

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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The first meeting of young Commonwealth Leaders held in 1977 in Ocho Rios demonstrated that this gathering has the potential to strengthen the ideals of the Commonwealth by providing a forum for discussion among young people which can result in practical proposals for the solution of common problems and so make the Commonwealth more relevant to the lives of the ordinary citizens whose nations comprise this voluntary association of independent states.

In Ocho Rios we recognised that it is in youth that man aspires to prove his worth more than at any other time in his life and that the enthusiasm and noble aspirations of youth, apart from their self-awareness have made young people a significant social and political force in all political systems. We expressed ourselves in simple and clear terms when in paragraph two of the Declaration of Ocho Rios we stated our belief that: "increased participation by youth leaders, officials and young politicians in a united effort, within local, national and international institutions, is imperative for hastening the pace of development and for combating the intolerable evil of unemployment which so extensively pervades the ranks of youth and most directly affects their right to equality of opportunity. We therefore as youth leaders, officials and young politicians dedicate our energies and efforts to the full involvement of the young in decision-making at all levels in our countries so that social and economic development can more rapidly be achieved." It is therefore appropriate that today we meet again and this time discuss youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment is not merely the absence of the opportunity for youth to participate in the production process, because unemployment means much more than the inability to earn a living. It is also the absence of opportunity to participate in the development of one's family, one's community and one's own country. A young person who is unemployed has to endure countless hours of idleness. Unemployment stultifies the growth and development of his personality. He or she is likely to be under-fed and therefore fails to develop his or her full physical potential at the time of life that his or her body is capable of its greatest strength.

Idleness is not just the absence of physical activity, it is a double curse which also affects the mind by cultivating habits of laziness, dependency and mental inactivity. It robs the individual of the success of achievement and the sense of purpose which comes from the social practice of regular work.

The unemployed youth is therefore not just the symbol of lost opportunity. He is a living reminder that despite his great scientific advances man continues to waste himself and threatens his best achievements by facilitating the development of social alienation and delinquency which are the by-products of any system which does not concretise the human right of every individual to gainful employment.

Mr. Chairman, I propose to structure my contribution to this discussion by concentrating my attention on youth unemployment in the Third World in general and in the Commonwealth in particular. By concentrating on the Third World I do not for a moment deny that the problem of unemployment among young people is a serious one for the developed and industrialised countries. The background paper on youth unemployment which was prepared by the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat stated one aspect of the dimension of this problem: "Unemployment among young people is a major problem in industrialised as well as developing countries. In the OECD group, unemployment is growing and young people between school leaving age and 25 now constitute 40% of those who are unemployed. To take three Commonwealth examples from this group: in Australia, young people under 21 form 12% of the labour force but 40% of those unemployed; in Canada, young people from 15-24 form 30% of the labour force but 50% of the unemployed; in New Zealand, young men from 15-24 form 43% of all the male unemployed."

Severe as these problems are for the developed world, they are much more significant for the developing world and so I concentrate on the Third World because it constitutes the vast majority of the youth of the world and because now that the process of political liberation is nearing completion, it brings to the forefront the question of the economic transformation of people whose exploitation has been the foundation on which much of the development of the world has been based.

The extent of the youth unemployment in the Third World dramatises the failure of post independent development policies to effect economic transformation and that these failures are ultimately conditioned by the system of international economic relations in which they are inserted. I will contend that genuine economic transformation and hence the solution to the problem of youth unemployment can only begin in the context of a new international economic order.

Employment and inflation are endemic features of society where production is for private profit and they lead to under-utilisation of resources and especially human resources. The problem is more severe in the Third World which is part of the capitalist system, and the misallocation and under-utilisation of resources arises not only because of the internal contradictions within individual economies but they are also doubly entrenched because of the nature of economic relations to which the Third World is subordinated. In fact high and mounting levels of unemployment is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the very concept in the Third World.

Whereas considerable alarm is caused in the capitalist countries when unemployment rates rise towards double digit figures, it is not uncommon for Third World countries to have persistent rates of unemployment which range between 20 and 30%. In these countries it is particularly oppressive to youth and women.

