

Today's Youth: Extension's Challenge

Russell D. Robinson

Robinson says there are three kinds of people: those who make things happen (10%), those who let things happen (70%), and those who wonder what happened (20%). Extension has worked primarily with the middle-of-the-road, "let-things-happen" group, and more recently has worked with the disadvantaged "wonder-what-happened" group. But what about the action-oriented youth who lead protest movements, participate in Peace Corps and Vista—the "make-things-happen" group? What obligation does Extension have to these young people?

Who's Involved?

There are three kinds of people: those who make things happen, those who let things happen, and those who wonder what happened!

The Adjusters

Studies show that about 70 percent of our youth, the vast majority, are "good kids." They get along moderately well with their parents, they like things pretty much the way they are, they accept our values and beliefs with few questions, they work hard, and we seldom read about them in the papers. They're just good kids. They let things happen.

The Left-Outs

There's another group of youth, a minority to be sure, for whom life doesn't take on the rosy view of the majority. They're the poor—the Negroes, white Appalachians, Indians, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, the "left-out" of our society. They're the group that wonders what happened. They didn't become poor through their own negligence; they were born poor. They didn't muff opportunity; they never had it. Life passed them by, and until recently we rarely heard or thought much about them. Now we talk a lot about them and spend money to do something. But for them, not much has really

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changed. Their hopelessness is still well founded.

The Reverend Hartmire, director of the California Migrant Ministry of the National Council of Churches, made this comment some time ago:

A month or so ago I was talking to a bright teen-ager who lived in a two-room shack in California, because her father is an underpaid farm worker. Shirley was telling me about the subtle way in which she and "her kind" are excluded from certain honors in her high school, including beauty contests and cheerleader positions. I asked Shirley how this kind of thing made her feel inside. She hesitated, then said with a feeling and articulateness that I cannot duplicate, "It makes me angry: It makes me feel left out. It makes me feel as if I am on the outside of the window, looking in at someone else's system. It makes me feel as if the system belongs to them, to those who are richer and more powerful, and no matter how hard I try, they will decide where my place shall be."

Love for Shirley, like love of parents for a maturing child, means more than taking care of her, and more than providing her with good things, and good programs; more than scholarships and good will. It may be comfortable and comforting for parents to always care for a child, and it may be comforting to us to believe that there are people beneath us who need us and who need being taken care of. But Shirley wants respect, and honest

friendship, and trust, and a chance to be her own girl, to set her own sights, and aim at them without the sinking feeling that someone else will set the arbitrary limit.¹

There are thousands of Shirleys, and some in virtually every school across the country. They're the part of the student body we don't talk much about. They aren't headed for college—their parents can't afford it. If they want to go to college, we're inclined to call it an unrealistic aspiration, even though they may be mentally qualified.

Most aren't headed for good jobs, and many aren't headed for jobs at all. They aren't headed for life with the good money because this is tied to education. They aren't among the blessed in our education-oriented society. The Shirleys, let's face it, are among the damned. She knows, and so do her teachers, and so do her parents, and so do we. The Shirleys (and the Billys) account for 20 percent of our youth—the out-of-school, the out-of-work—the people James Conant called the "social dynamite" of our times.

Generally, the programs of Extension have been directed toward the 70 percent. Recently, increasing attention has been given to programs for the poor, for the hitherto largely neglected 20 percent.

The Changers

There's still another 10 percent of our youth, and this percentage is growing. They confuse and bewilder

us—we just don't understand. These are the youth who have all that society has to offer and have turned their backs on it. They have learned that you cannot live by affluence alone. They are in a search, a desperate search for meaning in life, for commitment, and for authenticity.

They seek meaning through the Peace Corps or the Vista program—the missionary movements of our 20th century. Or, they seek meaning through protest. They protest a war that doesn't make sense by burning their draft cards. They protest their college education system, even while they're in college, as not being relevant to the real problems of life. They strike, they march, they boycott, they try to tell the world there's something wrong with society, although they don't know what to do about it.

