

2980 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

to do what they can to solve the problems of unemployment among America's youth. His concern was such that he readily agreed to serve as a member of the late President Kennedy's Committee on Youth Employment when he was asked to do so. His concern was reflected in the approach which the Equitable, on a completely voluntary basis, adopted to help a troubled segment of our unemployed youth, which I will discuss shortly.

The second circumstance from which our concern grows is the fact that we are a major employer of young men and women in their teens, particularly in New York City. In fact, during this month (July) well over 1,000 teenagers from the graduating class of June 1967 will begin employment with us. We are expecting about 1,000 new employees from this age group at our Home Office, and a total of about 500 at our field locations. As a major employer of youth, we feel a special obligation to be concerned with and sensitive to the problems this population is facing. Our concern is heightened as we find we must adjust to a changing labor pool prompted by the flight of the middle class to the suburbs. Our concern is strengthened each time we note that many of the jobs being done away with, as a result of increased use of electronic data processing equipment, were formerly filled by young inexperienced men and women. Our concern is intensified each time we hear statistics like the one which tells us that there are about 100,000 young men and women between the ages of 16 and 21 out of school and out of work in the City of New York alone.

As evidence of its concern with the problem of youth unemployment, and at Mr. Oates' specific urging, the Equitable several years ago addressed itself to doing something about a particular segment of this population—the high school dropout.

In addition, again several years ago, we put considerable time and the effort of some of our senior-level officers into formulating suggestions and an approach to combating the overall problem of unemployment, with particular attention given to youth unemployment. The result was a major speech advancing some new and innovative ideas given by Chairman Oates at the 34th National Business Conference of the Harvard Business School Association in June of 1964.

I would like to share briefly with you our experience in aiding the high school dropout, as well as some of Mr. Oates' thought-provoking suggestions.

In 1961 the Equitable started a special program for the employment of some so-called unemployable youngsters who had for varying reasons dropped out of school and who did not meet our normal employment standards. We were interested in seeing if these youngsters could do Equitable's beginning-level jobs, and if they could be prepared, like the hundreds of inexperienced high school and college graduates we hire each year, for positions with greater responsibility and higher earnings.

We've been working on this project in a modest way since 1961, and by 1965 we had employed over 80 of these so-called unemployable young men and women. The youngsters who came with us started as general clerks, inside messengers, mailroom attendants, addressograph clerks and Xerox machine operators. For the most part, general clerks start in jobs which require that they open and sort mail, and after a period of training, that they become familiar with the responsibilities of various units of a department so they can see that the right individual receives all changes of beneficiaries, another gets all correspondence asking for a change in the manner in which premiums are paid, and so on. Inside messengers, we euphemistically call them appchasers, are responsible for searching out policies or applications for insurance which are in various stages of the processing pipeline when they are needed for special attention, or when additional information is received or is needed. Our mailroom attendants staff a number of small individual mailrooms on each floor which are connected by a conveyor system, and are responsible for the pickup and delivery of mail on a set schedule. The fact that these rooms are spread throughout our 38-story building means the employees assigned to them have a considerable amount of unsupervised time. Addressograph clerks and Xerox machine operators carry out the duties that their job titles imply, with the understanding that they are often responsible for scheduling the use of their equipment and establishing priorities. Over the last several years our starting salaries on beginning-level jobs have gone up from \$56 to \$67 per week. Promotions to more demanding work are available to the youngsters who prove themselves reliable and capable.