I wish to pause to point out that the reason why I have singled out women for special mention in a discussion which deals with youth unemployment is that we must remember that the term 'youth' embraces both man and woman and that where ever there is high unemployment among young people, young women constitute the majority of that category. World opinion needs to be constantly reminded that unemployment among women is often disguised because women are confined to the role of mother at a young age and because they are forced to endure the countless hours of labour in the drudgery of repetitious and uncreative (though necessary) house-work. Because of this we often fail to recognise that they are unemployed and underemployed.

One of the characteristics of Third World countries is that their populations are relatively young. Approximately 60% of the people are below the age of 29 years. Uniform statistics are not easily available. In 1970, 60.9% of the population of Barbados and in the same year 71.5% of the population of Ghana was under 29. In 1971, 65.98% of the population of Sri Lanka was below 29 years. In 1972 68.3% of the population of Mauritius fell into this category and in 1977, 68% of the population of Jamaica. The average of these 5 countries is 66%.

Another characteristic of the Third World countries is the growth in the share of urban population although agriculture remains the main sector of employment. In the post independence period the predominant position of export crops as compared to crops for home consumption has also remained a characteristic feature. These factors have led to the growing aggravation of the food problem and the expenditure of large sums of foreign exchange to buy basic food from the developed world. This has increased the dependence of the developing world on the capitalist system and has also reduced the available foreign exchange which is required to build up national industries to industrialise the Third World.

The growing urbanisation of economies of Third World countries has therefore aggravated their food problem and led to the speedy increase in unemployment, and the phenomenon of urban unemployment most cruelly inhibits the development of the youth.

Statistics are not readily available, but ILO sources indicate that in the 1960s urban unemployment rates ranged between 20 and 40% in Third World countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The situation worsened in the 1970s. The problem of urban unemployment has been related to the general lack of development or rural life and in particular the failure of most Third World countries to undertake thorough land reform programmes. The consequences are that the phenomenon of urbanisation in the Third World is one that relates almost exclusively to young people because they are without a stake in the land and they leave the country for the attraction of city life and the promise of opportunity which does not materialise.

Urbanisation has brought with it the development of a large sector of young people who are neither a part of the peasantry nor are they a part of the industrialised working class. They exist on the periphery of economic activity in the towns and do not completely adjust to urban life. Nothing to which they have been exposed in their educational background has prepared them for this experience.

Education is not sufficiently oriented towards the acquisition of vocational skills which will prepare them to be productive workers and so in many instances even if employment opportunities exist, young people are unable to secure work. Consequently urban unemployment among youth of the Third World relates not only to uneducated and literate persons but also to thousands of school leavers who have graduated from the educational system.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to place the situation of the youth of the Third World within the context of the general poverty which is characteristic of its under development. The ILO report to which I referred had this to say on the subject: "Today in spite of the immense efforts that have been made, both at the national and at the international levels, a significant proportion of mankind continues to eke out an existence in the most abject conditions of material deprivation. More than 700 million people live in acute poverty and are destitute. At least 460 million persons were estimated to suffer from a severe degree of protein-energy malnutrition even before the recent food crisis. Scores of millions live constantly under a threat of starvation. Countless millions suffer from debilitating diseases of various sorts and lack access to the most basic medical services. The squalor of urban slums is too well known to need further emphasis. The number of illiterate adults has been estimated to have grown from 700 million in 1960 to 760 million towards 1970. The tragic waste of human resources in the Third World is symbolised by nearly 350 million persons unemployed or underemployed in the mid 1970s." And it goes on to say "In most developing countries the richest 10 per cent of households typically receive about 40 per cent of personal income, whereas the poorest 40 per cent of households receive 15 per cent or less."

Inequalities exist also at the international level. The postwar period has been marked by growing gaps in income and wealth between a small number of industrialised countries and the bulk of the other countries. In 1972 the industrial market economies, with less than one-fifth of world population, accounted for two-thirds of world output. At the other extreme, a quarter of the world's population lived in countries with average per head incomes of less than US\$200 and whose total output was under 3 per cent of global output. If China were included in these figures, nearly half of the world's population received less than 7 per cent of the world's income."

The problem of youth unemployment is therefore the core of the larger problem of high unemployment levels in the labour force of the Third World as a whole.

