

The Upbeat Generation

LANSING, Mich.—The Peace Corps idea is spreading fast. Some 46 countries are now sending their young men and women into the world to help the poor countries, and a spontaneous volunteer student movement is also working quietly and effectively among the underprivileged children in our own cities.

The Student Education Corps here at Michigan State University is merely one of many illustrations of this movement in the United States.

It started over a year ago on the assumption that serious college undergraduates might be able to help the harassed and overworked teachers in the poor districts of Lansing, Pontiac and other cities within 100 miles of the Michigan State campus.

THEY HAD NO MONEY FROM the university or the state, but a few of them reasoned that they might be able to deal with some of the worst of the kids who came from broken homes and had no incentive to get an education.

Now about 200 of these young college students go out as assistants to the slum school teachers several times a week. Some take on the backward pupils. Others work with the bright ones who are held back by the drones.

But the main thing is not so much to help the young laggards with their work, but to make friends with them and thus provide good examples that are not available in many homes.

LIKE THE PEACE CORPS, the student volunteers go only where invited. Any school within reasonable range of the university can get them to help if it will only pay 8 cents a mile to transport a carload of undergraduates.

The larger government programs are directed at training dropouts. The Stu-

dent Education Corps attacks the same problem earlier. Its ultimate aim is "to help prevent premature dropouts by showing these children that education is the key to a better life, by providing needed inspiration and motivation to continue with their schooling."

THIS IS NOT AN ISOLATED experiment. Similar activities are going on in other universities. Pomona College in California is another lively center. Gov. Terry Sanford of North Carolina is working with William Friday, president of the University of North Carolina, on a corps of volunteers to help the underprivileged, and Yale produced the Northern Student Movement that is now active on many campuses, not only in the field of education but of political action.

More than 1,000 students from various colleges and universities, most of them affiliated with the Northern Student Movement, will be going to Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana this summer to live in Negro homes and help the Negroes register for the November elections.

NOT SO MANY YEARS AGO, sociology professors were complaining about the postwar "beat generation" in America. A rotten crowd, they said, always dropping out of some school and into some bed: uninterested, uncommitted to anything but money, booze, sex.

Unlike his contemporaries in other countries, who were knocking over governments and leading the torrent of political change, the American student, it was said, wasn't engaged in anything and didn't care about anything.

Well, something is happening on the campus. In some ways these student leaders are ahead of the government. And when Congress finally gets around to backing a domestic peace corps and backing President Johnson's "war on poverty," quite a few young American men and women will already be in the field.



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