

CHAPTER 1

YOUTH IN SOCIETY

Introduction

During the last decade world-wide attention has frequently been drawn to aggressive and often violent action on the part of young people, action which has been directed against various aspects of the societies in which they live. Initially such activities were perceived as being symptoms of "youth problems", but closer examination of the nature and origin of these problems has led to the belief that they are not problems which are intrinsic to youth but rather problems of development in societies whose population includes a large proportion of young people.

In Cyprus, as elsewhere, society is undergoing a transformation, albeit at a much less rapid pace than that evidenced in most countries. In this age of instant communication, of travel, of tourism and increasing educational horizons, it is impossible for a country situated, as Cyprus is, at the cross-roads between East and West, between Europe and Africa, to remain untouched by imported values and ideas.

In addition to the changes wrought by external influences, the different aspects of development within the society will also affect its nature. The economic growth of a country is desirable, but if such growth results in increased wealth for the wealthy and little return for the poor, the maintenance of a wealth gap is likely to cause strong reactions. If economic growth is achieved at the expense of full employment, again those left unemployed at a time of national wealth may feel doubly frustrated.

A measure of the maturity of a society might well be the role and responsibility accorded to youth. Tomorrow's world is for today's young and no percipient government can plan for

tomorrow without seeking opinions of those who will be directly affected and allowing them an opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of programmes for their future. The part played by young people in the struggle for independence in Cyprus demonstrated in an undeniable way the ability of youth to serve the interests of the nation. If young people now begin to fight for their own liberation, the only adequate reward there can be is their emancipation.

As has been mentioned, the rate at which changes are taking place in Cypriot society is slow, compared with elsewhere. The nature of the society is close-knit and familistic, and the agencies which exert traditional influence upon it, namely the family, the Church, the school and social sanctions, operate in a way which assists in the maintenance of the status quo. Though the outward appearance of the social order is one of stability, the pressures for change are increasing and the need for re-evaluation of existing values is beginning to make itself evident.

The transmission of values

The seminar discussed the socialisation of the child in Cypriot society and agreed that the main agencies in formulating the behaviour patterns of the young were the family, the school, the Church and the media.

(a) The family

There was unanimous agreement that the family exerts the greatest influence on the development of the child. Moral discipline is traditionally strict and in a recent survey a large number of young people indicated that they felt oppressed by the restrictions imposed upon them by their parents.

The seminar believed that societal changes were beginning to break down traditional family interaction. Increased opportunities for education had brought about a situation in which some young people were more aware and knowledgeable than their parents. Frequently, as economic needs increased, mothers as well as fathers sought employment, thus reducing the opportunities for parents to oversee their children's activities.

Unlike the elders in some other countries, however, there exists in the minds of the parents no doubt as to the desirability of the mores which they are transferring to the young. The existence of a generation gap was acknowledged by

the seminar but no agreement could be reached as to the size of the gap. Some believed that the family system was so entrenched as to permit of only a negligible lack of communication between parents and children, whereas other participants thought the gap was marked. The latter group suggested that opportunities should be created to enable young people and their elders to meet on common ground. It was pointed out that dangers existed in direct communication, which could lead to a hardening of positions. What was required was a programme for improving the interaction and understanding between young people and parents with an underlying strategy aimed at strengthening the links which already existed.

The seminar also recommended that a programme of adult education should be organised on a larger scale in order that the knowledge gap between parents and children might be bridged.

(b) The school

The school was believed by the seminar to be perceived by society largely as an extension of the family in the socialisation process, though at the same time the school was expected to bring about innovation in the practicalities of life. Teachers were expected to hold acceptable standard views on matters social, political and religious, and to maintain a discipline as strict as that exerted in the family. The imposition of middle-class values has caused in many young people a feeling of oppression in school.

The seminar suggested that if the child was severely restricted within his family there might be a case for according to the school a compensatory role. The school might, while preserving what was best in the view of society, recognise the restrictions imposed and provide a complementary way of life. The main problem within the school was not, it was felt, a matter of what was taught but rather the way in which teaching was carried out. There was approval for the suggestion that re-orientation of teachers, focused on methodology and interaction, should be encouraged.

