

Youth Without Work

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WE knew that many Boston boys and girls just out of school were without work and probably without any urge to do anything but work. We were clear in our minds that they were exposed to influences demoralizing to morale and steady habits. But we knew little about the boys and girls themselves, about their actual situation, their schooling, their attitudes, and their hopes, and to what extent discouragement and despair, evident in older adolescents longer without work, had taken root in them. Any possible plan for helping these young people, blocked at their entrance to the adult world, seemed to swing on more exact knowledge of what they were doing and thinking, what exactly was their education and training, their employment history if any, and their work and recreational preferences, how were they occupying themselves, how were they behaving, how reacting to their present plight.

To disclose what was happening to young people in their first years of unemployment, the Massachusetts Child Council undertook a survey, directed by Herbert C. Parsons, of 330 boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 18, definitely finished with school and only casually and occasionally employed. It was of necessity a sampling study, but the sample was as typical as it could be made, drawn from settlement houses and clubs, non-member friends, boys known to the Juvenile Court, out-of-state transients, affiliates of an unsupervised Athletic and Social Club, and CWA registration files. Boys and girls were represented in the proportion of 60 to 40, respectively. The group included children of native-born whites and Negroes and fifteen foreign-born-parent nationalities. All parts of the city were represented in some proportion, and all parent-occupation classes in some degree. The major portion of the study was devoted to a statistical portrayal and analysis of the 330 case histories, but out of the tabulations and summaries emerges a figure, a composite individual, who bespeaks the whole group.

He left school at his sixteenth birthday and has been out of school eighteen months. In all probability he went to high-school for something over a year, but left usually for financial reasons, although very often he did not like it. If he left before his sixteenth birthday and should have carried on further study in Continuation School, the chances are even that he failed to comply with the law. If he stayed on in school after his sixteenth year, the chances are much greater that he received some real vocational training, and also greater that he returned for further training. If he did return to school for whatever reason after his first leave-taking, he chose a commercial course in overwhelming proportion to any other.

Whether he be boy or girl, he brings little thought or plan into the spending of his day. If a boy, he confesses to much hanging around the corner with his friends, if a girl, she turns to housework or to aimless staying at home to fill her time. The effect of the settlement house, the club, the organized character-building agency, seems to have slight incidence in his life, although he may be a member for over two years and attend every day. His own Athletic and Social Club has a greater hold on his interest and loyalties as evidenced by his daily attendance, which suggests that there is a need here which defies the genius

of the youth organizer. Hobbies and other creative activities fill little place in his daily round, and he expresses slight interest in them even if he is working steadily. If he were working and did have money, he would prefer to indulge in many pleasures which only money can buy, although this may be offset by a serious and sincere intention to return to school in the event of employment so as to fit himself for advancement.

The chances are about even that he has had some work in the time since he left school, but if he did it lasted not quite four months. In fact, the lower the age and grade at which he left school, the greater the probability that he secured employment. Nine times out of ten his school training did not seem to carry over into his work experience, but a somewhat higher ratio of continuity was evident between jobsthan between school training and the job he held longest. In over three quarters of the cases he secured his slight employment through his own efforts or through friends and relatives, and averaged about nine dollars a week while he was at work. When confronted with the possibility of a work preference, he is apt to choose work he was trained for in school, despite the fact that his training has slight relationship to such work as he did when he got out of school. Expressed absolutely, his greatest preference is for some type of business opportunity.

HE has had a great deal of time in which to get into trouble, and frequently urges this as his reason for doing so. Although he admits to much more frequent delinquencies than he has been caught in, the apprehended youth is only one fifth of the total group. If he has been in court at all since his departure from school, his average is twice, exclusive of previous appearances in court. Membership in a supervised organization seems to have little effect on keeping him out of court, but his membership in his own Athletic and Social Club seems to be related to more actively expressed anti-social conduct.

Such a summary analysis of the objective and measurable characteristics reflected by the unemployment of 330 boys and girls fails to appraise the underlying psychological attitudes which seem to be engendered by and concomitant with their plight. The first important point here is that, above all, these young people want work. The large numbers who have expressed dislike of school as a reason for leaving, the large fraction of highschool graduates who feel they have gone far enough to entitle them to find work now, the appreciable percentage of those who would consider education only as it was related to advancement in their work, all point away from a program purely educational in nature. This is not to say that an educational or recreational program could not depend from or hinge upon a work program. But work should be the core.

Another powerful urge in these young people must be mentioned. The economic life has a spur for them which is seen through all their training, schooling, thinking, and ambitions. They have been taught, and have absorbed from the tradition around them, that the good life is tantamount to a life of business. They want the ease, the remuneration, the prestige, that goes with clean work in an office or a store, or the routine security of factory employment. They are doomed, of course, to

disappointment for some time to come, for even as conditions improve they will not be the first to be absorbed. In some way, and this depends on the administration of a program worked out for their benefit, they will first have to be unconditioned of this ideology of business as the supremely good life and guided in the constructive and healthful use of leisure.

