

CHAPTER 3

EMPLOYMENT

The spectre of unemployment loomed large at the seminar, reappearing continuously as a major concern for all young people. While appreciating the desirability of education for its own sake and recognising the value of playing a contributory voluntary role in the community, the young people present wanted above all the security of good employment of a type and at a level commensurate with their qualifications. The problems as they saw them related to guidance and counselling, training for employment, and means by which employment opportunities might be increased.

Guidance and counselling

The seminar stressed the desirability of establishing an effective system of guidance and counselling which would begin at an early stage in each child's school career and lead eventually to a smooth transition from school to work. For this to be achieved there would need to be full-time guidance personnel appointed to all area schools; these specialists would be in addition to the complement of teaching staff. Support to the work of guidance personnel would be provided by a guidance research officer in the Ministry of Education, who would maintain close liaison with his counterpart in the Ministry of Labour, as one element of a close and continuing relationship between the Guidance Unit of the former and the Youth Employment Service of the latter. Both services would have close links with employers. Special attention should be paid to the guidance and counselling of girls and to the needs of students emerging from third-level institutions. Both these groups at present seem largely to be left to their own devices.

It was noted that, while the provision of guidance and counselling services are of considerable importance, they have not reached the degree of refinement which would give them the status of a precise science and so should not be assumed to be infallible. For this reason, opportunities should be available for young people to change their courses and their careers if it becomes apparent that they have set off initially in the wrong direction. Follow-up services are a vital component of the over-all provision so that changes may be made with the least disruption to the young person himself and to his school or employer.

One additional consideration was raised in connection

with guidance and counselling services: it was thought essential that, following upon the work of guidance personnel, there should be a genuine equality of opportunity available to candidates presenting themselves for employment vacancies and that the criterion for success in applications should be merit and potential suitability for the tasks involved.

Some employment problems and possibilities

Although the level of unemployment in Malta is not such as to cause undue alarm, the world trends in unemployment among educated young people must give rise to some concern in the islands because international factors increasingly impinge on national situations. Rapid industrialisation has not proved capable of generating employment on the scale needed by most developing countries to absorb the young people graduating from schools and colleges, while in Western countries a new phenomenon has emerged: the concurrent rise of productivity and unemployment. This raises the issue as to how far the generation of employment opportunities should be regarded as a matter of economics and how far a matter of social responsibility.

The younger members of the seminar expressed concern that the type and level of employment obtained did not always reflect the educational standard of successful applicants. This, of course, is a common phenomenon in many countries. Status and rewards do not necessarily relate directly to the academic achievement and vocational training of young employee. In part this may be attributed to an educational system that is out of phase with contemporary conditions; in part it is due to unrealistic aspirations on the part of young people. It is not always appreciated that when the general level of education rises faster than the number of available jobs then it is certain that the qualifications required for any job will also tend to rise. The "threshold of competence" rises, and young people find themselves compelled to consider posts of much inferior status to those obtained ten years ago by elder brothers with similar academic attainments.

The alternatives to the jobs to which most young people aspire are not popular. To most young people, for example, agricultural employment implies low social status, low financial returns, hard manual work and insecurity, although there are enough successful farmers to indicate that this blanket description is not necessarily accurate. The antipathy towards this type of employment might be countered in part by the introduction of a policy of realistic and guaranteed prices for farm produce and by

the expansion of experimental farms, perhaps on a co-operative basis. The development of agro-services- transport, storage, packaging, advertising, marketing, machinery-servicing, and so on - and farming co-operatives should help both to provide additional employment opportunities in themselves and increase the financial returns of the farmers. Increased returns are essential to the raising of the status of farming as an occupation for educated young people, for status tends always to vary directly with the material rewards derived.

Tourism in many Commonwealth countries has proved a disappointing area for the generation of employment and foreign exchange. A number of major problems has arisen. In some countries tourism has generated jobs predominantly at the lower levels. In some cases "package" tours have resulted in countries experiencing all the disadvantages of disruption of their traditional way of life without commensurate benefits in the form of a significant influx of foreign exchange (most of the payments being made in the country of origin of the tourists, who themselves are rarely of the type able to spend lavishly during their holiday). In some cases the apparent inflow of foreign exchange is illusory. If food, souvenirs and other goods are not produced locally and have to be imported to cater for the tourist trade then little net profit can accrue in terms of hard currency. Opportunities, therefore, should be taken to ensure an equitable distribution to local people of the higher posts associated with tourism, encourage the production of local craft-ware, expand market gardening and improve physical amenities for the benefit of both tourists and residents. All of these areas seem to offer real opportunities for young people willing to venture into new types of employment and self-employment.

Planning for employment

Overall planning for improved employment opportunities should result from close co-operation between all those agencies involved in education, employment, training, planning, policy and finance. Where manpower plans have been less than successful over the last decade the two predominant reasons have been the lack of such an overall consideration and the absence of an inbuilt provision for a continuous monitoring of the progress of the plan. Where manpower plans have been inadequately articulated with the educational system there has been a shortfall or a surplus of particular types of young employee; where plans have not been continuously checked against the current situation they have tended to diverge more and more from the realities of development and

so become an additional factor in the increase of frustration and disillusion. To be effective, then, manpower plans should evolve from a co-operative effort and should be subjected to continuous checks and periodic evaluation.

