

CHAPTER 3

EMPLOYMENT

The present situation

The problems of unemployment, underemployment and mis-employment have become urgent issues not only in the developing countries but now also in the more developed. Cyprus had for many years virtually full employment. As the economy has developed, manpower needs have changed and the beginnings of an unemployment problem are becoming evident.

Though unemployment is not as widespread as in many other countries, a large proportion (42%) of those unemployed are under the age of 25 years and the situation is beginning to give rise to concern. Whereas in many countries the problems faced by unschooled or partially educated youngsters in securing employment greatly exceed those faced by young people who have passed completely through the secondary system, in Cyprus it appears that secondary school graduates and even university graduates are almost as unhappily placed as their less educated counterparts, as far as employment prospects are concerned. Another group which is severely affected by inadequate employment opportunities is women and girls, regardless of level of education. Though workers in the agricultural sector are at least employed, frequently such employment is either under-employment or seasonal employment accompanied by spells of unemployment; agricultural workers constitute, therefore, another group to whom attention will need to be given.

Secondary-school graduates

In 1971, 23.4% of the total unemployed were graduates of secondary schools. Though this represents a slight improvement on the figures for 1969 and 1970, the situation is nevertheless

disturbing. The seminar believed that the main reasons for the 666 young people in this category were the type of education they had received and their attitudes to the employment opportunities which were available.

As was noted in the previous chapter, the education system and its objectives are based wholly on the classical tradition, with emphasis being placed on the development of the individual as a well-balanced, rounded personality. Although during the last decade the scope of the education system has been broadened to include a number of vocational and technical courses, the system has not yet widened sufficiently to cover all needs. Only recently has the inter-relation between education and training for gainful employment and between training and employment opportunities begun to be taken into account by policy-makers.

The problem of adverse attitudes to certain types of employment is prevalent not only among young people themselves but also among their parents. At the present time, opportunities do exist for employment in various technical fields, yet many unemployed school leavers are unwilling to turn to jobs which do not have white-collar status. Their aspirations tend to be largely towards clerical work, in which area openings are scarce. The number of technical training places has increased considerably over the last few years, yet these places are not always filled. The reason for this is again one of attitudes; parents tend to want their children to continue classical education in the belief that this would lead to a more remunerative, high status job in the end. At the present time the technical training courses are producing only 20% of the country's needs, and graduates of such courses do not experience any problems in finding employment. An advantage of such courses to the students is that graduates have found that they do not need to work in their specialised field; it is apparently possible for trades to be switched, depending on the market.

In so far as school drop-outs are concerned, the problem is lessened to a great extent by the fact that the aspirations of these have not been raised by extended education and attitudes are therefore more favourable to employment in any field and at any level. Training for some of the drop-outs is provided by the apprenticeship schemes and the hotel trade schools, the disadvantage being that the products of such courses are identified later by society at large as those who "did not make the grade".

Graduates of third-level institutions

In 1971 the number of unemployed university graduates was 183. Though by international standards this figure is low, the fact that the number is increasing at a fairly rapid annual rate is giving cause for concern. The more the opportunities for education, the more the graduates, and during 1971-72 over 11,000 Cypriots were attending higher education institutions in Cyprus and overseas. No doubt not all of these will return to Cyprus for employment but nevertheless jobs of the kind to which they aspire are likely to be available for only a small percentage. In the field of primary education, for instance, the number of students accepted for courses at the Pedagogical Academy is related to projected requirements for Cypriot schools. Any primary teachers trained overseas would therefore find it very difficult to find a suitable teaching post at home.

As might be expected, a large number of Cypriots continue their higher education studies in neighbouring countries. In some cases, special problems are created particularly for graduates who followed courses in which the medium of instruction was not one of the major international languages. In such cases their marketability is seriously affected.

The attitudes of graduates to non-professional employment again are of reluctance to take up jobs which they perceive as being below their aspirations. There is a widespread belief that on account of the investment made in producing graduates it would be unwise to persuade them to accept other types of employment. Such action might be further complicated by the psychological difficulties involved in carrying out a job for which one had not been trained. Conscious of these factors, the unemployed university graduate finds himself in an extremely frustrating situation.

Also operating against graduates seeking employment are the bilateral agreements between trade unions and employers, which have resulted in most cases in closed shop practices in many industries. The seminar believed that there was some indication, however, that such action might be slowly giving way to advanced placement for higher qualifications.

Manpower requirements in the fields likely to interest graduates have been projected for 1976 as being an additional 4,000 for professional, technical and related workers and 1,100 for administrative, executive and managerial staff. Quite clearly

the problem of unemployed graduates is going to become severe if measures are not taken immediately to ease the situation.

Women and girls

Female graduates represented 69.8% of the total unemployed secondary school graduates in 1971. The reasons for such a high rate were felt by the seminar to be the irrelevance of their education to employment openings, their desire to work in the clerical field, and the unavailability of suitable employment for females in industry. Since few opportunities exist for clerical workers, there is an urgent need for openings to be made in other fields which would prove attractive to girls.

Agricultural workers

A high percentage (36%) of the economically active population were engaged in agricultural work in 1970. Not all, however, were employed throughout the year, nor were all fully employed. The problems of underemployment and seasonal employment in this sector of the economy were believed by the seminar to merit immediate attention, and it was felt that they might be eased to some extent by increased mobility of labour.

