



## A critical problem

# Youth who need jobs

One of the most critical problems of the present times is the issue of unemployment amongst youth. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, in a special report on the "Situation of youth in the 1980's", suggest that "current trends in both the industrialized and developing countries in practically every region of the world indicate dramatically increased numbers of unemployed young people." The report further highlights that statistics taken by themselves, "fail to convey not only missed opportunities, but frustration, loss of confidence and bitterness and resulting risks and potential long-term consequences for society." Perhaps much of the violence and conflict that has characterised Black communities has its real origins in the global problem of youth frustration and unemployment which in the South African context is greatly exacerbated by the realities of apartheid education in an apartheid society. However, the question is: will the dismantling of apartheid bring about an end to the unemployment crisis or will greater problems of conflict ensue when it becomes evident that the new social order is unable to meet raised expectations? The slogan in some quarters is "freedom before education" but naive as the question may seem, one must ask freedom from what? Racial prejudice? Political oppression? Poverty? Unemployment? Exploitative labour practices?

Political leaders who mobilise youth around a naive conception of what liberation will bring, are no doubt creating very dangerous problems for themselves. In an analysis of youth movements in Africa, de V. Graaf (1979, 7) points out that the earliest stimulation for the initiation of youth organisations was the threat wielded by politically active youth.

Youth have been actively involved in the struggle for independence of nationalist movements. Once the great day of liberation arrives, many feel entitled to some reward for their efforts. When the liberation "goodies" fail to materialise many of them resort to political pressure, protest, conflict and violence. Some of the experiences from elsewhere in Africa are cited by de V. Graaf (1979, 7) to illustrate this point. In Ghana in 1957 unemployed youth physically attacked party members and others during the course of a riot. In Kenya youth exercised strong pressure through their MP's, causing a Kenyan politician to comment "these youth ... are not fools, they have been in politics for many years and





know how to campaign against KANU and KADU politicians." In Zambia UNIP Youth Brigade members turned to political thuggery and intimidated local populations, carrying out road patrols and political card checks. The much vaunted Malawi Young Pioneers, which also has its origins in efforts to solve unemployment, is said to have a poor image in local communities because of its inability to curb political thuggery. More recently Robert Mugabe's ZANU youth wing were involved in violent clashes with civilians in a situation which again revealed the dangers of misdirected politicization of youth.

With the growing problem of school boycotts and disrupted education in South Africa, a very grave situation lies ahead. Youth movements in other African countries have generally channelled inadequately educated, school leaving youth into rural development. Given the increasing polarisa-

tion in the politics of Black urban and rural areas, it is unlikely that the politicised, somewhat sophisticated, street-wise, out of school youth in the urban areas are going to be satisfied with menial tasks in rural development. The lack of attention being paid to this issue is as much cause for concern as the problem itself. What will become of the power hungry and politicised youth after they have reached their goal of "liberation?"

The KwaZulu Government in conjunction with Inkatha is not unmindful of these problems. A pilot training project for out-of-school youth has been established on a farm near Ulundi. The aim of Emandleni Matleng Camp is to help out of school youth round off their education and learn basic skills to facilitate greater self-sufficiency in themselves as well as to contribute in the development of the rural areas. Like its counterparts elsewhere in Africa, the project has contended with numerous teething problems. The most difficult was to try to recruit trainers who could bring both fieldwork experience and adult education skills into their roles. Another major problem has been slotting the youth into development projects at local level.

In 1984 Mr Cyril Phakathi was appointed Manager of the Camp. He has had many years experience in both Swaziland and KwaZulu as a school teacher, school principal and head of a correctional institution. Under his management, Emandleni Matleng Camp is beginning to realise its full potential. Currently there are 100 youth at the Camp — fifty young men, and fifty young women. The Camp is now entirely self-sufficient in vegetable and maize production. Besides agriculture, youth are also trained in youth leadership, building, primary health care and first aid. From 1986, courses will also be offered in home industries and hopefully, motor mechanics.

On-going evaluation of the project is possible because the project is small and manageable and some important lessons have been learnt. Firstly, having young men and women together in the same camp has not precipitated the kind of problems that one usually expects. There is no sex based discrimination in the training. Young people are merely encouraged to realise their potential whatever it is. Hence two of the young men this year have proved to be very proficient at "clothes" making (rather than dress making!). This perhaps helps to break down the stereotype of sex roles which can contribute a great deal to establishing a society genuinely founded on principles of equality.

Secondly, having urban and rural youth together has promoted dialogue and new dimensions of understanding. Particularly striking is the new understanding on the part of urban youth that the struggle of the rural people is not at an intellectual level of whether one goes to school or not; but it is at a physical level of whether there are school fees and a school to go to. Education for urban youth has been relatively easily available. It has been tasted, rejected and discarded. For most rural youth the struggle is for a mere taste of high school education. These are some of the issues that tragically divide our society and that can be debated about in a setting like Emandleni Matleng Camp.

Thirdly, it is commonly suggested that out of school youth



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have poor academic ability. Evidence at Emandleni Matleng Camp suggests that a number of factors contribute to the youth being out of school. Some youth have family problems, others have financial difficulties, others had their schooling disrupted by school boycotts — in fact few have failed their exams. Some of the youth have indicated that they would like to continue their formal education. To meet this need a night school has been established to help youth with their examinations. Youth who show promise and do well are being assisted with special bursaries to enable them to continue their studies.

In the present scheme of things youth will undergo training in first year and in the second year be deployed in the community to assist with various community development projects. Next year it is envisaged to deploy some of the youth into development projects in the Mahlabathini area. The projects will be planned in conjunction with local people. Again the project will be on a small scale and attention will be given to identifying and solving problems before expanding to other areas.

These are small and slow beginnings to addressing a desperate problem that is precipitating anger and conflict in many parts of the world. However, as experience is gained and lessons are learnt, hopefully the project will gain momentum. More and more youth will be helped to shape a responsible

future for themselves and their communities by the opportunities for dialogue, acquisition of skills and broadening of knowledge afforded them at Emandleni Matleng Camp.

Hopefully, too, it will help youth formulate more holistic and realistic conceptions of development and liberation. While some youth in the townships are looting shops and destroying schools in the name of liberation, other are growing their own food and preparing to assist poverty stricken communities build classrooms and clinics to meet their most basic needs. If Martin Luther King's non-violent axiom is true that "the ends are inherent in the means" could it be that when the new society comes into being the Natal/ KwaZulu region will have many young adults who will see that an



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important part of liberation is self-sufficiency and identifying with the needs of the poor? Or are we going to be catapulted into greater confusion by the likes of a young looter who at the height of the unrest hiccupped to a passer-by in Umlazi that "liberation has come — Comrade" as he staggered on his weary way with a bottle of whisky under one arm and a carton of imported cigarettes under the other? Only time will provide the answers to these questions. In the meantime the commitment at Emandleni Matleng Camp will be preparing youth for practical development roles in their communities with realistic and holistic views about the hard work, sweat and responsibility that working towards a new society brings.

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