

meeting the problems of old age has been in terms of providing *security*—which is easier than recognizing that it is *opportunity* which people want and are entitled to. And then, the “has been’s” haven’t a lobby!

The first two of these points warrant particular attention.

## I

Thirty-five years ago, in September, 1932, Henry Osterman, then aged 16, didn’t go back to high school because there wasn’t enough money in the family to afford it. He scratched for odd jobs for most of five years; then got a common labor job in the local steel mill; worked up then to a hard but reasonably good-pay job on the open hearth furnaces. Last January, those furnaces were closed down when the company opened a new mill in another part of the country, using the oxygenation process. Osterman lost his job, and 35 years’ seniority.

He has tried ever since to get other work. There are jobs in other plants in town he knows he could do. So do the people he interviews. But he knows, when he fills in two blanks on the application form—Age? 51. Did you finish High School? No—that he probably won’t get the job.

This isn’t an extreme or a typical case. In others, the individual involved is 61 instead of 51. Or he has had a poorer work record. Or the individual involved is a woman who has just finished raising her family.

And there are literally hundreds of thousands of these cases:

There are over three-quarters of a million workers 45 years of age or older (most of them under 65) who are looking for work today and can’t get it. Over \$750 million is being paid out each year to this group in unemployment insurance benefits.

Half of all private job openings are barred to applicants over 55; a quarter to those over 45.

Over a third of all men who have been unemployed 27 weeks or more (the “hard-core” unemployed) are over 45—although this group makes up slightly less than a quarter of the work force. The percentage of older workers in this “hard-core” category was 34.3% last year—up from 30.2% in 1965.

More than half of the nation’s poor families are headed by persons 45 or over; more than a third by persons 55 or over.

I like to believe that if the people in this country only knew how serious this situation is there would be action on it immediately. It is so inhuman! Such *bad* business. So indecent.

And so unnecessary! For most of this discrimination on the basis of age is the result of either (i) a failure on the part of employers to realize how technology and the life sciences have combined to increase the value of older people’s work, or (ii) a failure to adjust welfare and pension fund planning, and seniority provisions in collective bargaining agreements, to the facts of life and of the increasing mobility of labor.

The surveys and studies contained in my 1965 Report to the Congress—along with other available information—document the common ability of older people to compensate in a variety of ways for whatever failings we are heir to because of our age. The evidence is that, in general, the experience that older persons possess *fully* compensates for any loss of work capacity which might otherwise in varying degrees be occasioned by their age.

It now appears that up to the age of 60 there is very little diminution of a person’s work productivity in most occupations. Even after age 60, there is such a wide variety of productivity changes that age in itself is not a useful or reliable index of such change.

There is increasing and persuasive evidence that in those cases where there does exist some diminution in the productivity of a worker as he grows older, this diminution is not the result of age itself but stems from the worker’s understandable reaction to the prevailing practices and mistaken attitudes regarding the effects of age.

We are learning quite a bit about the age factor from our experience in the programs conducted under the Manpower Development and Training Act. It has been observed, for example:

That although younger trainees perform better “on the average,” as high as 40% of the older trainees perform “above average.”

Although younger trainees perform better in shorter training courses, particularly those involving perceptual-motor skills, their elders often aver-