And why don't we notice? They see the majority, the 70 percent, as sheep going through the motions, living lives without real meaning, hopelessly caught up in a system where bigness and impersonality seem to be the rule; where big business, big labor unions, big welfare industry, big universities, and big churches seem to swallow up the individual who's lost in the shuffle. A society caught up in mass culture, mass conformity, mass opinion, mass trends, mass organization where gigantic advertising offices of even larger firms determine what we see on television, and make it their business to influence and manipulate every corner of life.

These youth challenge youth Extension programs. Their uncomfortable questions about irrelevant programs raise issues that need earnest consideration. These are the youth who are willing to make things happen, who have turned their backs on affluence and are seeking a more purposeful life. They *will* make things happen. Not all at once, perhaps, but out of the ferment they'll reshape society and provide new goals. Is Extension serving their needs?

Youth's Political Significance

This is youth today. Not monolithic by any means, but at least three different groups: (1) the comfortable majority who adjust to the system, (2) the minority who are left out and seek to get in, and (3) the even smaller minority who seek to change society. These are the youth today who are here in greater numbers than ever before. This year alone, there will be one million more 18-year olds than there were last year. One out of every 3 Americans born since 1950 is under 16 years of age.

And, as with the children of the immigrants (who came of age in the 30s and 40s), this new generation is coming of age right now. They're coming into our political scene in such numbers that they'll inevitably upset the prevailing domestic political balance just as the children of the immigrants in the 30s did. As those in high school and college become eligible to vote be-

tween now and 1975, the potential electorate of the United States will expand by 20 percent. Already 50 percent of our population is under 25 years of age!

These new voters will be better educated, will be more tolerant of new ideas and social differences, will be more internationalistic (for example, more than 10,000 return from the Peace Corps every year). They'll more keenly feel a sense of social obligation. These young people coming into political maturity may be expected to have a higher level of participation in political and public life. And why not? We live in an era of change, and no one is more aware of this change than youth.

Born into a world that is vastly different from the world into which their parents were born, and destined to live in a world even more diverse from the world of today, their situation is very different from even the differences between us and our parents. For ours was still a time when we could confidently expect to live our adult lives in a situation different, but not too different, from that of our youth.

Changes Concerning Youth

At least three types of changes concern today's youth, changes that are remaking and will continue to remake the world: (1) changes resulting from technology, (2) changes resulting from rising expectations, and (3) changes resulting from increasing urbanism.

Technology

Last year alone, 15 million jobs were eliminated due to automation and cybernation. Fifteen million jobs were eliminated, but 15 million new jobs were created. But here's the catch . . . they were different jobs. They required wholly different training. People aren't able to simply shift. The consequences? Age used to bring wisdom—now it brings obsolescence. What do we do with the human scrap heap?

The answer would appear to be continuing education, adult education, University Extension. But it may be cheaper for workers to retire earlier than to be retrained. Retire to what? What about the unemployment that's the result of automation? If we look at the unemployment figures for the United States, the percentage doesn't change much. But we have to look beyond the percentage to find what happened to the guy who is automated out at the age of 45.

Whenever you see an unemployment rate of four percent, or whatever it happens to be, double it and you know the unemployment rate for youth. Double it again for the unemployment rate of Negro youth.

Will new jobs, *can* new jobs, be created fast enough? What kind of jobs? This is another part of the problem. The jobs that are dwindling are jobs in production—jobs that tie a man's pay to his contribution to the production of wealth. The jobs that are increasing are jobs in the fields of health, education,

and social services; jobs that don't create wealth in a productive sense, but use the wealth of society. And this trend from wealth-creating jobs to wealth-using jobs is continuing at an accelerating rate.

