

# The leisure generation demands a livelihood

By Thomas Land

*Structural changes in industry confront many school-leavers with the real prospect of holding no employment during much of their lives. The rest of society, still steeped in the work ethics of the first industrial revolution, will have to meet their material needs. The industrialized world is seeking suggestions to tackle — or hide the problem.*

The Commission of the European Communities is urgently seeking fresh ideas for the expenditure of about \$15 million earmarked for the next four years to combat rising unemployment among young people. Various proposals are being prepared in the nine member nations, some of whose specialists are looking to Canada, which has just launched an imaginative youth-employment program. But their schemes, urgently debated throughout the industrialized world, may not affect the core of the problem unless their authors ask some penetrating questions about the real needs and priorities of modern society, and even examine the very "work ethic" on which all productive activities are based.

The money was set aside by the European Community ministers of education, acting in alarm over the recent spectacular increase in the number of young people among the unemployed — whose numbers have already reached levels unprecedented since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Total unemployment in the Community is well over five million; and more than one out of every three jobless persons is under 25, may never have been employed — and may not be so for the rest of his life.

A recent study published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) described unemployed youth as "a new underprivileged group". Transatlantic observers such as *The New York Times* warn that a revolution by embittered and unemployed young Europeans may be around the corner.

Unemployment is a world-wide phenomenon and an inescapable problem for all mankind in this final and dangerous quarter of the twentieth century. It is due,

in the technologically-sophisticated countries, to a basic restructuring of industry, the effects of which are currently exacerbated by the prolonged, slow economic growth. Only about 17 million of the world's 315 million unemployed are Westerners. But the severity of unemployment in many industrialized countries is being examined for the first time on a global basis by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva because of its effects on the rich world's ability to help the developing regions.

## Unquestioned

Strangely enough, the present phenomenon of high youth unemployment has been foreseen for more than three decades but has gone unquestioned. While industry and agriculture gathered the profits of high technology by shifting towards more skill-intensive and capital-intensive activities, the super-salesmen of the second industrial revolution depicted the rise of future societies free of the burden of repetitive work. Industry was to remain the domain of relatively few responsible specialists able to provide for the carefree leisure of millions.

The first generation of Westerners thus condemned to leisure yet wholly unprepared for it now demands work — or at least a livelihood. Demonstrations by un-

*High youth unemployment foreseen for decades*

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