In addition to the two main reasons for employment difficulties, namely the irrelevance of classical education to employment needs and openings, and the attitudes of young people to employment in non-white-collar positions, the seminar attributed some contribution to the problems to the limited demand for employment generally, owing to the small size of the island, and to the limited variety of work which was available. The lack of co-ordination between bodies responsible for education, training and employment was also recognised as a drawback. The seminar felt that the efforts made in terms of vocational guidance were inadequate and should be not only expanded but also geared to manpower planning.

Prospects for the future

Manpower projections have been made and data compiled in the 1966-1969 survey indicated a change in the occupational structure of employment. The trend was away from less-skilled occupations towards technical, managerial, administrative, clerical and supervisory occupations. Despite the fact that the trend has been accompanied by an expansion of education and training facilities, it seems likely from the projections made for

manpower requirements in 1976 that all people seeking employment will not by any means be absorbed.

The largest anticipated demand is for craftsmen and technical workers, of whom an additional 16,900 are estimated to be required by 1976. The output from the various training courses in this field in Cyprus is not likely to amount to more than 6,000 people; there will thus remain a need for almost 11,000 craftsmen, for whom few training facilities are at present available.

In the professional grades, which have the next largest demand, a total of 4,000 people will be required by 1976. In view of the large numbers of Cypriots now engaged in third-level studies with a view to entering this type of employment, a severe problem is likely to develop within this category.

A further 3,150 workers will be needed by 1976 in both the services and the clerical fields. As has been noted, the majority of secondary school graduates aspire to clerical work, but since output from the schools is estimated to reach 17,900 young people within the interim period a large surplus is likely. The situation will be aggravated by the competition between school graduates and university graduates who have not found employment in the professional fields.

Some proposals towards solutions

The seminar expressed concern about the likelihood of a worsening of the employment situation and suggested that certain lines of action should be taken urgently to ease some of the problems.

It was felt that society as a whole was not aware of the economic and social changes taking place in Cyprus. A public information programme was suggested as a means of enlightening students, parents and employers on the changing economic and social needs of the society. The trends observed in the manpower surveys merited attention and should be explained to members of society.

Through such a programme it might be possible to change the attitudes of both parents and young people towards particular kinds of jobs. From the man-power projections it was clear that the technical field offered most opportunities and it was essential

therefore that emphasis be placed on the valuable contribution that could be made to society through employment in this field. Another agency which might assist in inducing a change of attitudes, the seminar thought, was the Church, whose influence was widespread.

The seminar believed that such action should be reinforced by expanded and improved vocational guidance services. The current efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour were appreciated, but it was felt that a co-ordinated effort would prove much more efficient. The seminar recommended that vocational guidance should be available for every pupil, at the appropriate stage in his school career. Decisions about which branch of the education system to follow were made at an early age, and it was essential for guidance to be given before the choice was made, since changing courses at a later stage could be difficult, if not impossible. Without guidance, the talents of young people were frequently under-utilised.

The seminar agreed that vocational counselling should concern not only the pupil, but also his parents and teachers. In many cases the parents were in need of sound information about employment prospects and, further, about the aptitudes of their children.

The desirability of linking vocational guidance with manpower forecasts was recognised. Without reliable data and information, guidance might prove inaccurate, since the rate at which development is taking place in Cyprus is so rapid that the possibility exists of certain types of jobs being outdated before the student is able to enter the market. The process of industrialisation had frequently brought about the redundancy of particular kinds of workers.

The seminar suggested that in order to reduce irrelevance and overlap contact should be established between those responsible for education and training and the employers. A recommendation was made for a co-ordinating body, with representation from schools, industry, trade unions and appropriate Ministries, to be concerned with various aspects of planning related to education and employment.

It was agreed that, though it would be easy to lay much of the blame for the employment problem on the education system, the real difficulty was one of attitudes. The first step towards

effecting changes in the education system would be effecting changes in attitudes among society in general. Only after people had accepted that some types of employment were as "respectable" as others could they be persuaded that changes might effectively be introduced in the education system.

Such actions might, the seminar felt, prove effective in the long-term. Meanwhile a number of short-term measures might be introduced in the hope of easing the problems of those already unemployed.

Secondary school and university graduates should be encouraged to retrain or to accept jobs for which they had not been trained. The availability of training places in technical subjects has already been mentioned and it would seem that in view of the demand for personnel great emphasis should be put on employment prospects in this sector.

The seminar expressed the hope that some influence could be brought to bear on those employers who operated on a closed shop basis. As has already been noted, there is some indication that this situation is improving.

In the technical field an amount of exploitation has been experienced. In many crafts no standards exist; one plumber, for instance, might be more or less qualified than the next, and could ask any wage or alternatively be paid any wage. The seminar expressed its approval of the proposed visit in 1973 by an ILO expert to investigate this matter and also the proposal for legislation about industrial training and the establishment of standards.

The possibility of expanding the social services and thus absorbing a number of young people in employment was also raised, an important advantage being that this was a field which young women would probably find attractive. The seminar agreed that the participation rate of females in the employment force should be increased. Society was now ascribing a different role to females and the pressures for more employment opportunities were increasing. The need for programmes for young women was emphasised, as was also the need to urge employers to accept females for a wider variety of jobs.

The seminar was of the view that the under-employment and seasonal employment of workers in agriculture was a cause for concern and recommended that the situation be studied with

a view to providing employment by matching manpower needs to available labour.

Employment problems in Cyprus are thus not restricted to uneducated young people, who represent in most other countries a large proportion of the total unemployed. An increasing number of secondary-school and university graduates are affected. If a large proportion of young people continue to receive a general classical education the problems of absorption into employment will increase. It was the view of the seminar that the entire situation required immediate close study and positive action.