Thirty years ago in the United States \$160 million annually was spent on research and development. More than \$18 billion a year is now being spent on research and development—an increase of 100-fold. This means that one and a half billion dollars a month is going into the production of new technology. Inevitably, there'll be greater changes because you can't introduce a single innovation without changing and affecting to some extent the total social and economic structure of society.

The cybernetic impact is one illustration. The impact is now felt by white-collar workers who are being displaced in sharp contrast to earlier automation that mostly replaced the blue-collar worker. The computers even bite into the "middle-management" level. In 1951, there were only 100 computers in the United States; today there are over 50,000 computers in use. Some corporations have more than 200. Computers work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; never get sick, never get tired, never complain, never go on strike. They go right on producing wealth. Wealth for whom? Their owners?

The machines produce what might be described as "automatic wealth." The machines produce it—not people, directly. How is the

wealth produced by machines to be distributed when it's not tied directly to a man's labor, as in the old system? Here's an issue we've only begun to wrestle with. Its resolution will require a whole new set of definitions. We'll have to find a more acceptable word for taxes, for example, if we're to distribute automatic wealth in the new society radically changed by technology.

Let's look at it on a more personal basis. We know man is going to have an increasing amount of leisure time. It has already occurred in our lifetime. And this is going to increase. A two- or three-month's vacation is likely to become common. But what to do with this amount of leisure? It raises the question that many of us have never faced before: What is life for? You ask the average man or woman, "What is life for?" and the answer will be, "Well, it's to work." This is our Calvinistic heritage: Life is to work. Our purpose is to be productive, to work. But when the work is done by machines, then what is life for? Today's youth, in particular, will have to wrestle with this.

Rising Expectations

Now let's consider another cluster of changes that concern today's youth, the explosion of aspirations of people . . . the rising expectations of people around the world for a better lot, a better life. Radio, television, automobiles, airplanes, mass communications have abolished the old isolated society in

which (we thought) there were the happy poor to do the work, poor because they were ignorant, happy because they were poor, and so on. This isn't true anymore (if it were ever true) because we all share the same communication media, we all see and hear the same things.

Everywhere in the world people are rising and claiming for themselves a better life. They know it's possible. They're not willing, no peoples in the world are willing, to accept a place assigned to them by someone else. The world won't endure half-slave and half-free. Revolutions in formerly colonial countries, new nations in the United Nations, the demand that every man have a fair share of the world's goods and a fair share in the say in what happens around the world, all attest to this.

The civil rights revolution in our country is evidence of rising expectations. These people don't want "out" of our society, they don't want to destroy our society. They just want "in." And we must find a way to let them in. Here, or anywhere in the world, there'll be a revolution unless ways are found to let the "outs" in. Three-fourths of the world are poor, and three-fourths are half-starved. They're demanding a place, no longer accepting their kind of life as the will of the gods.

Increasing Urbanism

And now to a third major change that concerns all of us and particularly youth—urbanism. How

many rural youth a generation ago in high school debated the topic: "Where would you like to live when you grow up—in the city or in the country?" It's not much of a debate anymore. Seventy percent of us have voted overwhelmingly for the city. The Bureau of the Census lists 225 metropolitan areas of 50,000 people or more. Many of these are already merging with one another to form "strip cities," like the continuous urban sprawl from Boston to Washington, D.C. Only 13 of these strip cities contain half the population of the United States! Observers of this urbanization suggest we may be witnessing the dawn of a new kind of civilization. Civilization from the beginning has been identified with the city. It began when cities arose on the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, the Nile and Indus, 6000 years ago.

Urbanism means togetherness. The neighborly togetherness of farmers getting together for a thrashing crew or a corn-husking bee isn't like the urban togetherness achieved by delegating to others—a city department, for example—the responsibility for cleaning the streets, picking up the garbage. The one-room school the community collectively managed in the rural area has been replaced by an organization impersonally run by a faraway school board. This is the effect of urbanism. Instead of farmers interacting with farmers in compact, homogeneous communities, city dwellers must interact with many peoples, of all races, religions, eth-

nic groups, for a city is by its very nature heterogeneous.

