

CETA PROGRAM

by Clara Hewell

The CETA Program, Comprehensive Employment Training Act, has helped the poor find employment for nine years. It is a nationally recognized program which has drawn a lot of attention for the majority of these nine years that it has been in effect. The main objective of the CETA is to train the unemployed for jobs and to employ them in federally funded jobs. There has been much controversy over CETA, whether it helps or whether it is another means of ripping off the government. For those who have been aided by the CETA, it is an important part of their lives without which they would be destitute. For others, it is an easy job, a guaranteed minimum wage. It is the latter group that has created a stir. The government has already spent an enormous amount of money on CETA and the results are not encouraging. How successful can a program be if even a small portion of those sponsored do not find jobs on their own after they finish work with CETA? The main purpose is to train the poor and unskilled so that they might find these jobs once they learn a skill. Unfortunately, no one has come up with a solution to the problem of the inadequacy of the CETA Program. Some authorities, such as ex-Labor Secretary Raymond DoNovan, says that at "the least CETA's a disappointment"¹, while others, such as Mitchell Gensbreg, dean of Columbia University School of Social Work, claim that "Without CETA jobs, thousands of workers may end up on welfare."² Which is right, let the poor go unskilled and unemployed? or waste government dollars in the hopes that a small percent will benefit?

The comprehensive Employment and Training Act was passed in 1973, under the administration of President Richard M. Nixon. Concerned with the enormous number of unemployed in America, the government hoped that this program would improve those statistics. CETA was designed to give classroom and on-the-job training for young people, elderly, welfare recipients and minorities.³ It also provided federally funded public service jobs at the minimum wage. The program set up hundreds of departments in cities all over the country to serve this purpose. These local offices receive money from the federal government to pay for the expenses necessary for operation. There have been questions about whether or not this money has been wisely and legally spent. Because of the number of employed, corruption and fraud are bound to take place because it is extremely hard to keep an eagle eye on all of the employees.

CETA is directed at the growing number of poor, unskilled, and unemployed sector in America. The rapid increase in the population of this group has alarmed government officials. This growth has especially been evident during the past decade. Unemployment has never been worse since the Great Depression. A major problem with trying to help this group is, unfortunately, their poor attitude. Of those taking training skills classes, sponsored by CETA, the dropout rate was close to fifty percent.⁴ Many of those dropouts feel as though they are fighting an uphill battle and

have lost hope. Others have family problems or are simply lazy. Welfare is usually the last resort for the group that will not or can not participate in the CETA Program. It seems as though these people simply go from one form of federal aid to another.

The job training program is sensible yet the success is minimal. The idea is to train the unskilled in jobs such as clerical work, auto mechanics, or household maintenance for example. Once trained, the recipients are expected to find employment not sponsored by the government. This is not always easy, especially with today's economy. If these people are constantly turned down for jobs, they lose hope and eventually give up. Hence, the entire process that they went through to learn their skill as a failure. "After 53 billion dollars spent, CETA placed only fifteen percent of its clients in private sector employment."⁵ That is a very disappointing statistic.

What is the cause of this dismal outcome of CETA? Houston, Texas's local CETA official Mark Work claims that the problem "involves the whole psychology of the poor and their attitudes towards work."⁶ This statement illustrates the discouragement that many of the professionals who work for CETA are feeling. The high dropout and low job placement rates contribute to the question of whether or not CETA is worth the time and money the government has spent to try to help these people. With the economy as it is today, more and more people are replying negatively to this question.

President Reagan has declared that his new budget program does not include CETA. He called for the termination of the program this fall. The end of CETA will hurt a large amount of people who really need it to get by. Sadly enough, however, officials don't sympathize with these people as much as they should. People are tired of giving their tax money to help people whom they feel are taking advantage of them.

Not surprisingly, it is not only the recipients on the CETA program that are taking advantage of the Federal government's money to this program. Local management of CETA has been found guilty of misusing funds meant for CETA programs. There were charges in fifteen cities, sixty-four indictments against embezzlement, misuse of funds, false statements, theft, and kickbacks.⁶ CETA officials often lack the motivation to uphold firm policy guidelines. This fact in itself is one more reason for the need to either improve the program or to abolish it altogether.

This poor attitude of the CETA officials reflects on those who are trying to help. If corruption and fraud are the examples shown to the people trying to find jobs, they themselves will acquire a bad outlook on the business world. If these people in charge can take a ride at the government's expense, why can't they? This endless circle is a very discouraging but is an unavoidable question. Some local CETA officials use the federal funds to pay county firemen instead of using it for what it was intended for.

