

## UNEMPLOYMENT

The current news reports about angry and violent teenagers do not just make me sad, they make me feel very sorry for the young (particularly young men ) involved.

A good many years ago we lived in the north, in a lovely city; but we lived very near what used to be called a "sink estate". A huge local authority estate in which few men had steady employment, if indeed they were at home at all. Most of the women worked at the local factory as unskilled packers.

We sent our children to the local Primary School, which put them into a world of which we had no experience. I had come up from London to take a position as a senior council officer, and our life was about as different from that of the other families at the school as could possibly be.

I did not realise just how different until one day I gave our little son his Saturday 10p (that tells you how long ago all this happened) and asked him what he was going to buy with it. "Oh no! I am not going to buy anything, I'm going to save it."  
"No, no" I said, "this is for you to buy something you would like, like sweets or something."  
"No Dad" he said "I'm going to save it because when I grow up, I won't get a job."

I was nearly in tears, because it suddenly brought home to me that this must have been the expectation of all the little lads in that school. Fathers were either unemployed or in prison. Mums had dead-end jobs. They were people who saw themselves as not needed.

And this feeling was widespread. The very next Sunday I met a stranger in the local Quaker Meeting and during our conversation, I asked him what he did. "I am sorry" he said "I'm afraid I am unemployed." He was apologising to me!

It is so easy to complain about youths and the sickening violence we have heard about over the past weeks, but perhaps we should just pause for a moment and think about how and why they became like that. How much of their aggression is really the fault of the society we have created - and tolerate?

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