

settings tailored to their academic pursuits. The project, to be financed jointly by Ottawa and the provinces, is intended to improve students' understanding of industry and enable them to make realistic career decisions before leaving school.

All these Canadian schemes, as well as some others of less immediate interest to European planners, will cost \$350 million in the first year. A basic philosophy of optimism is evident in all of them, concerned as they are with preserving the employment potential of a growing and important segment of the population for whom actual work is not now available. Labour specialists throughout the rich world are impressed with "the danger of making unemployables of our unemployed", as a spokesman for Britain's MSC recently put it. "Lack of a job early in one's working life means that one misses the vital formative experience of work, the essential disciplines which we take for granted," he added.

Such fears, and the corresponding national work and training programs, would be justified if industry were likely to need a huge reserve of labour some time in the future. But the contrary is true.

For the latest OECD report forecasts continued inflation, unemployment, foreign-trade and domestic-demand problems throughout the Western industrialized countries in the foreseeable future, with nothing to justify long-term optimism. And the ILO warns that, even if the recession were to disappear miraculously overnight, there would still be large numbers of young people seeking jobs without a hope of finding any.

The current recession began with the oil crisis of 1973, following a long and uninterrupted period of spectacular industrial growth. But the seeds of the problem were sown well before the oil crisis, the ILO says. A textbook example is the British labour market — there were 28,000 unemployed teenagers in Britain in 1968, 58,000 in 1971, 175,000 in 1975 and more than 200,000 in 1976. A similar pattern has been evident in many other countries, including Canada, the United States, France and Italy, all of which had high levels of youth unemployment in the 1960s.

Thus, the ILO considers, the recession has merely accelerated the trend, but so dramatically that:

"Now about 40 per cent of the unemployment total in the world's 23 richest countries are young people under 25 years, although they constitute only 22 per cent of the total population . . . Teenagers are

hardest hit, especially those looking for their first jobs. Even in countries with relatively low levels of joblessness, such as Sweden and Norway, teenage unemployment is twice or thrice as high as that of other workers."

As industry requires a constantly-diminishing human intake, children still in school are increasingly taught to prize the prospect of employment and to compete for places. The school systems tend to reinforce the trend by becoming increasingly selective and competitive themselves, a process that starts in primary school. The constant siphoning-off of gifted, and "motivated", youngsters leads to a downgrading of all the rest, who go to general and vocational schools when educational levels are also losing value. When the youngsters leave them, they are confronted with the strange world of the labour market, which requires skills, knowledge and behaviour they have not acquired. An estimated one-third of unemployed teenagers in the EC have completed compulsory schooling without receiving any additional vocational education; and, the ILO emphasizes, increasing numbers of school-leavers do not meet the standards required for training in modern industry.

That, however, is only a minor aspect of the essential problem of unemployment, since industry is quite capable of training all the people it needs. In fact, both sides of industry throughout the West are erecting barriers, for opposite reasons, against job-seekers. The plight of the jobless young thus becomes a political embarrassment and an excuse for bureaucratic organization in national youth-employment programs that can, at best, postpone problems for the future.

Corporate managers are understandably reluctant to hire new workers who are difficult and expensive to fire under the protection of labour legislation and the powerful trade unions. The rapid rise of labour costs combines with accelerating technological development in all industries to reduce the existing labour force and to promote the acquisition of more equipment, rather than more employees, even at times when vacancies do arise. Industrial firms volunteering to take on small numbers of school-leavers in response to pleas by government are concerned essentially with the public-relations value of such gestures, which simply cannot solve the employment problems of a whole generation.

Trade unions are in business to look after the interests of the people who are

*Labour market
requires skills
not acquired
in school*