(c) The Church

The seminar agreed that the Church had a strong influence on society as a whole and on young people in particular. The role of the Church and that of the family in the socialisation process were recognised as being essentially intertwined, since

the moral and ethical values being transmitted by the parents had their foundation in the teachings of the Church.

(d) Politics

The political situation existing in Cyprus during the last twenty years has been such that no-one could remain aloof. Political fervour in one direction or another is very evident among young Cypriots, who display a highly developed political awareness. There can be no doubt that political considerations have exerted a great influence upon many young people today. This influence will, no doubt, continue just as strongly.

(e) The mass media

The greatest threat to the power of the family, the school and the Church as the strongest influences upon the individual is posed by the mass media. The family, school and Church tend to be introspective and can ignore a great amount of external activity. Television and radio, however, while being introspective in a more analytical way, introduce external values in the shape of general news items, films and advertisements.

The seminar believed that the media should be controlled in such a way as to ensure that only those values which were acceptable to the society were propagated. If society considered its own socio-cultural heritage worth preserving, only action of this kind would prove effective against the widespread influence of the media.

The media was also criticised by the seminar for its misleading portrayal of the values of young people in other countries. Almost without exception young people were brought into focus only in adverse contexts, such as riots, sit-ins, drug-taking, etc. It was considered vital that more attention be paid to the good qualities which were to be found in the majority of young people.

The seminar believed overall that although the family, the school and the Church still maintained a firm hold on the society, it was important for people in Cyprus to be aware of the possibility of the social fabric being undermined by the media in particular and, perhaps, as the tourist trade increased, by the influx of values from the more lax cultures of the European countries.

The concept of youth

In very broad terms "youth" may be defined as the period of life which extends between the end of childhood and the achievement of adulthood. Chronologically this definition would embrace the age group of 12 to about 25 years, from the onset of puberty to acceptance as a fully fledged member of the community. In most countries, however, though the lower limit is usually acceptable, the point at which youth becomes adult varies according to the criterion used. The existence of different criteria within one society can lead to a kind of schizophrenia among young people, who in one situation might find themselves expected to behave as children and in another to act as responsible adults.

The seminar discovered that a large number of criteria for acceptance into adulthood operated in Cyprus, in addition to the more individual considerations of physiological and psychological maturity.

(a) Employment

Not long ago all young people leaving school and entering employment were, regardless of their age, accorded adult status. With the expansion of the education system, however, a much larger proportion of youth continue into the secondary schools and thus are denied recognition as adults on this basis. It became apparent, in fact, that to continue one's education through to tertiary level, during which period a young person remains financially dependent, delayed his acceptance as an adult, even though a primary school leaver, several years younger, who had entered employment was considered an adult. This was found to be especially true of those younger people who through employment were in a position to contribute to the family budget, while those still in schools and universities continued to draw from it.

(b) Marriage

The seminar noted that young people were tending to marry as early as 16 years of age in some areas and that marriage was likely to bestow adulthood upon the couple immediately. Consideration was given to the fact that a desired marriage was sometimes prevented by financial considerations relating to the dowry; such restrictions would again have a delaying effect on a young person's achievement of adulthood.

The improved status conferred on marriage was, it was felt, apparent in terms of freedom within the family, of freedom outside the family and of the responsibilities which the society now allowed the couple to have.

(c) Legislation

Other criteria, the seminar agreed, included franchise, national service and liability in law, each of which individually might be expected to accord adulthood to a young person. Certain inconsistencies, however, were evident in the legislative determinants laid down. For purposes of joining the National Guard, for instance, a young man had to be 18 years old. To vote, however, one had to be 21. A young man might therefore be sufficiently adult to defend his homeland, yet too youthful to have a say in elections. It was also noted that a minimum age for marriage was laid down by the Church, and that for certain kinds of employment and training a minimum age had been decreed.

The seminar agreed that the transition from childhood to adulthood in Cypriot society depended, generally speaking, on a combination of the above factors and that conflicts brought about by the various criteria in the perceptions of the society could only lead to confusion in the minds of the young people whose status was being assessed.

