

## **A united youth can help address unemployment**

**Sibonelo Sosibo\***

The class of 1976 will always be remembered for their fight against white supremacy. Highlighting the inhumanity of the apartheid system, their deviance marked a crucial point in our country's history.

In the ensuing decades, South African youth had been reminded of this courage, while being asked what they have done in their time. Put differently, what has today's youth done to solve their own challenges? The formation of the Fallists movements was, wittingly or not, a step towards addressing this question. University students from diverse backgrounds joined hands to challenge the expensive and Eurocentric education they receive in South Africa.

Demanding the doors of learning to be opened to everyone, including the poorest, they marched to Luthuli House, the Union Building and the Parliament. In a spirit of unity, they became galvanised around a common cause. It is this spirit of unity that we need to address one of our country's most pressing challenges, namely unemployment.

We all know that young people are severely affected by unemployment. The latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey published recently by Statistics South Africa shows that of the 433 000 people who joined the ranks of the unemployed in the first quarter of 2017, approximately 58% were young people aged 15-34. This increased the youth unemployment rate to 38,6%. The survey also revealed that among those with less than matric, the unemployment rate is at 33,1% which is 5,4 percentage points higher than the national average. Unfortunately, government and opposition parties have failed to come up with strategies and tangible plans to reduce the unemployment rate. What haven't been in short supply are promises of job creation and economic growth. It also hasn't helped that young people are often divided on what is needed to ease their entry into the job market.

Sometimes race relations are used to cover the failure of the current affirmative action (read BEE). This system is supposed to create employment and help transform the economy. However, this tender-based system favours the political connected at the expense of many unemployed young people. It has created a cohort of elites who cannot provide sustainable job opportunities. A black young person who is vocal about the failure of this system is called a "traitor, a sellout, a coconut, [and] a bloody agent". Similarly, a white person is labelled a racist and accused of being ignorant about the achievements of the current government. Essentially, this debate points to a bigger challenge, namely the failure of the current plan. As shown by #FeesMustFall, a united youth are capable of coming up with wide ranging solutions that will transcend selfish individual needs. One such solution could be the formation of youth cooperatives where young people can work together to address their communal challenges, while earning money on the side.

It is vital that young people from different backgrounds join forces and come up with suggestions on how to address the challenge of unemployment and the concomitant poverty and inequality. For this to happen, the youth must transcend their own narrow mindedness for a broader inclusive vision. They need to show that their struggle goes beyond the needs of young people and also seeks to highlight their communities' fight against poverty and inequality. The beneficiaries of such a struggle should not just be individuals but entire communities.

As illustrated by the Black Consciousness Movement – the ideology that inspired the class of '76 – a united citizenry can address its challenges. Through its community programs it managed to start clinics and provided employment to their communities. A united youth can unite and transcend race, gender, class and political party affiliations. By doing so, young people would have become their own liberators. As former Justice Dikgang Moseneke reminds us in *My Own Liberator* (2016): “[a]fter all is done and dusted, each young person is her or his own liberator in the personal space but so, too, together with others, in the public and social enterprise. No young person, and indeed no generation, may outsource the task of achieving meaningful and inclusive freedom.”

*\*Sibonelo Sosibo is a Philosophy, Political Science and Economics major at Stellenbosch University.*