

The fastlane

Unemployed youth are increasingly being forced to seek alternative livelihood strategies in the absence of formal sector jobs. The Labour Bulletin spoke to Carolyn Projansky who did a documentary about three street vendors in Pretoria.

These are the heroes of the new SA,' is how she describes the street vendors who are trying to make an honest living against extraordinary odds. They have to battle against huge prejudices from motorists who think they are criminals and harassment from local authorities and police, she says.

'They are misunderstood and treated as a criminal element in society but they are making the only honest choice they are aware of to make a living. There is no-one out there on the streets to help these guys. They do not understand how government works and did not know how to get a licence to be able to legitimately sell goods on the streets. No-one seems to care – it is a tragic waste of youthful potential,' she says.

Projansky's interest in the lives of street vendors was sparked off by her interactions with one vendor (Solly) who sold newspapers. Day after day she would drive past him and buy newspapers. Slowly over time they began to talk and she began to understand the lives of street vendors and the need to humanise them in the face of much discrimination and harassment.

She began to film Solly and two other vendors – Derrick and Dennis – for about a year. All three have attempted to find formal sector jobs but in most cases have not had sufficient money to sustain this. So who



are these street vendors who come up to our car windows and pester us into buying cellular phone accessories, glasses and the like?

Solly (23) worked for a number of years selling newspapers and then through help from one of his customers got a 'real job'. It seemed as if this job was not as it was sold to him and he could not afford the travelling costs to get to work so he left and went back to the streets. He began to sell clothes and took up photography. Then he won R15 000 in the lotto and decided to set up his own business but he has no training and real help.

Derrick sells cold drinks from the same corner that Solly was on. He has

been doing this for a few years. He works alone while his business very much depends on the weather. His ambition is to set up a shop in Mamelodi where his family live.

Dennis, who comes from the rural areas, supports his family through selling cellular phone accessories on the same corner as Solly and Derrick. He is the only member of his family who earns a cash income. He has never had a formal job and has been selling on the streets for four years.

Dennis and Derrick have sold on the same corner for years and if one goes away for a time, there is a clear understanding that when he comes back he gets his spot back.

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