"Even if the problem (of teenage unemployment) is in large part a certain shiftlessness among the nation's youth, as some cynics suggest, that is not a matter to be taken lightly. Should it be dealt with by tightening up on unemployment compensation standards? Does it imply a serious breakdown in secondary education? Does it suggest a vast subculture of youthful 'hustling' and crime that obviates the need for honest labor?"

These words, taken from an editorial in the Wall Street Journal, suggest the extent to which those in power in the U.S. are seriously concerned about the erosion of their control over the young people of the country. The institutions that are supposed to regulate the passage of youth into the system—the family, the schools, and the teenage labor market—are all plagued with crisis, and there are constant complaints that young people are not being assimilated into society.

Among the problems in this regard which have gotten the most attention has been that of youth unemployment. Even the official government statistics, which are always understated, have for the past year shown black youth unemployment at more than 35 percent, and for young whites the rate has been nearly 14 percent. The press has been full of articles warning of the dangerous consequences of not introducing young people to "the discipline of productive activity," and the articles link the persistently high rates of young joblessness to the growth in crime and to the periodic mass looting that has erupted in major cities during the last two years.

The federal government has taken up the question, but officials and social planners have been unable to reach agreement on how to deal with the situation. One side of the debate argues that the high rates of youth unemployment have resulted from fundamental structural changes in the labor market which have eliminated many of the unskilled, low-paying jobs that teenagers have traditionally been given. The policy that has emerged from this has been the federal government's creation of jobs for young people on public works projects. In 1977 Congress passed a $1.5 billion youth unemployment act that created tens of thousands of jobs (at the minimum wage) through a "youth adult conservation corps" and "youth employment demonstration programs."

Opponents of this view assert that more young people are unemployed because it is too expensive for business to hire them. On this basis proposals have been made to lower the minimum wage, or else institute a special "sub-minimum" rate for young people. The so-called "teenwage" was
seriously discussed in 1977, when Congress was considering increases in the general minimum wage levels. Although the proposal was defeated at the time and Congress did vote increases in the minimum (from $2.30 an hour in 1977 to $2.90 in 1979 to $3.35 in 1981), the legislature at the same time increased the number of small businesses--many of which employ teenagers--that are exempt from the minimum wage requirements.

For the time being, the federal strategy is concentrating on the public works approach. The programs initiated under the 1977 act have largely involved taking teenagers out of their urban communities and sending them, in Maoist fashion, out to the countryside to clean up the forests, repair roads, etc. Along with the new programs, the government has revived and expanded the Job Corps, a similar scheme that dates back to the mid-1960's and the Johnson Administration's "war on poverty." However, in keeping with the current atmosphere, the Job Corps program has largely been placed under the control of the private sector and is being run much more strictly than in the past. In fact, the director of all the current youth job programs has clearly indicated that the main concern now is with discipline: "The government wants more supervision for these jobs than in the past, and the supervisor-to-youth ratio could run one-to-four to make sure some work is actually done. This shouldn't be simply picking up a check." Nevertheless, there have been numerous reports that the youth programs--which one federal official has called "the largest social experiment the nation has ever undertaken"--are not achieving their intended goal of turning young people into productive members of society. In March the Carter Administration ordered a complete review of the job programs, and there is some question whether their funding will be renewed.

The problem confronting the planners is that more and more young people are recognizing the worthlessness of the jobs being held out to them--whether in the public or private sector and whether at, below, or slightly above the minimum wage--and are finding ways to resist legitimate jobs altogether. As things stand now, work in the underground economy and outright criminal activities seem to hold more promise than frying hamburgers in a fast-food shop for $2.90 an hour. One business publication, in a profile of an officially unemployed young man who does occasional work "off the books," noted unhappily: "Mr. Rinaldi doesn't fit the stereotype of youth unemployment. He isn't desperately banging his head against walls trying to break into the job market. He doesn't work (at a regular job) and he doesn't particularly want to."

Given the widespread failure to motivate young people who have left school, the ideological assault has returned to the classroom. The planners are now talking of the need to deal with young people at even earlier ages to try to put them "on the right path." The most disturbing example of this new campaign is a program called Push for Excellence, which is being promoted by black leader Jesse Jackson, who was a protégé of the late Martin Luther King. Jackson has been traveling around the country lecturing to students and their parents. He argues passionately that discipline, hard work at school, and individual responsibility are the only hope for young blacks; not surprisingly, his organization has been showered with government funds and business donations.