Another cause of disturbance within CETA is the confusion over the regulations

meant to be followed. Through the past nine years, several different presidents with different views of how CETA should work have held office. Jimmy Carter felt that CETA should be increased and made a prime effort to improve it. In contrast, Ronald Reagan and his Reaganomics feels that CETA is a total waste and should be terminated. As a result of those views, the rules and regulations for CETA have been changed many times. This instability causes confusion when those already on CETA have to adjust to new rules and under a new administration.

A serious problem that CETA workers have to face is the reaction they receive from the general public. The attitude of the country today is that CETA workers are usually lazy and ignorant and as a result, treat them as though they are. For example, there is a program in CETA which provides youths in jobs during the summer. This reaches roughly one million youths out on vacation from school. While employed, these young people receive indifferent treatment. They have to prove themselves to get any kind of recognition for the job they are doing other than their minimum wage salary. I, myself, worked at a day camp for retarded children with CETA workers one summer. As a fact, the CETA workers were generally regarded as lazy and incapable of trust or dependancy. This is a terrible attitude but unfortunately, one which is hard to erase. The young "get such a strong message of cynicism and corruption that it cannot fail to carry over into their attitudes about work, crime, and society."⁷ These youths are impressionable, and this view of the employment situation could prove to be harmful to their motivation. They lose the desire to learn a trade and get into the business world if they feel that that world is such a terrible place.

So what should be done to improve this seemingly hopeless situation? Unfortunately, statistics speak stronger than anything and the statistics on CETA are not hopeful or encouraging. One optimistic study was performed at Johns Hopkins University on the Baltimore area. This research found that three-fourths of the CETA participants landed unsubsidized jobs within three years of the program.³ Though this is encouraging, it also illustrates the waste of time and money spent on the ones who either tried and didn't make it or those who simply not motivated enough to go out and look for a job. Maybe for some, the minimum wage earned on CETA is enough. This may be one of the problems. Maybe the security CETA provides is harmful to the recipients. Maybe the jobs should be more competitive with a need for workers to prove themselves on the job. More money should be spent on training the employees instead of simply giving them a salary. The Labor Department estimates that "in 1980, only about eighteen percent of CETA funds was spent on training while forty-four percent went for stipends and allowances for participants and thirty-eight percent was spent on administration and support services."⁹

The glaring figures still exist. CETA program offers no permanent benefits: the only guaranteed aid exists while the individual is on the CETA

program. After that he or she is on his own and this is often where the trouble lies. CETA has been called "the most ambitious and certainly most visible"¹¹ program sponsored by the federal government. Perhaps it is too ambitious and optimistic. Certainly an incredible amount of money has gone in to CETA without reciprocation. The achievements of the program are certainly not in line with the costs.

The major problem that I see with the CETA program is the enormous amount of money spent with little results. The attitudes of the people involved is also a strong factor in this, unfortunately, a factor that is very hard to change. This attitude has existed for a long time and has always been harmful to society. If the workers for the CETA program could be improved them maybe the recipients of the aid provided by CETA could be improved. With today's economy in such bad shape, however, something must be done quickly.

1 "Taking Shape: Smaller U.S. Role in Job Training." U.S. News and World Report, April.

1982, p.68.

2 "Where Budget Cuts Stir Biggest Protest." U.S. News and World Report, May, 1981, p.17.

3 "Taking Shape: Smaller U.S. Role in Job Training." p.69.

4 "How CETA Became a Four Letter Word." Fortune, April 9, 1979, p.112.

5 Ibid., p.112.

6 Ibid., p.114.

7 Ibid., p.112.

8 "Taking Shape: Smaller U.S. Role in Job Training." p.70.

9 Ibid., p.68

10 "CETAmnia." Fortune, June 18, 1979, p.46.

11 "How CETA Became a Four Letter Word." p.112.

... The above article won first place in the college contest sponsored by the Department of English.

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In every free person,
THE LORD IS BORN

EVERY DAY.

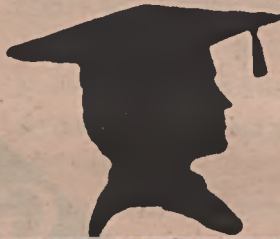
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THE LORD IS BORN
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THE LORD IS BORN
For the equality of people
THE LORD IS BORN
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