

fatal disabilities than the average worker, but I hasten to add that when we concede this fact we also must note that it is applicable only to those at the top of the older worker category; and, further, we must add that, under most contracts and sick leave policies, this factor is of relatively little significance to the employer involved.

Another often stated but unsubstantiated allegation is that older workers are unable to adapt to new production methods, that only youth is capable of change. Such presumed proof as is preferred usually consists of citing isolated cases which, upon examination, proves to involve other factors than the age of the employee in question. Again, when older workers are evaluated as a group rather than by these exceptional instances, study after study has shown this inability to adapt ideas to be largely a myth composed of prejudice rather than fact. Whether myth or fact, however, is beside the point. These and other presumed reasons result in a high level of continuing unemployment for older workers who are ready, willing, able and desperate for an opportunity to prove their competence to perform.

What can we do about this unfortunate condition of things? Well, that is what we are here to find out, and the final effective answers will undoubtedly evolve as we proceed in our cooperative search, but there are some guidelines or points of attack which may well be suggested.

Volunteer agencies and organizations of older workers themselves have had some degree of success - but that success has been related primarily to the executive levels of employment and is, of necessity, peripheral when weighed against the problem as a whole. It is a good approach and should be encouraged to the utmost, but it is not a final answer.

Another approach may well be in the area of alleged employer fears of incurring a heavy cost factor in terms of so-called fringe benefits (such as vacation and pension payments) by employing older workers. While, as I have previously stated, this fear may be based largely upon a supposition that older workers are incapable of steady, full-time employment - a proven fallacy - the fear exists and must be dealt with.

It could conceivably be met head on by stipulations in employment contracts that an employer would not be required to pay such fringe benefits until a worker had actually performed forty hours in a single month. This would protect the employer's interest on the one hand, and, at the same time, give the employee an opportunity to prove his ability to carry his load. It would provide, in short, a probationary period during which the matter of an older worker's employability could be proven to be either a fiction or fact. Prejudice as a basis for hiring and firing would be eliminated.

Employers, further, might either be relieved of Unemployment Insurance Tax on "intermittent" or part-time employees, or be allowed to offset wages paid to older workers for less than forty hours a month against their benefit charges for unemployment insurance. Adequate