Identification of the problems

There has been in Cyprus no vociferous or violent expression of youth's dissatisfaction with their role within the society, yet there is acknowledgement of the existence of a number of difficulties facing young people. The seminar found that these arose in several aspects of life.

(a) Employment

In 1970 a total of 3,836 people were registered as unemployed; of these 1,635 (42%) were under the age of 25. Though the majority of these were unqualified or unskilled school leavers, unemployment also affected graduates of the secondary schools and even to a small extent university graduates. Many of the secondary school graduates were aspiring to clerical occupations since they lacked vocational or technical training. At the same time there was a shortage of some 11,000 manual and skilled workers in industry. The problem is, however, not simply one of provision of training facilities. Social attitudes

reveal a deep-rooted prejudice towards manual and technical work, both on the part of parents and students.

The seminar recommended that vocational guidance services should be expanded to reach all students at the stage of education where a choice had to be made. At present vocational counselling, when available, frequently comes too late in the student's school career for a change of course to be made. It was suggested that the guidance service should also involve teachers and parents in an effort to change unfavourable attitudes to certain types of employment.

It was felt essential that vocational guidance should be linked with manpower planning since, in some cases, by the time the student had completed his training, the kind of job to which he had been directed was no longer available or had been out-dated by the introduction of technology.

(b) Education

Many young people have indicated that they feel oppressed within the school system and have expressed some dissatisfaction with the administration and the curricula of the schools. The seminar felt that in society generally certain values were held as ideals but were not practised. In the schools too, there existed a gap between theory and practice. This conflict between values in practice and ideals had not gone unnoticed by the students, many of whom considered that a revision of the school system was urgently required.

As far as the provision of education was concerned, the seminar recognised with approval that expansion had continued at a swift pace, and welcomed the introduction of free secondary education for all, although slight scepticism was expressed about how soon this would be put into practice.

(c) Recreation

Facilities for recreational activities in Cyprus, especially in the villages, are deemed by young people to be inadequate. The facilities which do exist are almost all for one sex only, usually for boys. Today's cry is for opportunities for mixed social interaction in youth clubs, where young people might be free to meet and exchange views without condemnation on the part of their families.

(d) Involvement in the community

Life in Cyprus, especially in the villages, is dominated by the elders. There seemed, according to the seminar, to be a need for the elders to be made aware of the part which young people might play in their communities. The passive role ascribed to youth had frequently led young people into a state of apathy, though in several instances the initiative of some groups had been followed up enthusiastically and had set an example to others of what youth could do for the community and the society.

(e) Communication

During the seminar discussions it became evident that communication gaps existed between various groups. As has been mentioned, a generation gap was recognised and the need for channels for enabling closer communication between adults and young people was expressed. One suggestion was for a "school" for parents, at which parents could be helped to appreciate the changes in society and consequently the changes in the expectations of their offspring. Similar instruction for young people was also deemed necessary, though it was realised that such mutual appreciation could not be achieved simply by bringing the two groups together.

Co-operative activities in which the young and their elders could join forces were also recommended. The young people, however, had expressed desires for their own clubs where they might be completely independent.

The desirability of increasing communication between the age-groups by affording young people an opportunity for involvement in planning activities was approved by the seminar.

Communication, it was found, was difficult not only in a vertical direction but also horizontally, between different groups of young people. The lack of facilities for social interaction, to which reference has already been made, has prevented co-operative ventures among young people. In particular there exists a need for programmes to increase communication between the sexes. Though most of the schools in towns are mixed, the general fashion is for segregated schools and the youth clubs which have been established are all segregated.

The seminar expressed approval for the establishment of mixed youth clubs under the auspices of which social relation-

ships between young men and women might develop and lead in turn to local co-operation between all age-groups.

Special groups

Though the problems mentioned face almost all young people in Cyprus, some groups appeared to be more restricted and under-privileged than others.