There is no reason to believe that Jackson's scheme will be any more successful than Carter's "back to the countryside" strategy. Yet the real difficulty is in determining what will be the long-term effects of the mar-
ginalization of much of the young population--effects concerning both the society and the young people themselves. Youth finds itself at an impasse with business and government: the system has no future to offer, but young people (as well as older ones) have not yet found the political means for insuring a future of their own making.

Pentagon Follies: The Campaign to Revive the Draft

Only six years after the antiwar movement forced the government to end the draft, and four years after the U.S. was defeated in Vietnam, military fever is once again spreading through Washington. Those who were never reconciled to the creation of a volunteer military now see an opportunity to bring back the draft. In the last year a large number of proposals have surfaced, ranging from a program of compulsory national service for all teen-agers, to a more cautious move to compel draftboard registration. The one most likely to be voted on by Congress in the coming year is the registration plan: it would merely require that all young men turning eighteen in 1981 and thereafter register with their local draft boards. Yet there is little doubt that registration would be a definite step toward actual military conscription.

The renewed interest in reviving the draft has arisen partly in response to concern about the high cost of the volunteer army, partly due to Defense Department predictions of a "military manpower shortage" in the 1980's, and partly in direct response to increased dissatisfaction and resistance amongst volunteer recruits.

The cost of building and maintaining a volunteer army is indeed quite high. Just in order to enlist sufficient numbers of people, the government has had to develop expensive public relations and incentive programs. This year alone, an estimated $105 million will be spent on advertising, and another $74 million will go for bonuses. Then, to keep these volunteers, the government has needed to keep wages competitive with those in the civilian workforce. Advocates of reviving the draft expect that this would save the government millions of dollars, since mandatory service would permit the government to pay substandard wages. Moreover, the draft would arguably save enormous sums in unpaid pensions.

A third impetus for resuming registration has been Pentagon predictions that there will be a big shortfall in both the active and reserve forces by the middle of the 1980's. This possibility is supported in part by the

"This time we don't anticipate any problems spotting non-registrants."
continuing fall in the national birthrate. However, opponents of the draft think that what is of greater significance is the obvious desire of the Defense Department to carry on with its interventionist foreign policies.

At the present time, at least, there appears to be no deficit in the numbers of volunteers: except in the reserves, none of the branches of the military has been unable to fulfill its annual quota of new recruits since the volunteer system started in 1973. The U.S. now has two million in active duty, 300,000 in Europe alone. Ironically, it is in Europe that the Pentagon has said that it feels most insecure. In fact, the prodraft movement in Congress is largely in response to a single Pentagon proclamation that, in the event of a "major land war" in Europe, it would expect to be 500,000 short of "casualty replacements" within the first two months. Such predictions bolster the confidence of resident cold warriors in their own belief in the Soviet menace.

But a matter of both real and immediate concern is the military's disciplinary problem. The government has publicly stated that the situation is much better now than before the switch in 1973. But it may be that resistance today in the uniform services has simply taken on a less dramatic form than during the heyday of the G.I. activity of the late 1960's.

According to the government's own estimates, the level of attrition has been quite high - nearly 40% during the initial enlistment period. Absenteeism has reached record levels in the last several years. Moreover, organized political activity has continued. In 1976, there was a push for unionization in several states, before both Congress and the Pentagon took repressive measures. Among troops stationed abroad, groups of servicemen have opposed use of the neutron bomb in Europe, and also demonstrated for the withdrawal of U.S. forces in South Korea in 1977. Clearly, the government is quite concerned about the threat from within.

Reintroduction of the draft has also been defended in terms of the benefits expected to accrue domestically, but here it is liberals, rather than cold war conservatives, who lead the parade. Compulsory service, they insist, would lower the phenomenally high rates of youth unemployment, would curb boredom and restlessness and, according to Senator Paul McCloskey, one-time antiwar activist, it would awaken "latent idealism" amongst young Americans. McCloskey's involvement is one indication that the draft is one issue on which politicians of many persuasions seem to agree on the need for government engineering on a massive scale.

As Congress proceeds to consider the registration proposal, already there have been public demonstrations, and committees have been set up nationwide in anticipation of a renewed campaign in opposition to any kind of compulsory military service. The Pentagon has said it expects that there will be very high levels of resistance; and there is much to indicate that it will not be disappointed.

EDITORIAL: REPRESION IN ITALY
The American Owl was shocked to learn of the wave of arrests and repression in Italy since April 7th. We strongly protest the blatant violation of fundamental human rights by Italian authorities in connection with the arrests and interrogations, and we demand the immediate release of all the Italian political prisoners. The Owl supports the work of the Committee Against Repression in Italy, 159 W.33 St. Rm 1010, NYC 10001