

Older workers (1949)

ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE INSTITUTE,
ON OLD AGE.
LONDON, ONTARIO, APRIL 2nd. 1949,
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"REPORT ON THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE NEW YORK STATE JOINT LEGISLATIVE
COMMITTEE ON PROBLEMS OF THE AGING HELD DECEMBER 9, 1948 IN NEW YORK CITY"

Noah Webster, who was responsible for Webster's dictionary, was, of course, an authority on the fine shades of meanings of words. One day he was caught in the act of kissing the cook. His wife, who made the discovery, exclaimed "My dear, I'm surprised!" - "Oh, no" said Noah "We are surprised. You are astonished."

When I received an invitation to speak at a Public Hearing of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging, I was astonished! For some time I had been impressed by the work of the New York Committee. I had felt it to be the best of its kind. I believed that the Committee either had the answers or knew where to obtain them. However, Senator Desmond was courteous himself. He hoped I could come. Would I speak on the subject, "Counselling Older Workers Can Succeed?" Would I prefer to speak during the morning or the afternoon session?

Well, I soon obtained permission of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, accepted the invitation, prepared a talk describing our counselling of older applicants, and found myself on the morning of December 9 in the New York State Building, 80 Centre St., New York City, where I met Senator Desmond for a moment. More of this gentlemen later. The hearing commenced:

The first two speakers were two outstanding physicians.

Dr. C. Ward Crampton, an older man, Park Avenue, and Chairman of the New York City Geriatric Committee described what a geriatrician really is. He is a physician "who gives aid, in health and illness, to the aged and the aging". He is concerned "not only with the treatment of illnesses but the prevention of disease, disability and degeneration of later life." He made use of a new word "de-aging" which he said was scientific; "rejuvenation" was magic.

Probably Dr. Crampton's main contribution was his advocacy of the physiological age by industry. This was to take place of the chronological age as used in hiring and retiring men. The use of the physiological age would depend upon having a thorough yearly medical examination to ascertain the health of the individual. A thorough medical examination yearly would do many things - it would detect strengths and weaknesses, it would reveal the physiological age of the individual.

Mr. Blackburn, Public Relations man of the Department of Labour, Ottawa, a visitor at the hearing came home and reported that the way in which Canada could assist the problem of the aged was to advocate that the physiological age be accepted in industry. I was asked for my comments on this. - Are you interested in my views?

While most experts in the field advocate a physiological and mental age criterion rather than a chronological one (- that is, judging the workers on the basis of what they can do, rather than by their calendar age only), yet it is still a far cry to have such a standard used extensively in Canada. At present in Ontario less than 125 firms have industrial physicians. While the firms engaging them may be the leading industries, yet few of these firms have provided for periodical medical examinations of their employees. Such examinations would demand extensive equipment and more full time physicians. Thus, while the annual medical examinations and the adoption of the physiological age is a goal to which we should aim, yet its practical realization is far in the future."

Dr. Howard A. Rusk, Chairman of the Department of Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine, New York University College of Medicine and Associate Editor of the New York Times then gave a masterly address dealing with the rehabilitation of aging workers. He stated that the treatment of chronic diseases was what formed the largest task of medicine to-day. He advocated the remodelling of county homes for the aged and the introduction of rehabilitation centres. I was privileged to be shown through the Rehabilitation Centre that Dr. Rusk operates in New York City. There, there is found every modern device and competent personnel to retrain

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individuals while safe-guarding their health.

The Chairman then said that the next speaker would be Dr. Scott of Toronto, Canada. Had I read the New York Times that morning I would have been greatly encouraged. I would have realized why I was there. There it was announced that Senator Desmond planned to introduce into the Legislature almost immediately following the hearing two bills (1) to provide in the State Labour Department a job counselling service for older workers, (2) to provide a bureau to launch a permanent drive to expand employment of senior citizens.

Having this purpose in mind, three addresses at the hearing were most significant:-

- (1) The address describing the job counselling service for older applicants in Toronto, Canada (the only known state service of its kind in existence) You may be interested in a summary of my remarks:

After describing how our Canadian counselling of older applicants had come into existence, the training of the counsellors was mentioned. The change in applicants was noted. Fears and frustrations previous to counselling had been replaced by feelings of hope and confidence as plans were devised for them.

During the year 1138 persons had been counselled. Each interview had lasted one hour - many had from two to five interviews depending on individual needs. The applicants had come to us by appointment chiefly from the employment offices - also from a score of other sources including employers, interested individuals, social agencies, or on their own. Sixty-one per cent of the group were over 60 years of age. 33% were veterans. 44% had been born in the British Isles. 29 persons were without any formal education yet 109 had attended University. The following professions were represented - Medicine, Law, Pharmacy, the Ministry, Chartered Accountancy. Almost 1/2 had activities which might be called hobbies.

