

Industry has been in the thick of this subject because it cannot afford otherwise. Industry exists for profit as well as having tax and community obligations, indicating that problems of the older worker are a tremendous economic and political force. Many companies have taken a humanitarian approach to re-employment problems giving assistance to older workers through preretirement counseling, retraining and re-educating programs and relocation of workers. Aside from the humanitarian interest, industry has reckoned with the economic power of these older workers.

The problem of finding employment for older workers is a part of the larger problem of finding employment for all who wish to work and are capable of doing so. How to stimulate the economy so as to provide more jobs and increase productivity has been the motivation for the recent tax cut, the recent Area Redevelopment Action for the Manpower Development Training Act and so on. In many cases, the social experimental laws have little economic value and are sometimes misused through the support of those who want to see problems resolved quickly at almost any cost.

I do not want to leave the impression that such a law as the Manpower Retraining Act is bad or unwarranted as I advocate retraining when needed, by self or by government. This type of law can be well used but results are difficult to measure and can be misused if left to irresponsible administrators.

When the older worker loses his job where are his chances for employment? If competing with younger workers, he will tend to be more skilled, will have completed less years of school and has more chance of having some physical handicap. Despite favorable factors, he will usually lose out in competing with a younger man. This, in spite of studies showing that older workers have as good or better attendance records than younger workers, that their turn-over rates are lower, safety records better and that they are more reliable, conscientious and possessive about their jobs.

Their most serious re-employment obstacle is the hiring age limit. There is considerable evidence that discrimination against older job applicants through such factors as career policy, promoting from within their employees, claiming that older people are inflexible and difficult to train and that older workers increase pension and insurance costs, all tend to discourage the employment of older persons seeking employment. However, the pension issue is diminishing through the increase of social security benefits, increased individual insurance and annuity protection, the retention of pension rights from former jobs and the fact that companies have found that older workers included in pension plans do not add as much to costs as anticipated.

Union managements are unable to offer any more help to the older job seeker than nonunion managements. Through the system of seniority the unions must protect their own members and most of the union contracts require specific retirement. Society is requesting both union and nonunion management to develop their apprentice programs more fully which also puts the older worker at a disadvantage.