(a) Short-term measures

In the short term, measures such as accelerating the development of the infrastructure for local industries, raising the school leaving age and establishing a national youth service can all have positive effects. Raising the school leaving age increases the need for teaching and ancillary staff and also gives one year when far fewer young people come on to the labour market. The need for additional teaching staff creates extra jobs for teachers, teacher-trainers, ancillary staff, and the whole range of suppliers who service educational institutions. The delayed entry into the labour market of the first group of young people affected by the raising of the school leaving age gives governments a brief breathing space in which to implement plans for increased labour absorption. If these plans are not well considered and opportunities are not available to the older output the government may well find itself facing an aggravated problem of unemployed young people at a higher level of frustration than before. The extra year of schooling will be interpreted by youngsters as a form of social welfare payment rather than a means whereby they may be better equipped to participate in the life of their community.

National Youth Services, similar in concept to the Emergency Labour Corps in Malta, exist in a number of Commonwealth countries, where it has been proved that they can have some immediate effect on unemployment. If, however, they are to be successful and not again merely raise the frustration level of trainees, provision must be planned in advance for the employment of trainees when they complete their period of service. The major drawback to services in other countries has been their cost. High costs mean that only a limited number of young people can be accommodated in the service. In Kenya, for example, where perhaps 100,000 young people seek employment every year, the National Youth Service has a throughput of some 3,500 annually, or 3.5 per cent of the target population. Over recent years highly-capitalised and sophisticated youth services have been declining in popularity. Nevertheless, apart from the value to the trainees themselves, youth services can also have positive value to the nation at large by producing a cadre of young people who have been trained to discipline themselves, accept responsibility and show initiative. It was suggested that the development and operation of the Emergency Labour Corps could benefit by the visits of selected responsible officers to other Commonwealth countries

in order to examine their national youth service operations.

(b) Longer-term measures

The problem of unemployment, and seasonal employment (and consequent under-employment) might be met at least in part by the promotion of small-scale self-employment opportunities and small co-operatives, geared in some measure to the tourist industry. Longer-term measures might also include a lowering of the retiring age, a shorter working week, and the planned use of emigration possibilities. All these measures have been used in one or more Commonwealth countries. In order to maximise employment opportunities an efficient manpower survey system should be established to give a continuous flow of information about needs, resources and trends. Such a system would require the accurate compilation and analysis of labour statistics and would make possible more extensive measures, including a reconstruction of the labour force and the provision of more and better training facilities in the form of trade schools, industrial training centres, facilities for apprentices and "learners", and the wider availability of basic training and re-cycling courses.

Training for employment

The need seems to be established for a comprehensive review and critical appraisal of the means by which young people are trained for employment both institutionally and otherwise. The review should be extended to consider also the provision which is available and which is desirable for the updating, upgrading and retraining of all members of the labour force. Technological development, changes in patterns of living, shifts in supply and demand, all make it increasingly improbable that any worker can go through his career without acquiring at intervals new or improved skills. Every young person leaving school today and starting to train as a mason or a shipwright or a mechanic - or as anything else - must anticipate having to adapt continuously to new materials, new techniques and new types of output. Industrial training should be planned as an integral component of employment, and can be most efficiently organised and controlled by a central co-ordinating body representative of and responsible to all interests in the field of employment.

Systems of apprenticeship are well-tried and successful. Unfortunately, in Malta today the system of apprenticeship seems to fall short of its purpose in creating a competent work-force.

In the first place apprenticeships are available to a very small proportion of school leavers: in 1971, for example, only 117 apprentices were engaged by the Government, the Malta Dry-docks Corporation and private firms, out of a total of some 3,000 young people who left school in that year. In 1971 only 451 apprentices were undergoing training, despite the declared shortage of skilled workers. In part the problem may originate with young people who prefer immediate full status and rewards in other jobs and are reluctant to undergo a further extended period of training immediately upon leaving school or college. In part, however, the problem lies with employers, who could make apprenticeship more attractive - by ensuring an efficient training programme and by guaranteeing employment on the successful completion of articles, for example - and by increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities, especially in trades related to agriculture and fisheries. There is, however unjustified it may be, a feeling among young people that in some cases apprentices are used as cut-price labour, given scant training, and dismissed upon completion of their articles so that they may be replaced by a new and cheaper trainee. "Learners," with lower entry qualifications than apprentices, feel this situation even more strongly. Sufficient staff should be available to the Ministry of Labour to ensure enforcement of existing legislation with regard to apprentices and learners.

Increased opportunities for apprenticeships present some obvious problems. In the first place, craftsmen are naturally reluctant to see their own numbers increased to such an extent that they lose that part of their security and bargaining power which is founded on demand always exceeding supply. (This situation is not peculiar to craftsmen: the professions, too, tend to restrict numbers of new entrants). Again, employers are disinclined to increase their expenditure on apprentices if this seems to result in their training young people who then leave to sell their new-found skills elsewhere. The only effective solution to this problem would seem to be to require all industries assisted from Government funds to accept apprentices and to implement a national training programme linked to a continuous manpower survey and funded by a levy on all employers. Such a training programme could ensure adequate training facilities, require the attendance of apprentices and learners for prescribed periods, control lengths of apprenticeships and establish training standards suited to local needs and conditions. A programme of this type, too, could plan suitable arrangements for training in skills common to more than one industry, determining in what

circumstances training is best based on the industry to which the trainee is currently attached, and in what circumstances the training should be based on the specific trade to be learned. When considering overall training needs, the role of institutions in the training process should be re-examined and an assessment made of the desirable relationship between basic training, sandwich and release course, and in-service training. For this purpose recent developments in countries such as Britain, Kenya and Singapore might provide useful comparative data.