Contrary to popular opinion the health of the great majority of these older applicants was good. 233 (or about 20%) had a problem here. Not a single Toronto physician failed to give a report on an individual when it was requested. Practically all (1106) needed work urgently in order to live and maintain their families.

Job opportunities were increased three-fold or four-fold as a result of counselling. Also suitable jobs were recommended instead of unsuitable ones.

218 members of the group were in receipt of pensions. Civilian pensions were in most cases low in amount. They were not a satisfactory substitute for work in a period of high costs.

Practically all the group, as judged by their work records were reliable and dependable. Each of 102 had worked at least 30 years for one employer. One man (82) had been employed 66 years with one firm.

Does such intensive counselling lead to employment of these difficult-to-place older applicants? The answer is an emphatic "Yes"! Remember we were a counselling unit - we were not a placing service.

Following counselling - 630 of our older men and women secured work! 203 obtained work through the employment offices - 426 through their own efforts! Among those who secured their own jobs after a plan had been evolved by the counsellors were 40 men over 70 years of age, 5 men - 75; one man - 76 two men - 78, one man - 79.

Examples of an Individual Who Secured Work After Counselling.

A .B. - 69. Strong and virile man. 38 years with a large national firm - had risen from office boy to office manager. Reported to simplify and improve almost every business system with which he was associated. Unemployed eleven months.

After counselling, together with other recommendations, it was suggested, that he be a "resurrector of failing businesses".

With his morale restored, he immediately sold his services to a contracting firm engaged in the rapid building of houses. Because of his business ability and experience, he vitalized this business. One month after his appointment he became a Director of the firm; four months later he was made Vice-President!

- (2) The address of Mr. P. C. Wolz, Eastman Kodak Co., Rochester, N. Y. This firm with 18,000 employees, apparently practices the principles that the contemplated bureau would promote.
 - (a) The firm has a competent medical department to watch over the health of the employees, and supervise the transfer of the older workers to more suitable jobs.
 - (b) The firm provides for retirement at 65 years, yet makes such retirement non-compulsory.
 - (c) The firm surveys and lists jobs suitable for older workers so that older employees may be engaged. There is no prejudice against hiring an older man or woman provided it is shown he or she can do the job. Twenty-five per cent of their total employees are over 50 years of age.

(3) Another pertinent address was given by Mr. Arnold Askin of the Federation Employment Service, New York City. This organization decided to focus public attention upon the needs of the older workers. The campaign they launched was intended not to lessen job opportunities for younger people, but aim to focus attention on the selection of a worker on the individual's qualifications regardless of age. They believed it was important to have people know the facts; to point out that the hiring of mature persons was sound business practice and not charity.

Among other things they devised an attractive poster designed by professional copywriters and commercial artists. This was displayed without charge in 3,100 positions on subway platforms and suburban railway cars. All subway cars had a miniature copy of this poster. The campaign was launched on April 17, 1948.

The response was tremendous. Editorials, radio comments, trade papers, all carried stories in regard to the campaign. One indication of the success of the campaign was that the "March of Time" produced a documentary film entitled "Life with Grandpa".

The campaign of the Federation Employment Service in New York shows what can be done by a voluntary agency at very little cost. The Executive Secretary confessed to me that the cost was approximately \$1,000! It focussed the attention of the entire nation upon the problem.

Dr. Nathan W. Shock of the United States Public Health Service, Washington D. C., spoke on physiological capacities of elderly workers. He stated that science had discovered that older persons, that is, up to 65 years or older, if not under stress can do as much as younger workers, in a great many fields.

Other speakers stressed the attitudes of labour, management, and social workers to the employment of the elderly. Retirement pensions were discussed; also a number of issues pertinent to New York State elderly citizens. For example, the plight of retired state Civil Servants and matters of like interest.

This report would be incomplete without a brief comment on the Chairman of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging. Senator Thos. C. Desmond is a man probably fifty years of age, a graduate of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is a Professional Engineer. In the course of his work he has gained considerable wealth becoming a millionaire. He is now devoting his life to the public service and wants his life to be productive of the greatest good. He has a research staff investigating possible problems. They find that the problem of the aging is one field that needs tremendous emphasis and exploration. He, therefore, has a Joint Legislative Committee of Problems of the Aging. Another problem is the growth of cities. Here again he has a legislative committee dealing with the problem. He has, in all, I believe, three legislative committees. Besides these committees he champions the cause of justice in every way possible. Just last week I noticed in the New York Times a dispatch that he was

introducing legislation seeking to curb the corruption in the appointment of judges in New York State.

Two things at the hearing greatly impressed me (1) the quality of the addresses, (2) the public-spirited man who acts as Chairman of the Committee.