Whitney Young, executive director of the Urban League, wrote in *Ebony*:

Today our big cities are in decline not only because they are aging but because their source of taxing—the very tax base which provides for their upkeep—is being eroded by the corrosive subliminate of the white man's hatred and white man's fear. The white man creates the ghettos and brutalizes and exploits the people who inhabit them—and then he fears them and then he flees from them. He builds Harlem and then he runs away from Harlem. He created second-class schools and then he fears for his children lest they be compelled to attend them. He denies Negroes jobs, and then curses them for robbing his store; he creates a climate of despair and then acts surprised when the protest marches fill the streets and the riots erupt. Our cities cannot survive unless whites and Negroes can learn to live together in them. And I mean *together*. For unless we can share the same neighborhoods, community centers, parks, schools, playgrounds, and stores, the current pattern of segregated living produced by total neighborhood transition will go on. And as long as it goes on our cities will continue to decline.²

Cities are in trouble. The plight of the cities is of much concern to youth who see poverty at the core, where vested interests (both governmental and private) operate a

benevolent dictatorship in the name of helping others; who see cities ringed with wealthy suburbs that somehow believe that the city isn't their responsibility (as if you could have a suburb without an urb); who see a deadly threat to all life through environmental pollution.

This is what youth face today: accelerating, technological change with its consequent social adjustments; a climate of revolution as have-nots demand their fair share; a decaying, troubled, urban complex hemmed in by suburbs convinced that if they can close their eyes long enough city problems will somehow go away. Is it any wonder that for some youth it's a time of tremendous challenge, and for others a time of confusion—even alienation?

Growing Commitment

To be sure, these concerns are of overriding importance to only a minority of today's youth. But their number is growing. Does University Extension in its youth programs have an obligation to youth to accelerate the increase in awareness? Or isn't this the business of Extension youth programs?

There are dangers, or at least problems, for Extension if it moves to program for the disenchanting, the questioning youth. But there may be greater problems for society if Extension chooses not to. To really deal with the society bedrock issues related to technology or expectations or urbanism, brings Extension face-to-face with questions of values, philosophy, religion, politics.

Religion Vs. Science

For centuries, the integrating force, that which vitally determined values and gave meaning to life, was religion—call it faith in God, or Fate, or Destiny. There was a conviction that an outside force somewhere could be blamed for misfortune, or could be credited for the good. This is no longer believed. Though we may talk as if we believe it, we don't act as if we do, and youth note our actions more than our words. Today we believe that what happens is not the responsibility of God—it's up to man himself.

For example, take our attitude toward floods. We no longer accept the thought of God sending destruction for our sinfulness and punishing us, and accepting the disaster as an "act of God." Today we believe such disasters could be prevented if we only knew enough, if we could apply what we know and work harder. On a practical level we live as if there were no God.

Religion today, in a practical sense, is scientism. Our pastor is the scientist, the researcher. Our prayer is the scientific method. Through science we can find all the answers to the problems that have plagued the ages. God let us down in our generation, so we turned from dogmatic religion to science. Science gave us hope.

But that was our generation. The new generation also sees science as letting us down. For science provides wonderful things through technology in abundance for all. It

postpones death, but it doesn't give meaning to life. For science is, by its very nature, amoral. It has no values except the values of science itself. It can produce an atomic bomb; it can't guarantee that man won't pull the trigger. What is man? A mechanism, an animal, a collation of shimmering electrical particles? This is the only answer that science can give. Why is man? Where is he going? What is his purpose? Science must remain silent, for these are value judgments. Never have youth more earnestly sought religious answers, and at the same time rejected the church, rejected the institution.

