

Students suffer from changing work ethic

(CPS)—"Work," boomed author Studs Terkel, whose very name has become synonymous with drudgery, boredom and sweat, "gives the modern American a feeling of 'anonymity and wondering.'" The Chicagoan told an audience of Berkeley students early this year that working people today are asking themselves "What am I doing?" as they perform their "daily humiliations," as Terkel put it in his best-selling book, "Working."

"What am I doing?" wonders Anna Shapiro as she licks an envelope addressed to Studs Terkel,

of all people, an envelope containing a royalty check for that very book, "Working."

"I wanted to send it in with a letter," Shapiro wrote recently in *Seven Days* magazine. "Dear S.T.: The irony of the situation overwhelms me. My yearly salary for stuffing envelopes is less than one-fifth of this check which represents one-half of your yearly profits from a book about people who stuff envelopes."

Work. It's still the foundation of modern society and the thing that so turned on the Puritans, but today, work is probably the biggest loser around. As the nature of

modern industrial society changes, the work ethic is changing as well, experts are saying, even disappearing, according to some. The long range economy is also in trouble, with even the greyest, most conservative business leaders talking in chilling, desperate terms about the future of work and its consequences for the world. One thing everyone agrees on: Students and other young Americans stand to lose the most in this coming transformation to what one insurance industry research group called a "somewhat different culture."

Unemployment is currently the biggest bugaboo in nearly every Western nation. In the U.S., the rate hovers about the 7.5 per cent mark, 13.7 for blacks, 19.2 per cent for young people and a whopping 35.2 per cent for young blacks. These dismal rates won't soon improve, experts warn.

"Even with recovery," says cautious *Business Week* magazine, "unemployment will stick at a very high level: at least five per cent through 1980." But even that five per cent prediction hinges on whether the country can generate 12 million jobs by 1980, a tricky proposition when one looks at the work situation closely. Conjuring up 12 million jobs in 14 years, admits *Business Week*, "is more than have ever been generated before."

The task of creating all those jobs goes on top of a changing work force situation. The nation's jobs are slowly changing from a manufacturing character to a service and information-oriented nature. Today, the fastest growing jobs are in managerial, professional, technical and clerical fields, which already account for 40 per cent of the labor force. The work force is changing in human makeup as well. Plunging into the job market for the first time in large numbers are young women; three times as many women as men entered the work force last year and one Temple University economist predicts they'll reach parity with men by 1980.

Since the economy is unable to generate enough jobs for the

population, women, teens, minorities and the usual number of men are scrambling after the meager offerings. This vicious circle is called an economic "structural problem" by experts and it is nagging the people who think about such things because "structural problems" don't respond to the usual market manipulations. "In the Western world, something has changed radically in political economics," *Business Week* announces. "Our economy suffers from a serious mismatch between available jobs and available workers," says Northwestern University economist Robert Gordon.

Moreover, the expected tight economy for the next 15 years is creating a massive pool of "underemployed" people, a polite way of saying many former students with doctoral degrees in hand are emptying trash for a living. A recent University of Michigan study found that as much as 27 per cent of the U.S. work force is performing a job for which they have been overtrained or overeducated. *The Wall Street Journal* says "underemployment" will soon become a chronic problem. "Indeed, some analysts believe that many of today's underemployed will probably spend the rest of their careers in jobs that don't match their qualifications," warns the *Journal*. "That," it adds, "has ominous implications for industry and society." Says urban economist Charles Holt, "It's a smoldering problem."

Students should expect the worst for the writing seems to be on the wall. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports rapidly rising numbers of college graduates — both men and women — are being forced to take jobs unrelated to their majors and unrelated to college at all.

"The golden age is over for higher education," says Harvard economist Richard Freeman. "A college degree no longer guarantees a good, high-paying job, so graduates are taking the best they can get." George Rieder, president of the American Society for Personnel Administration, agrees. "The simple fact is we've educated people too much for the wrong types of careers."

On top of all these facts and statistics, the future stockholder might also consider the more philosophical bugaboo creeping into the work force — the growing

refusal among many people to work at all.

Philip Mason, archivist at the Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University in Detroit, writes in a long essay in a recent *National Observer* that "many observers view with deep alarm the apparently changing attitudes of American workers to their jobs and the existing free enterprise system." Mason adds that many workers — especially the young — have little commitment to their jobs. They view with equal suspicion the business for which they work and the labor union which represents them, he says.

The work ethic is crumbling, insurance industry executives were told early this year by a research group set up by the industry to help them prepare for the future. The report warned of coming "economic turbulence" and "social disruption" in the next 20 years as we head into what was called "a somewhat different culture."

"(The study) has documented many manifestations of this erosion in the work ethic: lower productivity, more 'glooming off,' more looking to government and employers for financial security," the executives were told.

Radical sociologist Murray Bookchin says that ever-growing numbers of people "sense that society has developed a technology that could completely abolish material scarcity and reduce toil to a near vanishing point."

The refusal to work, the "new enlightenment" as Bookchin calls it, is "percolating downward from the intelligentsia, the middle classes, and youth generally to all strata of society, slowly undermining the patriarchal family, the school and the factory." He notes it is "eroding the work ethic and the sanctity of property, slowly dissolving the individual's obedience to institutions and authorities."

The changes in store for society are profound, Bookchin says, and they "tend to occur almost unknowingly, as for example among workers who engage in sabotage, work indifferently, practice almost systematic absenteeism, resist authority in almost every form, use drugs and acquire various freak traits." As one radical paper puts it: "Workers of the World, Relax!"

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