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DE LA SALLE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING CENTRE DALOA

Daloa is a large town in the west central part of the Ivory Coast, in the forest region. It is caught up in a process of expansion. Immigrants from everywhere, especially from Burkina Faso and Mali, live in very poor, crowded and rudimentary conditions.

The population of Daloa is thought to be 175.000 inhabitants. The Moslems are slightly in the majority and are more vociferous. Catholics make up less than 2.5% of the population of the diocese.

Some 15.000 students follow secondary school courses in three State schools, four private schools, two "general education schools" (CEG), and a State professional school.

Many of these pupils had problems at primary school level: they began too late, they received no support from their family, or they were simply not terribly interested, which is understandable if we remember that this is a forest region where the crushing climate tends to favour a certain "dolce farniente".

The Brothers of the Christian Schools were invited to Daloa by Mgr. Pierre Marie Coty. On the occasion of his consecration as bishop, he had stayed at our Generalate in Rome. It was then that he strongly urged Brother Superior to send Brothers to take over the running of the Lycee II. Before being the Lycee II, it had been the Sacred Heart Catholic College. It was founded and built by the Canadian Brothers of the Sacred Heart, who had been obliged as a result of a series of tragic circumstances to let go of the school.

Three Brothers, then, arrived in Daloa in September 1978. For eight years they worked simply as teachers in this school, but the idea of taking over the running of the school posed insurmountable problems to do with the number of students (some 2.000) and the spirit of the school.

During those eight years a great deal of thinking went on and the result was the creation of a Profes-

sional Training Centre for the outcasts of society: boys and girls, between the ages of 15 and 20 who were too old to begin general secondary education courses, or who had reached the limits of their ability in the first years of their secondary schooling.

These young people who came from both the town and country districts were frustrated in their hopes, did not know where to turn, and had no training for life or for a job.

The La Salle Professional Training Centre wishes, at least in some measure, to help such youngsters. It aims to give these young people who are failures some basic technical instruction which will give them hope and some dignity. For this reason, this Centre stresses the practical side of teaching in particular. It aims to train student apprentices so that they can earn an honest living as more or less expert workers in electrical equipment or as repairers of radios and television sets.

The Centre aims also to make its students responsible and honest citizens in their work and all areas of their lives. This is the special aim of the ethics class, but the whole dynamic ethos of the Centre is directed towards training the personality of the future worker in all its aspects. Teachers and monitors are aware of these aims.

There was no other similar establishment in the Ivory Coast. This means that we had to be pioneers. Not bound by any particular curriculum, not tyrannised by the prospect of State examinations, we can devise our own courses which are adapted to the needs of our special clientele and are accessible to it. We are in a position to choose our methods and approach. We can give our students whatever information or techniques we feel will be of most use to them in the short or long term.

Our teaching tends to be practical. Apart from a few French, maths and electricity lessons, adapted as far as

possible to their ability and work-patterns, our apprentices spend most of their time in the workshops, where they work on repairing radios and television sets, practising setting up circuits in houses that are being built or renovated in town. This work is always supervised and checked by teachers and monitors from the Centre.

The Centre opened in 1986 with 21 students. In 1987, they numbered 53, in October 1988 there were 80 of them. We hope to pass the hundred mark when school starts again in October 1989.

The buildings we use were built by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The land which covers an area of 9 hectares was provided by the town authorities of Daloa. The German Charity organisation MISEREOR has supported the Centre during the first three years of its existence, and we have reason to hope it will continue to do so for another three years. We have already submitted our request.

Is not all this something of a dream? Is not our work here something of a Utopia, something that cannot be achieved?

Our pupils come from country and forest regions. They are lacking in a sense of thinking about the future, about making savings or investing. The idea of keeping a promise is foreign to them, as is love of work and of work well done. They have no team spirit or professional conscience. All these are values that need to be taught and promoted among our students.

And so, our Centre is open to young people whose academic record is somewhat poor. It represents, therefore, a life-belt, a last resort. This is social work in the true meaning of the word. This is why MISEREOR has adopted us, as have other organisations who have come to our support.

From the very first day the Centre opened its doors, it was made clear to parents and students that it did not offer studies leading to a diploma. However, students who did not manage to get a diploma in their general education studies hope to be able to do so by coming to us. It takes all our patience and skills as teachers to wean them away from the glittering prize of THE

DIPLOMA, and a great deal of courage and perseverance to teach them the value of work, and to make them want to have the joy of working for the development of their country, and to take part in the struggle against under-development.

We have taken steps to obtain basic toolkits to give to students when they finish at the Centre, so that they can start a job without too many problems.

The idea of starting up a cooperative is in everybody's mind. We encourage our students when they finish their training to pool their efforts, their work and their skills, so that when they start work it will be with a lot of backing. A cooperative would put at their disposal a sufficiently well equipped workshop where they could work and do some repairs. It would also provide an administrative office, some books, value tables, catalogues, etc. Teachers from the Centre would be able to advise them and, from time to time, could organise refresher and retraining courses for them.

However, we see that there are inherent dangers in such an arrangement. Would our former students see the cooperative as a place of refuge? They have always dreamed of becoming officials. The idea is inbred in them, and it is very difficult to succeed in making producers out of them when their ambition has always been to be consumers.

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And so, the challenge facing us is to transform these young men, who have been disappointed in their ambition of finding a comfortable and secure job as a petty official into free men, determined to become the co-workers of God the Creator through their work for a better world, ready to pool their efforts, so as to play a greater part in the salvation of the world; and as children of God following in the footsteps of Christ, helping those in need and those who are oppressed.

Are we, really, the ones who are dreaming?

The Daloa Community