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Millions of American Adolescents Never Learned Value of Work

MILLIONS of children become adolescents each year and more than 4 million adolescents turn 21 each year. A large percentage of them have never done any work more constructive than carrying out the garbage or raking the yard. Their out of school time has been spent watching TV or playing. They do not know how to work.

Many of them have not been motivated to work, particularly those who come from homes where adults take indifferent attitudes toward steady jobs. Youngsters learn quickly that unemployment compensation and various welfare programs will provide, whether the unemployed is willing or able to work or not.

So teenagers become adults, many of them marrying and becoming parents (not necessarily in that order) without any firm idea of how to earn a living. Many resort to crime.

Concern for wellbeing of children, protection of jobs for adults, and safety for all has resulted in restrictions which severely limit opportunities for adolescents to try out different types of work and learn to apply their abilities. Only the ambitious and industrious are able to overcome the obstacles.

Federal regulations prohibit hiring of those under 18 for any work the government may consider to be hazardous. With the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and other bureaus looking on, threatening heavy penalties, employers are reluctant to take chances.

Minimum wage laws also limit jobs for untrained applicants. Employers may figure that if they must pay at least \$2.30 per hour, they might just as well try to get an experienced worker.

Manual labor on construction and other unskilled or semi-skilled work largely was replaced by machines before the building slump occurred. Labor unions control most of what is left, with rules restricting temporary or part-time employment.

Many trades and professions require apprenticeships, special training or licenses with qualifications which unprepared teenagers cannot meet. They may not even know whether they would want to take time to qualify, or if they are suited to the work.

School counselors may have only limited work experience, and second-hand suggestions are no substitute for on-the-job training.

Many schools now have divisions for teaching trades and area vocational schools serve many others, but this is only a part of the task. Job training should begin at home, where attitudes are formed and responsibilities should be learned.

The failure of parents, public schools and private businesses to meet the needs of young people for career training is just what socialist reformers want. It gives them an opportunity to take over by providing taxpayer funds for jobs for idle youth.

It is estimated that various agencies will put about 1.5 million youths from poor home environments on government payrolls this summer. What they will accomplish has not been indicated.

Youths from middle and upper economic class homes also need to learn to work constructively. Only by working in business and industry can they learn that free enterprise, rather than government aid, leads to individual success and national prosperity.