Youth tend to see the church as having turned from the essence of religion, as having sold out the Judeo-Christian message for gold and silver, fancy buildings, ritualistic gobbledygook. Youth are more likely to find appealing the psychological or pseudo-religious writers generally classified as existentialists, (not necessarily the absurd, nihilistic school), writers who put their emphasis on the here and now; writers who talk about man as a process of becoming, as self-actualizing, as goal-oriented, as fundamentally more than anything else needing and seeking meaning; writers who write about the self-concept and the importance of our internalized view of ourselves.

There are such writers, in virtually every denomination, but their words sound strange to our ears. "What's the matter with these young ministers nowadays?" we ask. They think working for civil rights is more

important than the sermon on Sunday . . . some even go so far as to say that working for civil rights is a sermon!

Are these the kind of issues Extension youth programs should consider? Suppose youth Extension avoids "religious" issues and only deals with political questions. Is that way any easier?

The Year 2000

Earlier we discussed the tremendous number of youth coming of voting age in the next few years, and the impact this will surely have on our country and the world. What might be their political impact in the next 30 years?

The kind of world these youth will create may well look like this by the year 2000:

FIRST: It'll be a world where national boundaries mean less and less. For all practical purposes national boundaries will disappear. Millions of people, not just thousands, will have lived major parts of their lives in other countries, in other cultures. They'll think of themselves primarily as citizens of the world. Travel will be so common that everywhere will be our front doorstep. It'll be an international world.

SECOND: It'll be a world in which education will be the most important and largest industry. Everyone (all ages) will be in school at least half of the time. It'll be common practice in industry for half of the work force at any given time to be working and the other half in

school full time, being paid for by the industry. Labor unions will primarily be in the adult education business. The work week will be cut in half—two or three days—and there will be long vacations. Everyone, in one way or another, will be paid to go to school his whole life. Free education for all ages.

THIRD: The 18th century terms "capitalism," "communism," and "socialism" that we talk and argue about now will only be read about in history books. A new system will evolve to distribute the automatic wealth produced by machines. We'll be approaching a state not too dissimilar to Greek society, where, because the slaves did the work, it was possible for the Platos, the Socrates, the Aristotles to sit around on street corners and discuss important things like: What is Truth? We'll all be doing this. When machines do our work, there'll be nothing left for us to do but *think*. The industrial slavery that ties a man to a machine in a factory, his whole life wrapped up in a routine, will have disappeared, and equality of all men in fact will then be possible.

FOURTH: A man will be known then by his humanness—by his humanity—by the things he does that are human, by how he uses his leisure. He'll be an artist, a writer, a sportsman, rather than a plumber, an office worker, or an electrician. He'll be known as a golfer or musician, not because that's how he earns his living, but because that's how he spends his time. There's a segment of society where this has al-

ways been true, though this number is small.

FIFTH: An effective system of world law, world police, and world courts will evolve as the only alternative to a global war which would destroy civilization and possibly the planet itself. The awesome possibility of the consequences of atomic explosion will force us to develop world government.

SIXTH: Birth control (probably by a method not now known) will be practiced worldwide and the world's population will stabilize in the years to come. It will have to. If it doesn't, we'll all be eyeball to eyeball and life will be impossible. When you put too many rats in a cage, it's not survival of the fittest, they *all* go mad, mentally and physically degenerate. Before the population is stabilized, to stem cruel worldwide famines, new sources of food will have to be found. The pressures of population will likely cause a shift for us from an animal to a vegetable diet.

SEVENTH: The whole idea of private ownership of natural resources and their exploitation for private benefit will have to give way to the idea of stewardship. No man can be allowed to deplete irreplaceable resources because they're on "his property," nor can he pollute the air above, the waters that pass through, or the land he occupies. Effective controls will govern what had been thought to be "free enterprise."

