

## SOME ASPECTS OF THE YOUTH CAMP MOVEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

based on an address delivered by  
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Youth in the Caribbean countries are facing problems similar to those of young people in most developing countries. Unemployment presents a very grave problem throughout the region. The situation is exacerbated by the population explosion; and although Family Planning programmes have slightly reduced the birth rate in some areas, it still remains high. Over half of the total population is under 25.

Every year the labour market is flooded with new entrants, the vast majority being unskilled school leavers. The figures below give some idea of the size of the annual influx.

Jamaica	40,000
Trinidad	20,000
Guyana	10,000
Barbados	7,000
Antigua	3,000
Dominica	2,000
St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla	1,000

Only a small proportion of job-seekers are successful in finding employment. The figures available indicate that in Jamaica about 10,000 are absorbed annually into the labour market - a mere 25%. In Guyana about 2,000 manage to find work, - some 20%.

Part of the problem, that is, lack of skills training, lies in the educational system. The system in the Caribbean is based on a combination of the British and American patterns, which, while satisfying the requirements of those countries, is irrelevant to the needs of the region. A serious examination of the appropriateness of the content of education is required and where necessary radical changes should be made.

The exodus of young people from the rural to the urban areas presents another problem. Many consider physical labour, especially in agricultural situations, to be degrading and they

seek instead positions of higher-status in the towns. It may be possible to overcome this prejudice to some extent by introducing agriculture into the school curriculum, where it may take its place among the various academic and practical subjects.

In discussing agriculture, it is important to mention the plantation system which operates in the Caribbean. The most fertile areas of land are in the hands of large landed owners, many of whom do not utilise their land to the maximum possible extent. Since many thousands of peasant farmers throughout the region are obliged to scratch a living from small plots of poor land, the system of land tenure should be carefully considered when plans for agricultural development are being made.

In all Caribbean countries, young people are being attracted away from the rural areas to the towns, in search of employment, higher wages, entertainment, etc. Attention must be given to ways of drawing people back to the rural communities, of making these communities sufficiently stimulating to encourage young people to remain in them. Recent efforts in Guyana and Jamaica are moves in the right direction, but it is as yet too early to assess the effects of these.

Caribbean Governments are paying increasing attention to the problem of youth. Whereas previously their main concern in this field was the provision of institutions for the correction of delinquent youth, today, realising that prevention is better than cure, they are becoming increasingly involved in youth programmes, camps and settlement schemes which have a developmental objective. In some areas a few youth workers have been trained and appointed to further develop this sort of work but there remains a great deal to be done.

Voluntary workers from overseas - Peace Corps, C.U.S.O., V.S.O. and West German volunteers - have done some excellent work in the region; it is hoped they will continue to assist.

Valuable aid has been received from the international organisations - UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF and FAO and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Young people who have left school and have some inclination towards agricultural employment are catered for by the Youth Camps. The success of the first camp in Jamaica has led to the development of more in that country and to their establishment

in others. Jamaica has three youth camps in operation at present and plans to construct more. In Trinidad there are four and in Guyana two. The one youth camp in Dominica is attended by not only local boys but also boys from other Eastern Caribbean islands. Camps for the Windward and Leeward islands are planned for the near future.

The aims of the youth camps are:

- (a) to provide basic training and experience in agriculture, including principles of the economics and management of viable farming, both crop and livestock;
- (b) to provide on-the-job training in various skills and trades appropriate to the process of development and often ancillary to agriculture;
- (c) to promote among youth community spirit, a wholesome attitude to work, good citizenship and the qualities of functional leadership, in an environment where youth can feel involved and experience some degree of fulfilment.

Recruitment of volunteers is carried out by Government agencies. The age range of youth trainees at recruitment varies from territory to territory, as shown below:

Trinidad	13 to 21 years
Jamaica	15 to 19 years
Guyana	15 to 20 years
Dominica	15 to 20 years

In Jamaica, the cost of training one boy for a year is approximately £150. This figure includes administrative expenditure, food, clothing and pocket money. There may in some cases be additional costs for transportation.

Each camp is headed by a Director, who is assisted by Counsellors (or Assistant Directors). The latter play the role of 'guide, philosopher and friend' to the youngsters in training. The instructors are technicians from various trades and occupations. As part of their work, instructors carry out a certain amount of vocational guidance and are concerned, in some cases, with the conducting of aptitude tests.

The boys themselves play a part in the camps' administration. To every ten boys, there is a leader; to every 100-150 boys, there is a deputy Senior Leader, and to every camp a Senior Leader, all leaders being elected by the boys from among themselves. A weekly meeting of all leaders is held to plan the programme for the following week. Opinions are expressed and discussed before final decisions are made. Any problems which the leaders cannot solve themselves are taken up with the Director.

In this way the boys become acquainted with the principles of democracy, and learn that much can be achieved by peaceful discussion. The boys begin to feel that they have a place in the camp community and experience, perhaps for the first time, a sense of belonging and community spirit.

As an aid to improving the large unemployment problem, labour-intensive projects are a necessity. So, too, are projects which will attract young people back to the rural areas. For these reasons, the emphasis in the camps in Guyana, Dominica, and Jamaica has been placed on agriculture. Ancillary activities such as the construction of farm buildings, maintenance of vehicles and tractor-driving, are also taught. In Jamaica, the boys' interest in agriculture is encouraged through membership of the 4H Young Farmers Clubs.

The daily programme at a youth camp is quite heavy and youngsters not accustomed to discipline may sometimes find adjustment difficult. Every activity - rising, meals, instruction, chores - has to be carried out at a set time; in this way, the boys are obliged to become more punctual and they learn to use effectively any free time they have. The programme ensures that the boys are fully employed; they learn not to waste time and gradually begin to develop the 'right' attitude to work.

When the boys, now skilled in some areas, leave the camps, they face the problem of finding suitable employment. The youth camps do assist the boys in this. In Jamaica they are advised by Welfare Officers, who are responsible for post-training guidance and counselling. In Guyana the problem of finding employment in agriculture is not as acute since there is plenty of land available in the Interior. The Government is anxious to develop this region and through a Placement Committee helps to find appropriate employment for the youth camp 'graduates'.

## Plans for the Future

In view of the current uneasiness among youth in all parts of the Caribbean, it behoves the various Governments to pay immediate attention to the problems affecting them. In some instances the frustrations of young people have already led to violence.

In October, 1969, the Caribbean Regional Workshop on Integrated Rural Development stressed the need for the formulation of national policies on youth and proposed that such policies should recognise three basic principles, namely:

- (i) the approach should not only be problem-centred but should have a positive resource-development orientation;
- (ii) the approach should be an integrated one, covering the various aspects, such as social environment, the educational system and employment opportunities;
- (iii) the strategy should be part of the overall national effort.

Youth employment and training schemes should be developed within the framework of national development plans. They must be directed towards the achievement of full and productive employment through the training of youth.

While the success of the youth camps up to this point has led to plans for the construction of more. It is important for Governments to realise that youth camps cannot be developed simply by importing a blue-print from another territory. They must be tailored to fit the economic and social needs of the particular country.

From time to time, an appraisal of the work being done in youth camps should be made to ensure that it remains relevant to the needs of young people and the society.

Ideally, the youth camps should be run in conjunction with other aspects of community development; they should be part of an integrated programme.

It is argued that our greatest wealth is our people. Let us remember that the majority of our people are youths.