COMMENTARY - THE SPIRIT THAT CREATES LABOR.

ASK THE YOUTH

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Our crisis arises from more than just financial causes. Despite the improving condition of the stock market and the financial spreads, the unemployment rate, particularly among the youth, has not decreased. The economies of Italy and southern Europe are sick. They have been struggling against recession for decades, and speculative finance has only accelerated their decline.

The trauma of these troubled years could have been lessened if financial system had supported innovation rather than speculation and if economists had focused on long term rather than short term shortsighted analyses. However, economic decay and declining productivity were unavoidable; they smoldered under the ashes of society. Our present and future are uncertain; work must be reinvented, and it will be far different than anything we and our parents have ever known.

Job creation is a demanding task that requires action on multiple levels and involves minds and souls. To build a healthy society, we should start with children and reinvent the symbols that prepare them to work in the future. Society has taken away the images and symbols of labor from childhood. A common language is necessary to reconnect the different generations that no longer understand each other. In our childhoods, we used to play with bulldozers, tractors, dolls and toy workers; these represented our future professions. We were also influenced by the jobs of grownups and stories at school and from the elderly about professions. As we played we were preparing ourselves for our future professions. Today, children play with virtual four-head monsters, spending most of their time alone with their mobiles or in front of the TV; these activities don't involve symbols of labor. Through the organization of games, soccer matches, treasure hunts and races, children used to learn how to cooperate, compete, solve conflicts, and accept defeat and shortcomings. They were developing a basic character that is necessary for a successful professional life.

We are in dire need to create new images of professionals and to foster the aspiration to work for our children. How can young people decide on a profession that they haven't seen nor dreamed of as a child? How can they cooperate in businesses without learning cooperation? We call on artists to use poetry, literature, cartoons, tales, games and architecture to introduce children and young people to labor and community life through stories and images.

It is also vital to create jobs so that the youth of both present and future will not be unemployed.

People can only help the youth effectively if they are aware that the youth alone know what is best for them. Our society is lacking in the civil virtue of this ethical awareness.

Baden Powell, the founder of the Scouts, used to wisely say, “Ask the boy”. Healthy relations between adults and youngsters are based on this simple idea. He had a true, universal and charismatic insight.

This expression is one of the clearest applications of the “subsidiarity principle” in education. It affirms that an adult should not do what a child can do; children should figure out how to solve problems on their own. Likewise, young workers should show us how to resolve youth unemployment. Adults must help, but they can only do so effectively if they listen to the youth and fully believe in their capabilities. Young people are unemployed because we don't ask them the right questions nor give them helpful advice. Thus, they are unable to produce income, develop their career, and utilize their full potential and abilities. We need to be clever to learn how to read their hearts and souls. Many of the professional skills that young people
possess are hidden even to themselves. Don Bosco, an expert on youth and labor, once had the following conversation with a young man named Bartolomeo Garelli: “How old are you?”, “I’m 16”. “Do you know how to read and write?”, “No, I don’t”. “Do you sing?”, “Nope”. “Do you know how to whistle?”, “Yes!” Bartolomeo could whistle and was able to do many other things as well. According to the Salesians, educators should assist young people in finding their own potential by listening and asking them the right questions. Education is the process of seeing talents beyond appearances and helping them to emerge (revealing and developing those once hidden qualities).

If Baden Powell and Don Bosco (and other charismatic educators) lived today, they would agree with current competent educators that youth unemployment destroys public happiness. Four out of every ten young workers are unemployed, and three of those employed work part-time in unsatisfying jobs. As the bible says, the youth are our families’ paradise. However, young people, jobless and without hope, have no other alternative to emigration. Old immigrants have seen their grandchildren hit the road filled with sorrow. Just like those before, these new travelers leave in pursuit of bread and a hopeful future; they shed tears and leave their loved ones behind, weeping. They flee from a cold, arid and filthy land that no longer produces jobs.

Economic policy isn't enough to revitalize, cleanse and “warm up” this land. The nation needs a Spirit that gives strength and life while increasing efficiency and productivity. This Spirit will give new enthusiasm to many people, young and old, who have lost hope in life and faith in the future. “Come father of the poor!” Come father of the youth!

Translated by Cristian Sebok