The Coming Crisis: Youth Without Work

When young people reach working age, they are at an important stage in their lives. It is the time to begin developing some work experience and skills. It is the time to assume a greater understanding of the responsibilities of being an adult and a member of a community. They are no longer children. For many, it is a time of marriage and the start of their own families.

These are important, formative years. It is a time when their ideas and attitudes—towards life and towards society—begin to take on a permanent mold. But without a decent opportunity to get started—without jobs—the ideas and attitudes developed during these formative years are bound to be twisted by the disappointments and frustrations they suffer.

It is for this reason that the problem of unemployment among young people warrants special attention. Jobless, disappointed youths quickly grasped at the "solutions" offered by Hitler. They provided a good base upon which to build the Nazi movement in prewar Germany.

Any totalitarian movement—be it Nazi, fascist or communist—directs its efforts toward those who have grievances, whether real or imaginary. And in the United States, in the years ahead, the grievances of our rapidly-expanding youth population can be quite real indeed—if they are denied a reasonable chance for jobs.

The dangers of largescale unemployment among youths is not only a matter of economic hardship and deprivation and wasted manpower. Even more important is the fact that it represents a potential threat to society—not only in street gangs, crime and delinquency—but in even more serious forms. It can become a threat to our way of life—not only from the young people who are unemployed—but from the adults who today are passing through the years of their youth without a decent opportunity to get started in life. It is, therefore, only logical to be vitally concerned over the prospects for the future, with 26 million youngsters entering the labor force during this decade.

During the 1960s, the U.S. will feel the impact of the largest labor force increase for any 10-year period in its history.

By 1970, the labor force will total 85.5 million—a rise of 12.6 million or 17 percent over 1960, according to Department of Labor estimates.* Of even greater significance, however, is the tremendous increase in the number of young people who will be seeking work for the first time.

Almost one-half the total increase in the labor force during this decade will be youths 24 years of age and under. In 1970, there will be nearly 20 million young men and women in the workforce. In 1960, there were only 13.7 million.

In other words, while the total labor force is growing by 17 percent, the number of youths in the labor force will be increasing by 45 percent—nearly three times as fast. By way of contrast, in 1960 there were only 400,000 more youths in the labor force than in 1950.

All told, between 1960 and 1970, 26 million young people will enter the labor force to seek work for the first time. Between 1950 and 1960, only 19 million did so.

The sharp rise in the number of young workers in the 1960s is the result of the baby boom of the 1940s, particularly after the end of World War II. Previously, during the years of the Great Depression the U.S. had a low birth rate. As a result, the number of young

** The labor force includes all persons 14 years of age and over who are (1) working or (2) are unemployed and seeking work. The labor force increases each year because there are more entrants into the labor force than there are those who leave it through death, retirement or other reasons.*