(a) Young people in villages

Since the villages are small units of the society, the pressures prevalent in the society as a whole are often experienced much more intensely in the villages than in the towns. The strictures of the traditional way of life impinge much more heavily in a situation where everyone's deeds are very soon public knowledge. Family traditions, however, are still strong and continue to resist the influence of new ideas taking root in the towns. The main problem facing young people living in villages was considered by the seminar to be a lack of provision for social interaction. A fortunate few may travel to the nearest town and back to work or to school, but public transport facilities do not provide for late return journeys to the villages. In most villages there is little in the way of facilities for socialising and entertainment, although the evening institutes afford opportunities for coming together in some areas. The problem is not, however, simply a matter of provision. The attitude of the village communities to social intercourse among young people of different sexes is one of entrenched disapproval. The present social activities of the village, namely chatting, walking and reading, are pursued in segregated groups or in family groups. The young men of the village have an advantage in being able to assemble at the local café, whereas the only meeting places for girls are the home, the school and the church.

The seminar recognised the need for youth clubs to be established in the villages, perhaps segregated initially or with "mixed" evenings and eventually, with the approval of the local people, on a fully mixed basis.

(b) Girls

The position of girls in Cypriot society was considered by the seminar to be particularly underprivileged. Family traditions oblige young women to lead extremely sheltered lives with little opportunity for social interaction outside the family,

school and church. Girls with a brother were considered fortunate in that the brother would serve as a chaperone in certain situations; the lot of those without was much less happy since they would be denied such opportunities for lack of a suitable companion. Such difficulties do not face only young girls of school age, in villages and in towns, but are experienced even by young women in tertiary level institutions who, on the brink of becoming, for example, qualified primary school teachers, are still obliged to seek their parents' permission to attend a social gathering.

Another difficulty facing young women was found to be the insistence of social traditions on marriage. The lack of opportunity for interaction between the sexes, together with the necessity for a dowry, has raised problems for many young people. In many cases marriages are semi-arranged by the parents with a young man willing to accept the dowry offered. In others, a young girl may be prevented from marrying the man of her choice for lack of an adequate dowry. Even if the man concerned were willing to marry her regardless, the pressures brought to bear upon him by his family and the society are frequently sufficient to deter him.

Although one group of the seminar believed that declining importance was being placed on the dowry system, another group felt that on account of the rapid increase in the price of land and housing the dowry had become more important since it ensured that the newly-married couple would have at least somewhere to live. As one participant put it, "Husbands are getting more expensive every day."

Whether or not the dowry system is as strongly rooted as it was, there is evidence that a number of marriages have taken place without a dowry where the girl is qualified for employment. The seminar was unable to decide, however, whether the potential salary was perceived as a substitution for the dowry or whether such action represented a total rejection of the dowry system and a move towards marriage based solely upon the mutual regard of the couple concerned.

The importance placed by society on marriage results in the identification of another under-privileged group, namely unmarried young women. Regardless of the reasons for their remaining single, which might include lack of a dowry, lack of an offer of marriage or simply a desire not to marry, society accords very low status to this group and they remain within the

family group with little hope of achieving adult status before middle age - if indeed then!

(c) Primary school leavers

Another special group identified by the seminar was composed of those primary school leavers who do not have an opportunity to enter secondary schools. The entrance examination for the secondary system allows some 85% of primary school leavers to proceed to the secondary schools. Of those remaining, some enter private fee-paying schools, others enrol in the government apprenticeship schemes, a few find employment, despite the fact that the minimum age for employment in Cyprus is 16 years. Not all are absorbed into education, training or employment, however, and a large number of youngsters, mostly girls, find themselves leading an aimless life for the next few years.

In some areas eight-grade primary schools have been established, which provide semi-vocational education for an extra two years, up to the age of 14 years. The seminar recommended that the number of these schools be increased until such time as secondary education becomes free and compulsory for all. It was also found desirable that in the meantime an attempt should be made to identify those young people for whom the education system failed to make provision in order that appropriate programmes could be put into operation for them. The seminar recognised the desirability of co-ordinating such activities with those of the various trade unions, under whose guidance many of the school leavers who had managed to enter employment were working.