The question that arises for discussion is, will the youth who are increasingly becoming a significant political force be prepared to accept that things must remain this way. Today's youth are in a very real sense the first generation who have grown up in the post colonial era. Their social situation demonstrates that political independence and the economic measures which most newly independent states have pursued have not been an adequate solution to the first responsibility of new nations, that is to provide employment and material welfare for the first generation for whom they have been responsible. Current trends in the world indicate that unless there are fundamental adjustments there will be continuing deterioration

in the unemployment among young people and in the well-being of the mass of people in the Third World. The effects of the staggering rise in the cost of energy, in the increasing burden of debt-payment and the general crisis which international capital has experienced since the mid 1970s creates a situation in which the solution to the problem of youth unemployment requires fundamental changes in the world economic system and in the economies of Third World countries.

The current generation of youth will have to live in a world which is in a different historic stage from that in which their parents were born. Because many of them did not personally experience the former colonial system and have been exposed to the most advanced stage of the international struggle for national liberation they are an important part of mankind which is becoming impatient with all forms of oppression. This generation will not be deluded by the symbols of sovereignty and political independence. They understand the nature of new colonialism and life itself has taught them to look behind the symbols of nationhood at the reality of the economic relations in which their countries are trapped. This generation of youth is in the vanguard of the world movement of socio-economic liberation which is expanding at an ever increasing rate.

A recent publication by UNESCO entitled "Thinking Ahead: UNESCO and the Challenges of Today and Tomorrow" has recognised the critical situation of contemporary youth in these words: "The difficulties of a social, psychological nature (marginality, delinquency, feeling of uselessness) due to prolonged insecurity combined to heighten the tensions which usually exist between youth, eager for change, and the rest of society more anxious for stability. The unease felt by young people about the economic machinery over which they have no control pushes them into the form of activities that are attributable to their social status (young workers, students etc.) much more than to the fact that they are young".

And so UNESCO, embodying as it does a wide cross section of international opinion recognises, as indeed must the leaders of the world, that unless there is an outlet through which youth can contribute, their energies will be transformed into a destructive force which will increase social instability, subvert any form of development, and threaten peace itself.

We have argued that the extent of youth unemployment and alienation reflects the failures of national re-construction in the post-independent period. The principal basis for these failures has been the continuing monopoly of Third World resources by foreign capitalists and local ruling classes hostile to change. This monopoly has been exercised primarily through direct ownership. However, it has been supplemented traditionally by the exploitation of Third World countries through unequal trade and increasingly the growth of national indebtedness. Everyone recognises that growth and development can only come about through reorganisation of the economic system within the Third World countries as well as the restructuring of international relations between the advanced capitalist countries and the countries of the periphery. However, precisely because of the common colonial experience, it is the domination of the economy by foreign capital that constitutes the principal obstacle to social change.

The proposals advanced by Third World countries under the title of a New International Economic Order must be seen as a means of overcoming some of these constraints. In a recent paper prepared for a Seminar on UNCTAD V at the University of the West Indies, Professor C.Y. Thomas of the University of Guyana has summarised the N.I.E.O. demands as follows:

- (i) Commerce: In the field of commerce a rise in the price and increase in the volume of exports of the Third World's basic products to the industrialised countries. This is to be achieved by some combination of internationally operated buffer schemes (and the associated demands for a "common fund" and "indexing of prices") enlargement of quotas and lower duties; multilateral long term contracts; producer cartels a la OPEC; and the deliberate creation of access in the industrialised countries for manufactures and semi-manufactures produced in these countries.
- (ii) Aid and External Indebtedness: In the field of aid and external indebtedness there is the call for the liquidation and/or rescheduling of most of the Third World's periphery's foreign indebtedness, presently estimated at between \$180-\$200 billion US; maintaining an "equitable", guaranteed and automatic transfer of resources from the industrialised countries (often expressed as a percentage of GNP - usually 1%); the direction of most aid to the poorest countries and poorest sections of any given country in order to raise the level of "basic needs" satisfaction; that all aid should be "utilised" and preferably directed through multilateral institutions.
- (iii) Resource and Technology: To recognise the full sovereignty of each country over its natural resources, including those of the adjoining sea and air-space (with special considerations for land-locked states); to promote an effective international code to govern world trade in technology, particularly with respect to problems of ownership, control, use, taxation, financial flows, accounting procedures, utilisation of Research and Development funds and transfer pricing.
- (iv) Foreign Exchange: To phase out the use of national currencies as international reserves; to ensure for the Third World's (periphery) improved access to international liquidity; to democratize the decision making structures of all international financial institutions.
- (v) Regional Cooperation: To foster joint efforts and schemes of collective self-reliance and to promote regional integration and/or cooperation among countries of the periphery.
- (vi) Discrimination: To end discrimination in trade by involving all countries in the international division of labour.