They need a vitalizing standard of a sort that will allow them to envisage life as consisting of something other than a comfortable existence adjusted to a nine-to-five round in the employ of someone else. They require instruction and inspiration to see life in its other aspects, and to make these aspects vital parts of their own lives. This task of readjustment of their attitude, whether it springs from the apathy of puzzled youth, or from the tradition of our business heritage, should be made the responsibility of some branch of our organized system so that they may be led toward a fuller life than they give promise at present of entering upon by themselves.

But perhaps the most obvious single characteristic which marks this group is their utter failure to think out their own particular problems, or, much less, to appreciate the broader implications of general unemployment. Any attempt to get their beliefs as to the reason why they could not find work was met in the great majority of cases with blank surprise. When their own predicament was presented to them for examination, it is not going too far to say that they almost failed to recognize it as part of themselves. "Gee, I don't know," was the typical answer, and there the matter stopped as though their answer was at the same time an explanation. Few had gone deeply into probable causes or had thought about them even within their limited knowledge and experience. A sizeable proportion were only too ready to ascribe their inability to obtain employment to lack of luck or influence, while an appreciable number gave more personal reasons—racial, physical, personality, appear-

ance, lack of education, reform-school records, and so forth.

Almost a third of the group had some realization of the handicaps imposed upon them by competition with adults because of their youth or inexperience. However, despite the apparent cognizance of the problem evidenced by their remarks, the prospect of returning to school until such time as they were older and better trained was in no wise appealing.

This passivity and lack of planfulness is further instanced by the manner in which they fail to acquire constructive influences or habits. There is little in their lives but the remote prospect of work, and meanwhile they deplore their lack of clothes and money, their inability to help shoulder the financial burden at home. With most, the day drags and brings no satisfaction. Yet with all this, those will look in vain who seek in this group an aggravated resentment against the existing social order. There are very definitely the seeds of discontent. But the attitude expressed by "They make me sick with their excuses for not giving me a job," has not yet been crystallized, organized or directed. Within the narrow age range studied it is impossible to postulate the definite presence of such a trend. However, it is evident and significant that the longer the period of unemployment, the less the effort to seek work. This is only one symptom, which while not in itself immediately disturbing, has as its end-product the restlessness and desperation showing itself in young people between the ages of 18 and 25.

In this older group the feeling of hopelessness has become crystallized and articulate. Unless some preventive measures are taken with the younger group, the development of their attitude will progressively parallel that of their older brothers. A planned program, whether it be recreation, education, or work, will at the same time serve as preventive mental hygiene. The morale of these boys and girls if once destroyed may never be regained.

The Future of Homes for the Aged

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WITH the establishment, in the not too far distant future, of comprehensive old-age annuity systems, and with the more complete development of placement of the aged in boarding-homes, the potentialities of which have been so admirably demonstrated by the state of Massachusetts, the field of the present homes for the aged will be greatly curtailed. Of course there will always be some old folk who for one reason or another will be in need of an institutional haven. But they will be relatively few and the present homes will either have to close their doors, or else broaden the service that they are prepared to give. There is at present, and there always will be a great need for institutional beds for the elderly chronic sick who require custodial care. A person who has had an apoplectic stroke, but who has partially recovered, one with a heart affection that sharply limits his activities, one severely crippled by chronic rheumatism, need institutional shelter.

Most of these chronic invalids can walk but little, many are confined to wheel chairs or to their beds. Their life is circumscribed by their enforced immobility. What can existence, year in and year out within the four walls of a bare room in a poor home of their own offer them? The time consumed by the simple procedures of bathing and feeding them and making their beds is so great that care can hardly be given by a visiting-

nurse service. But in an institution this care is greatly simplified. Furthermore, in a well-planned institution occupation, amusement, diversion, social contacts, a chance to get into the open, into a garden, can all be provided. So for the incapacitated aged an institution often offers the best form of relief.

Here, it seems to me, is the logical field for the present homes, their service organized to provide not alone room and board, simple nursing care, and medical supervision directed to making the aged person comfortable and arresting the progress of his disease, but also to provide human contacts, and some means for sustaining his emotional and intellectual life.

Such an institution must, of course, be endowed with better facilities than most of the present homes for the aged, but they need not be very complex or expensive. Ample grounds, porches, elevators, wide doors allowing the passage of wheel chairs and beds, are the main structural requirements. More service must be available for the guests; diet kitchens or floor pantries; means of serving meals in the rooms as well as in a central dining-room; plenty of maids or attendants to feed patients and attend to their personal needs; more nurses; more intensive regular medical supervision; a simple infirmary for those suffering from intercurrent disease or sudden set-backs; liaison with a hospital, preferably one for chronic diseases, to