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Apprenticeship to society – young people meet the challenge

Minister of National Defence Barney Danson recently assessed the value of a special youth-employment project, introduced by his Department last year. Following are excerpts of a speech delivered to the Kiwanis Club of Ottawa on April 14:

For more than a decade we adults have worried about our young, a concern we have shared with parents around the world. The manners of youth annoyed us. Their refusal to share our values distressed us. Their vandalism was frightening, their counter-culture bewildering. Their drug-taking brought tragedy and despair to many homes, and their disaffection caused us sorrow.

These were our children. We loved them. We wanted them to be happy. So we gave them, at home and in school, most of the things they demanded as rights, and we, in turn, demanded little of them. We raised the best-informed, most highly-schooled, most-travelled generation in history. Yet never in history has youth rebelled so utterly against its society – its values, its work ethic, its authority and its elders – the activists through violence, the escapists by dropping out.

Obviously, we were doing something wrong.

I thought about this a great deal in the early 1970s. Then, as now, many young people were living outside society, unemployed, undirected and uncommitted. Others were professionals whom the economy couldn't absorb. Many more were too well schooled to settle for dull, menial dead-end jobs. Together, they represented the future of our country. We had to help them, bring them into society, find socially useful channels for their energy and enthusiasm. We couldn't afford to frustrate or disinherit them.

Unique program

As I moved from the back to the front benches of Parliament, I began to talk up and write about a new and different youth program: a voluntary non-military national service. Local and national sur-

veys were encouraging. About 80 per cent of all ages was in favour of such a program. Jacques Hébert, president of Canada World Youth, an exchange program, added his voice to mine, and a year ago March the Federal Government put up \$10 million to test the idea.

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Our advertising campaign was too hurried to be effective. Still, it drew more than 3,000 young men and women aged 17 to 22, and we narrowed that down through interviews and psychological tests for such traits as stability and motivation. A computer made the final choice, based on geography, sex, family income and language, which gave us a fairly good cross-section of Canada. At the same time we were contacting federal departments, provincial authorities, municipalities and voluntary organizations, and through this pooling of ideas we selected 30 work sites in 46 communities, from Terra Nova in Newfoundland to 100 Mile House, British Columbia, and some 30 volunteers were dispatched to each work site in charge of three paid group leaders and a project co-ordinator.

Initial problems

The work projects were crucial to the experiment's success, and as usual with any new venture we had some start-up problems. A group in Newfoundland, for example, was asked to make a canoe run out of a brook studded with rocks. They were working all day in freezing water, without gloves or know-how, because no one on the community council had thought of the need for instruction, and morale sank as the temperature went down. In Fort McMurray, on the other hand, the community was so enthused at getting Katimavik [an Inuit name given to the project, meaning "meeting place"]

Twelve years ago tomorrow, the appointment was announced of Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs as the first woman director of the National Gallery of Canada. She was succeeded, ten years later, by the second woman director, Dr. Hsio-Yen Shih, formerly of the Royal Ontario Museum.

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