

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF YOUTH IN TURIN

1. Turin: a city in crisis

The city of Turin with its industrial zone forms a metropolis of one and a half million inhabitants which underwent a radical transformation in 1980. Fr. Sorge, S.J. describes it as an epochal crisis. Turin's main industry — the manufacture of motor cars — has suffered the consequences of the energy crisis and especially of the introduction of modern technology such as the use of "robots" in the production process. A fall in sales coupled with the introduction of new technology has caused a serious drop in employment, the social consequences of which are relieved only by recourse to unemployment payments.

The following figures give some idea of the situation: In four years, from 1980 to today Fiat-Auto has seen the number of its employees fall from 140,000 to 99,000 (of whom 15,000 are not working but are paid by the state). A further reduction of the labour force to around 60,000 is forecast for 1986.

Turin which, during the 60's and 70's had so much work available that a surge of uncontrolled immigration into the city took place, is now suddenly faced with a grave unemployment problem. There are today nearly 55,000 applicants for jobs and a large number of these are young people in search of their first job. Employment is, therefore, the most urgent problem today, a source of agonizing worry especially for school leavers who risk a long and humiliating period of unemployment.

Marginalization is another disturbing problem, particularly the marked increase in the number of drug addicts. There are more than 10,000 of them in the urban area and the numbers are rising particularly in the 15 to 18 age group. This modern plague of society whose roots are ethical as well as social and cultural, affects all the districts of Turin. Two areas, however, stand out: the well-to-do residential area of the upper class and the working class zone of the proletariat and the immigrants. In other words, the worst affected are the sons of the wealthy and of the poor, while the middle class seems to have greater resistance, thanks to its stronger family ties.

2. Escape through drug abuse

According to the report published by the Commission of Inquiry set up by the Turin City Council and representing all political and social interests, the escape from society through the use of drugs seems to be the result of deep ethical and cultural differences or of the present conditions of economic and social unrest.

The crisis which affects the economic structures of Turin also produces a tendency towards despondency. A marked decrease in the number of marriages and births is evident while the number of those living alone has greatly increased. A large sector of older people lives practically cut off from the rest of the population. There is risk of a wide generation gap appearing in society.

In such a crisis situation we must consider all the causes. If we take account only of the economic aspect we shall have a very limited view of the situation.

There is also a cultural crisis and a crisis of values. The deeply rooted positivism of the two main cultural streams (laicism with its origins in liberalism, and Marxism) is not able to provide an adequate answer to a completely new problem which surpasses the kind of thinking current at the beginning of the century, and because of which Turin is still represented by the dialectical contrast between Agnelli and Gramsci, between rising capitalism and the worker movement, under the control of the Italian Communist Party.

Today the reality is much more complex. Turin cannot surmount the crisis without the launching of new activities by the "third" sector, that is, by scientific research and by the University. In the process all cultural streams are needed including that represented by the Catholic Democrats.

A new dimension of the city cannot be expressed solely in terms of productivity and economy, it demands from all an awareness of human problems, of ethical problems first of all. Only in this way can a new sense of solidarity come to life capable of offering possibilities to future generations and of preventing the consumer society from creating a new ghetto - that of the old.

3. Responsible attention by the Christian educator

The Christian educator should, above all, be conscious of the imperative need to oppose the tendency to seek solutions to the city's problems which are purely materialistic, characterized by the profit motive or by selfish interests which set one sector of society against another.

There is an equally imperative need, in view of existing tensions in society, to give responsible attention to the all round education of the person which goes beyond purely personal interests. For example, it is difficult to oppose the spread of drug abuse even in school if you do not endeavour to form individual consciences to a scale of values which give meaning to the life of a young person and demand commitment and a sense of responsibility to himself and to others.

To be more specific, it seems essential to stress the kind of commitment required at each level of education. In universities and other institutions of higher education which form the future leaders of industry it seems appropriate to insist on their role as enlightened and constructive leaders not only of industry but of society.

It is not, therefore, a question of a school whose aim is preparation for a personal career. The school must also educate the student to make choices which are in accord with the general good. It is development of the human personality which must be given priority in industrial policy, in the conduct of public affairs and in professional activities. This demands a careful study of the life of our society so that an effort and if necessary criticism, can be made to discover new sectors for development and new industrial activity, in other words, to make a contribution to the renewal of the whole life of the city.

In middle and professional schools attention must be paid to the preparation of students for a trade or profession which offers some hope of employment. To this end school programmes must be adapted to the needs of the area, given that a good professional training has important value for the future, for it guarantees employment and protects the person from marginalization and idleness.

The Christian educator must do his best so that the school may not be just an aside in the life of the young person but an essential factor in his personal development and in his finding his place in society.

4. The Lasallian response

Lasallian experience suggests two considerations:

a. You cannot fully respond to the needs of the persons and of society without an education unlimited by the horizontal dimension but envisaging also the vertical dimension. In a society becoming more and more secularized, reference to Gospel values and to a higher Reality seems an essential element for the young person if he is not to be carried away by the myths of the consumer society and the "good life" as an end in itself.

b. From the ideological aims of the 19th century came an ardent aspiration for a new dimension of man with new possibilities towards the absolute. In this context the Lasallian message remains an essential point of reference and should never be watered down for fear of embarrassing certain social and cultural groups.

Three centuries ago, in a France where the middle class was beginning to emerge, St. John Baptist de La Salle gave preference to the poor. Today we must devote our attention to the "new poor" of the post-industrial society. In present day Turin, the "new poor" are the young people threatened by unemployment and emargination and a prey to drug pushers. Whence the special importance today of technical and professional schools which are orientated towards market outlets and are more responsive to known needs.

To provide such a school is to answer in full to the needs of those who otherwise would become the "poor" of twenty-first century society. It is equally important to bring attention to bear on new scientific research and modern technical innovations for it is in these fields that the future of the next and following generations is determined.

5. An agonizing question

There remains the agonizing problem of drug abuse. Here I pose a question: Why do the Lasallian Community and the Lasallian family not enter this field in an educative capacity by the formation of groups of leaders capable of taking the initiative in the fight against drug abuse? In this field there is a void: Few people devote themselves to this work and they often lack the scientific training and the means necessary.

A "school" for volunteers, training the best of the young people, would be a really worthwhile initiative. The same holds good for Turin as for Milan and Rome for the drug problem is the same in all great centres of population.

Like the abandoned children, the vagabonds, the "libertins" of the seventeenth century, the young drug addicts of today are waiting to find on their path a new de La Salle.

Mario BERARDI

Turin City Councillor and
Television journalist.