

"LABOR LOOKS AT THE OLDER WORKER"

by Don Vial, Research Director,  
California Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO,  
San Francisco

I. Introduction

We can all stipulate at the outset that there is a serious employment problem concerning older workers.

Like other progressive organizations we have supported and continue to support a program of increased aids to older workers to enhance their employment opportunities. We supported, for example, the legislation enacted in 1961 outlawing age discrimination and providing for the development of special services and placement aids within the Department of Employment.

The value of this legislation has been demonstrated in the increased placement of older workers by the Department of Employment, although the two percent decline in placements in 1963 reported by the Department recently should serve as a warning to all that we have barely begun to scratch the surface of the problem.

Indeed, we believe the State's ban on age discrimination needs an enforcement agency to process complaints administratively, rather than relying on the present totally ineffective misdemeanor enforcement procedure. But such enforcement, even if it were legislatively feasible, should not be viewed as any kind of a panacea.

The truth of the matter is that many of our older workers -- especially those with little formal education and few skills -- are caught in an "economic vise" that is squeezing them right out of their jobs.

They are being held in place in the "vise" by the structural rigidities of the labor market that work against their adjustment to technological change; but it's the failure of the economy to provide enough jobs to go around that is doing most of the squeezing.

We are deluding ourselves if we think that we can really penetrate the problem merely by breaking down "stereotyped" attitudes toward job performance and the ability to learn of older workers, or by expanding training and retraining efforts in combination with better counseling and placement services under an effective ban on older worker discrimination. All of these are necessary, of course. We can well afford to allocate more of our resources to overcoming these structural barriers -- and we must.

But, as in the case of our special efforts to help minority groups and the youth, our objective must have a higher purpose than