EIGHTH: Governments will evolve for metropolitan areas to effectively deal with metropolitan

problems, for, after all, the city doesn't stop at the suburban line. The polluted stream doesn't respect boundaries. Polluted air doesn't stop at the state line. Governments will have to be devised to effectively deal with areawide and regional problems, and these may even replace state governments. Certainly county and suburban governments will eventually have to be radically restructured into viable local units of government.

NINTH: Social welfare programs, the whole idea of social welfare, will be completely revamped and revised and a new system developed without paternalism, or the element of punishment now involved. The new program will be devised as a human right. Several beginnings along this line are already being considered. Fundamentally, a way has to be found to revise the whole social system to achieve the distribution of our "automatic wealth."

Is Extension prepared to help youth understand and bring about such ends as these? Are we even ready to help *adults* understand why youth sometimes get impatient with our ideologies that stand in the way of political change. Youth know things are going to be different. Adults should too. What inputs are appropriate Extension responsibilities?

Summary

At the outset, three kinds of people were identified: those who make things happen, those who let

things happen, and those who wonder what happened. These descriptions fairly characterize youth today—the active, vital, committed, searching 10 percent who are determined to make things happen; the 70 percent who more or less let things happen; and the 20 percent who wonder what happened. We program for the 70 percent. We try to reach the 20 percent.

But let's not be mistaken. The 20 percent who are the have-nots, though helpless and hopeless, aren't content anymore to stay have-nots, no longer are they just wondering what happened. Increasing numbers are deciding that they too can make things happen. And the 70 percent we like to think of as the well adjusted who don't give us trouble, the vast majority of youth, are also increasingly moving into the column of the committed, those who won't just let things happen, but want to make things happen.

All youth are having to face up to the vast challenge of change that characterizes our time: the accelerated, technological development with its trail of social consequences to employment, education, and every facet of life; the exploding aspirations of peoples around the world, the "unequals" now demanding an equal share or else; the skyrocketing urbanism that brings increasingly vast numbers into urban complexes that must be governed in a sensible fashion.

Out of these forces and counterforces, out of this fermentation and churning and stirring and

changing will come the world of tomorrow, the world of the 21st century, a new world, a different world. And a new religion (or perhaps a "new-old" religion) that will give meaning to the life of man from whom the curse of toil has been removed. And a worldwide community of nations with no more war, and no need for foreign policies, and no need for half of the world's wealth, as is the case today, to be put into armaments designed to destroy wealth.

Sound like the millenium? Visionary? Impossible? Perhaps. But ask youth. For if youth were to select their models today from the past, they would pick men like Columbus, Copernicus, Galileo, and Erasmus. For our age isn't unlike a new Renaissance. Accepted attitudes and traditional ways are being openly challenged everywhere, voyages of discovery are uncovering the still hidden secrets of our planet and beyond. The horizons of man and of the universe itself are being pushed back steadily, and we can behold a new flowering of scientific and spiritual vitality. We're at the dawn of a new Reformation, and, as in the 16th century, more than the church will be affected.

If Extension would serve the needs of youth, it must help youth and adults to address themselves to these issues. Extension must particularly focus at least some of its youth programing to the concerns of the 10 percent. This doesn't suggest that programs for the 70 percent and the 20 percent should be neg-

lected. Actually, such programs need to be strengthened. But the challenge is programing to deal with political and value issues and programing in such a way that the appeal reaches the 10 percent without losing the majority of youth.

Young people are fortunate to live in an era when everything can be questioned and everything can begin anew. Their voices are now raised loud and clear, echoing across the land. Before their onslaught the walls of our universities shake and tremble, and the most hallowed tenets of philosophy, politics, ideology, and religion are being

questioned by the rising generations.

The challenge to Extension may be summarized in these words: "Never tell a young person something is impossible. God may have been waiting for centuries for someone ignorant enough of the impossible to do that very thing."

Footnotes

1. Editorial page, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 24, 1964.
2. Whitney M. Young, Jr., "The High Cost of Discrimination," *Ebony*, XX (August, 1965), 51-52.