted an unemployment rate 50 percent higher than the official rate. Although the household sample is not the only input for determining the unemployment rate in localities, and so does not account for the entire disparity, the study revealed it was an important factor.

On Jan. 1, 1978, 9,000 more households were added to the original sample of 47,000 in order to increase accuracy by taking larger samples in smaller states. Instead, the additional sample increased the gaps between the official and real unemployment rates because the distribution of new households was disproportionately small in the central cities and ghettos.

In Massachusetts, for example, virtually all of the households selected were in Barnstable County (Cape Cod) where persistent unemployment is relatively low. Since the new sample was introduced this year, the biases are not reflected in the 1977 unemployment rate, which is being considered here. From this year on, however, the additional sample will further understate the magnitude of unemployment.

A conservative estimate would be that correcting these biases would increase the unemployment rate by at least 10 percent—that is, another 1.3 percent to the rate of 12.7 percent computed in Part I (Nov. 22) which would bring the aggregate unemployment rate to 14.0 percent, or at least double the official unemployment rate.

Real gap growing

The changes, in fact, that have been made from time to time make it seem on occasion that the economic situation is improving when in actuality it is deteriorating.

For example, when the additional 9,000 households were added to the sample in January, unemployment rates reported for the first quarter of 1978 declined ap-

preciably from the previous quarter. Yet as the Commerce Department reported for the first quarter, GNP also declined. Economists were understandably surprised. For the labor market to improve while the nation's output of goods and services decreased seemed miraculous. GNP statistics *should* have signaled the Labor Department to reexamine its revised sample.

Long-range perspectives are even more difficult to see due to continual revisions of one kind or another. Since 1967, the following modifications have been made: 14 and 15 year olds were eliminated from the unemployment count, those who admitted to interviewers that they were discouraged and no longer actively seeking work were dropped, and the time for which a jobless person seeking work was counted was reduced from 60 to 28 days.

Despite these revisions, the unemployment rates have risen substantially during the '70s. In fact, the real gap between the current rate and those in the recent past is greater than these official rates suggest.

In calculating the monthly unemployment trends most familiar to the public, the Labor Department uses statistical procedures that make meaningful comparisons extremely difficult. The raw, unofficial unemployment rates are seasonally adjusted. According to the Labor Department, about 90 percent of the monthly fluctuations in the unemployment rates can be accounted for by seasonal variations unrelated to the economy.

Distilling raw statistics to reflect changes in the economy seems at first quite reasonable. Closer inspection shows that the official, or seasonally adjusted unemployment rates obscure rather than reveal the labor market trends.

Seasonal sleight of hand.

The seasonal adjustment process statistically shifts the unemployed from months of below-average to above-average rates to offset both seasonal peaks and troughs. This balancing procedure entails no net changes in the 12 monthly or annual unemployment rates. It does tremendously reduce the disparity in the unemployment rates from one month to another, hiding considerable turbulence in the labor market which tosses the American worker about.

Even though more than a million workers lost their jobs in January 1978, according to the Labor Department's raw figures, the difference in the unemployment rates between December and January disappeared when seasonally adjusted. The formula operates as if the entire increase in unemployment in January were unrelated to economic conditions. The Labor Department blames a 1 percent rise in joblessness mainly on cold winter weather. But unemployment contributed by nature means no pay—just like job loss from any other cause.

Cold weather can unnecessarily excuse the economy. The technology to carry out year-round construction is highly developed: department stores, motels, residential and commercial buildings have all been built in winter months. Often they are not—which partly explains why taking account of seasonal factors in computing unemployment seems reasonable to the public.

Economist Walter Heller, a former chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, admitted being amazed to observe from his office in Minnesota a building being constructed in 20 degree-below-zero weather. These seasonal adjustments cover up the lack of year-round work for construction workers.

The economy, not nature, poses formidable barriers to the full utilization of labor. To pretend that unemployment hasn't risen obscures by one statistical swoop both a serious weakness in our economy and the hardship experienced by American workers.

In June, adjustments in the unemployment rate are intended to offset the unusually large number of young people entering the labor market when school closes. Since unemployment almost invariably rises in June, the Labor Department claims that without adjustment, the raw unemployment rate would convey an economic downturn rather than an abnormal swelling of the labor force.

There is a serious flaw in this argument. Although unemployment rises in June, the extent varies greatly, from as little as 0.1 percent to 15 times that extent. The extent to which joblessness increases depends mainly upon economic conditions.

Schultze's aberration.

Compare, for example, recent experience with the early 1950s, when job prospects for young people were brighter. If we consider years when the extent to which the labor force expanded from May to June were comparable, we can see how the economic stagnancy of the '70s, rather than seasonal issues, are paramount.

Unemployment rose by only one-fourth as much in June 1955 than in June 1974; in June, 1953, by only one-fifth the rate of June, 1970. From May to June, 1954,

unadjusted unemployment did not climb at all. What the unadjusted unemployment rate reveals, and the seasonally adjusted figures obscure, is that job opportunities in recent years have not been expanding fast enough to accommodate new job seekers.