Two things stand out as obvious. First, while these demands speak to a fundamental restructuring of the world economy they do not go so far as to call for the complete abolition of the imperialist system. As such, they represent a starting point but nevertheless an important contribution to the struggle for national liberation. Second, the level of support for these demands varies from country to country according to the level of commitment of the ruling regime to the anti-imperialist struggle. Nevertheless they represent a rallying point or a focus for concerted action on behalf of Third World countries in seeking a more equitable partnership with the advanced countries in the world economy.

It is clear that it is in the interest of youth to support the demands for a New International Economic Order in so far as these reduce the constraints now holding back national development and that by raising the demand for the New International Economic Order the youth movement will be making a concrete contribution to the struggle for national liberation and social progress. The role of the youth in this struggle was recognised in the UNESCO publication to which I have referred in the following terms: "A large proportion of young people appear to be aware that no true peace can be attained so long as there continues to exist vestiges of colonialism, racism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and more generally, the various forms of oppression and domination which are still at work in the world. Many young people include amongst actions for the attaining of lasting peace campaigns for national independence, territorial integrity, equality among nations and the sovereign rights of nations to control their national resources and to adopt forms of social organisation conducive to the cause of freedom and justice." We are suggesting that the NIEO constitute a concrete and constructive articulation of these widespread concerns among today's youth.

Consistent with support for NIEO at the level of the international economy, today's youth must begin to concern themselves with constructive programmes for national construction in order to participate directly in solving problems of unemployment and lack of opportunities which bear down so heavily on them. Youth organisations should take the initiative to develop new forms of economic activity and new ways of bringing idle natural resources into productive use. They must recognise the political and economic limitations which circumscribe the capacity of the national governments. While they must be encouraged to challenge the old social order, they must at the same time put forward concrete programmes for economic development and transformation.

In this endeavour they could receive valuable assistance from the publication of popular brochures and pamphlets summarising the experiences of youth in developing social and economic programmes to alleviate unemployment. This seems to be one area in which the activities of the Commonwealth Youth Programme could be immediately extended.

Finally, however, these efforts will require the leadership or at least the sanction of national governments. Youth organisations should take the initiative in sensitizing national economic policy to the importance of youth unemployment. They should seek to ensure that the problem is treated in an integral fashion and occupies a central position in governments' overall strategies.

Mr. Chairman, I have treated the subject from the perspective of the Third World, but before I end this contribution to your discussion, I wish to stress that within the creation of the New International Economic Order lies the possibility for the solution of many of the problems of unemployment among the youth of the developed industrialised countries. We must remember that underdevelopment not only restricts the purchasing capacity of the Third World, but it is quite a limiting variable in the expansion of world trade. The change in the world economy which is proposed by the New International Economic Order involves both justice for the poor and an increase in world trade.

In addition to the development of the New International Economic Order, I submit that the developed countries can provide opportunities for their youth by taking swift and effective steps to direct the vast resources which they currently waste on arms and weapons of human destruction to the provision of meaningful programmes of employment and human need.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of peace is everybody's business but it concerns the youth more than any other sector in society because it is they who will have the responsibility to guide the future of mankind. Mankind's future cannot be assured and peace will evade us if a significant section of the youth is systematically deprived of the right to work.

This generation like all those before it are the custodians of all of mankind's achievements. This generation unlike any before it is faced with a threat which challenges the very roots of civilised living on earth. We owe it to our forefathers before us, we owe it to the unborn generations of mankind to ensure that today's youth will be fit to fulfil their historic responsibilities.