

# Voting and hope for future don't intersect

by Allison Engel,  
Pacific News Service

LA SALLE, ILL.—With their overall unemployment running far ahead of the 10.1 percent U.S. average, young people are the hardest hit Americans in the nation's prolonged economic slump.

Yet indications are that this November they will also remain the most silent at the polls.

An informal survey of young people between 18 and 24, from California to New York, suggests that none of the issues which might have provoked them to take new interest in voting is doing so. Neither charges of political unfairness and economic neglect by the Reagan Administration in the East and North Central states, nor the much ballyhooed nuclear freeze campaign in the West, appears to have galvanized this segment of the eligible voting population.

Instead, a pattern which has seen voting turnout by those under 24 slip to just two-thirds the national average—with a scant 23 per cent casting ballots in the last off-year election, 1978—will probably continue.

A Lou Harris Poll confirms this trend. In the month preceding the 1978 elections, 24 per cent of the 18-29-year-olds surveyed said they expected to vote. By October, 1982, that figure had dropped to 17 per cent.

## Analysis

While the reasons vary, in general they point to a dramatic lack of faith in the ability of the nation's political leaders to solve problems that the young feel most affected by.

"Right now, it doesn't seem that voting would make a difference in whether I'm working or not," said Jeff Kemp, 19, of Lacon, Ill., a laid-off shipping clerk. Kamp added that he is not registered because "I haven't gotten around to it."

Darryl Sims, 20, another unregistered voter interviewed outside the same unemployment office here in northern Illinois, was recently laid off from his job as a stone-cutter in



"Voting with their feet"—young people have been slow to vote, preferring other methods. Will issues bring out the young people on November 2nd? (Photo: Richard Brown)

a ring factory. Among other things, the resulting money crunch has forced him to postpone getting married, he said. Sims doesn't know if his fiancée is registered to vote either, because "it's not a big topic of conversation with us. Politics seems like more or less a lot of talk—not something that affects us."

Black young people, who as a group are confronted today by 48.5 per cent unemployment, appeared no more likely to vent anger via the ballot box. Observed Thomas Hines, 23, an unregistered and unemployed maintenance man from suburban Washington, D.C., "The only politician who could help me would be if a young black person was elected President." Nevertheless, said Hines of his job difficulties, "I don't blame President Reagan because he wasn't the one who fired me."

A recent survey by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center confirmed that the young, especially, no longer look to conventional politics for answers to their dilemmas. Only 10.9 per cent of under-24 voters sampled expressed "great confidence" in the nation's chief executive today, down from 24.4 per cent in 1973. Just 10.7 per cent say they have great confidence in their legislators. The confidence level of older Americans surveyed is nearly twice as high.

At New York City's Brooklyn College, Director of Puerto Rican Studies Antonio Stevens-Arroyo reports that while politically-active

students are approaching the issues "with more passion and more intensity this year," nearly half those he talked to about the upcoming election had not even registered.

One explanation, he felt, might be a phenomenon noted by Fordham University political scientist Dale Nelson: Unlike most children of immigrants, Nelson found, Puerto Rican young people tend to vote less often than their parents. Stevens-Arroyo believes that those who do become involved focus on the politics of the Third World, keeping them outside the context of U.S. elections.

In California, where a well-publicized nuclear freeze initiative (Proposition 12) is on the ballot, anti-nuclear activists have been hoping aloud for a large youth turnout at the polls. Jeremy Sherman, the campus coordinator for the initiative, claims that 5,000 students in the San Francisco Bay Area have been registered in the last month alone thanks to freeze-organizers' efforts. "A lot of students were turned off by the 1980 election because they felt there really wasn't a choice," he said. "But the freeze initiative has rekindled some spirit in students."

The freeze campaign does appear to have provided an outlet for student energies that lack other political focal points. "There's no politician that is really for young people now," declared Toni Slattery, a 20-year-old student at San Francisco State, explaining why she is working on the freeze campaign but not for any candidates.

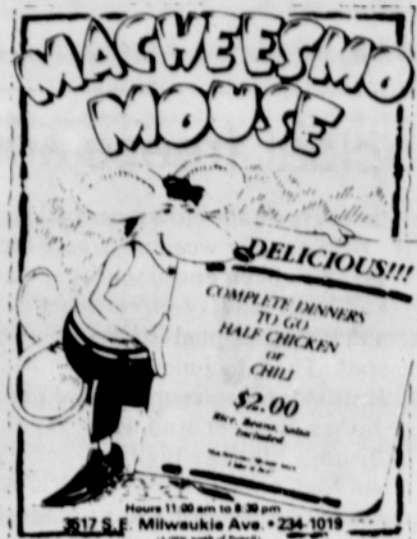
Nevertheless, just minutes away from the big Bay Area campuses—San Francisco State, Berkeley, Stanford—a different picture emerges. At the nearby College of Alameda and Merritt Community College, for instance, most students interviewed dismissed the nuclear freeze as a major inducement to vote. "Freezing nuclear weapons is an impossibility," one commented. "The freeze might pass, but that doesn't mean it's going to have an effect," said another.

Susan Arrington, 22, interviewed at the Virginia Unemployment Commission where she has been going since she lost her job last May, said she has never registered and is "still not sure about voting." Arrington, who is six months pregnant, said the arms race is beginning to worry her because "I want my child to grow up." But, she concluded, it wasn't clear to her that voting would solve the problem.

In New Mexico, the birthplace of the atom bomb, anti-nuclear issues are expected to have little impact on the election; too many residents depend on the nuclear weapons industry for their jobs. But even on other issues, notes Robert Anderson, director of the government research division of the University of New Mexico, young people evidence little desire to vote.

"I hear the usual sniping comments about Reagan," he said. "But there doesn't seem to be a groundswell of interest in doing anything."

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HOWARD WILLITS

## Willits selected

Howard Willits was presented the "Roar of the Tiger" award by the Democratic Party of Oregon. The award is presented annually to a person who typifies the courage and independence of Senator Wayne Morse. Willits, a conscientious objector during World War I, was castigated by the community for tending the graves of portland's Japanese cemetery during World War II.

Among the issues he has been actively involved in are the anti-war movement, the grape boycott, the public power movement, the anti-nuke movement. He was arrested in Bangor, Washington for climbing over the fence during an anti-trident demonstration. While an Oregon legislator, he hired the legislature's first black secretary.

He can frequently be seen carrying a picket sign, sometimes in a crowd but often alone.

Willits gathers thousands of signatures on initiative petitions on a variety of issues. He is outspoken and courageous in the defense of justice.

Vote  
Nov. 2nd

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