The official unemployment rate occasionally declines after being adjusted although the unadjusted rate reveals that unemployment has actually risen. The Labor Department calls this "overadjustment," which tends to occur at higher levels of unemployment. This problem was officially acknowledged as early as 1962, but has never been corrected.

For June, 1978, the national media reported a substantial drop in unemployment from May to 5.7 percent—the nation's lowest rate in almost four years. Charles Schultze, the President's chief economic advisor, noted that the decline from May to June from 6.2 percent to 5.7 percent, was among the steepest declines in 15 years. But the unadjusted unemployment rate jumped from 5.5 percent to 6.2 percent, almost 700,000 more people without a job.

Schultze admitted that the huge reported decline in June might have been a "statistical aberration." Apart from his passing comment, Labor Department spokespeople and other government economists have still maintained that unemployment has declined.

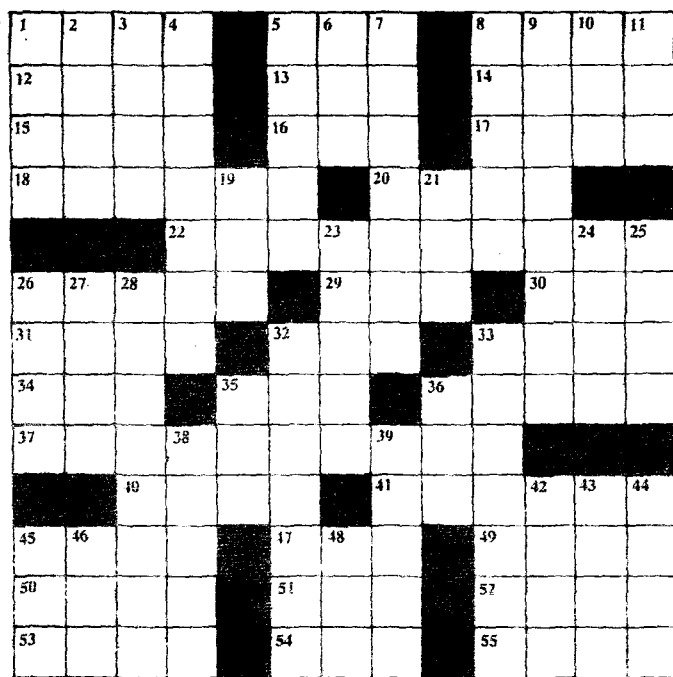
The combination of biases produced by the Labor Department's definitions and sampling and averaging methods means that official unemployment rates respond to recessionary trends slowly. Eventually, substantial increases in unemployment are reflected in the rate because in hard times joblessness reaches even the more economically insulated households, overrepresented in the sample.

But the public doesn't deserve data that lag behind the economic facts. We should get—and our public policies should be based on—an accurate, more sensitive record of what actually occurs in the labor market. The Labor Department's official unemployment rate receives a failing grade on this score.

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Of Lakes et al.

By Jay Shepherd



ACROSS

- 1 Roman statesman-soldier
- 5 Word with at and away
- 8 Chinese dynasty
- 12 Welsh reformer
- 13 Slim finial
- 14 "___ not to question why..."
- 15 Talk wildly
- 16 Soviet program (1921-28)
- 17 Poisonous tree
- 18 Potentate
- 20 Fabled monster
- 22 Brought about again
- 26 Vampire
- 29 Wore away
- 30 Labor org. with HQ in Geneva
- 31 Potpourri
- 32 Miss Arden

DOWN

- 3 Lounge
- 34 100,000 rupees
- 35 Mouths
- 36 Lofty nest
- 37 Horizontal line, in masonry
- 40 Particle
- 41 Hymenopterous insect
- 45 Booth
- 47 Label
- 49 "M'appari," for one
- 50 Milkfish
- 51 Gums
- 52 Raise
- 53 Clari
- 54 Wrong (prefix)
- 55 Film actor Bruce

- 3 Neighbor of Ky.
- 4 Toronto's lake
- 5 Hundred (comb. form)

- 6 Orang-utan, for one
- 7 Fencing thrust
- 8 Muslim virgin
- 9 Marquette's lake
- 10 One of the Gershwins
- 11 Balaam's beast
- 19 Andaman or Java
- 21 Certain engineer
- 23 Pert. to ships
- 24 She conquered Thor
- 25 Type of charity
- 26 Girl's name
- 27 Woe is me!
- 28 Chicago's lake
- 32 Mistake in printing
- 33 Opposed to windward
- 35 Cereal
- 36 Miscellany
- 38 Loan deposit
- 39 Russian log huts
- 42 Unfettered
- 43 Ananias, for one
- 44 Tell stories
- 45 Hang back
- 46 Be beholden
- 48 He's still "the Greatest!"



Note: We apologize for the error in last week's diagram. The answer (above) is correct.