

Migration, Migrant Workers and Trade Unionism



Newsletter

Migration Patterns in Jamaica

by Sandria Tennant Research Assistant, H.L.S.T.U.E.I

Jamaica is no stranger to the concept of migration, whether forced or voluntary. This long history dates back to the days of slavery when million of slaves were captured from Africa and transplanted in the Americas. Migration has become so integrated in our way of life that its very nature and prevalence has provided entertainment material for many of our cultural icons, for example, the Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverly's "Banana Boat", and Buju Banton's "Deportee".

This trend is confirmed in *Table 1* which illustrates the consistently high levels of migration in Jamaica, with very little fluctuations from year to year. The average annual level of migration over the review period, 1994-2004 is 18,620, with the majority of migrants seeking domicile, higher wages and a better quality of life in the U.S.A, followed by Canada and the United Kingdom. Their travels are made less daunting and more diverse with the falling prices of transportation and the increased speed of communication. It is noted that these global changes give workers access to work/life opportunities in a greater number of countries. An ILO study conducted in 2006 on current migration patterns in 152 countries showed that between

1970 and 1990 the number of countries classified as major receivers of labour immigrants rose from 39 to 67 countries, and the world's number of migrants in absolute terms in 2005 is estimated to be at 191 million people, approximately 2.3 per cent of the world's population.

It is important to note that the migration levels in Jamaica, though high, seem to be marginally trending downwards. However, given the instability in the local environment, the restructuring of the private sector, loss of jobs and a general social dislocation it is doubtful that trends will show any significant decline in the future.

Arguments for and against immigration and its value to the Jamaican economy are diverse and often times conflicting. Some welcome the inflow of remittances sent by expatriates to their dependents, the transfer of investments, the increased technology and social capital by residents who return to the island. However, the question of whether the net result is a benefit to Jamaica is of great interest. Whilst, one acknowledges the benefits to be gained from migration, the disastrous impact of "brain drain" on the country's labour force cannot be denied. In an article written by Brenda Wyss in 2004 it is noted that Jamaica is haemorrhaging from teachers and nurses seek-

ing employment in the U.S and the U.K, and that an IMF report estimated that approximately 60% of Jamaican tertiary level graduates migrate to other countries. This continuous exodus undoubtedly creates gaps within the economy, which must have bearing on its health .

A comprehensive assessment of the benefits and losses that result from this phenomenon is timely. The Jamaican government needs to seriously decide how this trend should be treated, whether serious measures should be implemented to stymie, or facilitate its growth? If they choose to facilitate the movement, how should this be done, and what category of workers can the island afford to export?

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/download/perspectives.pdf> (2006)

Wyss, Brenda (2004), 'Global Poaching : Jamaica Brain Drain,' Econ-Atrocity Bulletin, The UltimateGuide to the U.S Economy. <http://www.fguide.org/Bulletin/BrainDrain.htm>



Table: 1 Mainstreams of migration from Jamaica, 1994-2005

Year	U.S.A	Canada	U.K	Total
1994	14,349	3,873	334	18,556
1995	16,398	3,577	242	20,217
1996	19,089	3,138	262	22,489
1997	17,840	2,396	260	20,496
1998	15,146	2,217	325	17,688
1999	14,733	2,331	307	17,371
2000	16,000	2,451	287	18,738
2001	15,393	2,774	346	18,513
2002	14,898	2,456	408	17,762
2003	13,384	1,983	479	15,846
2004	14,414	2,130	500	17,044

Source: Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica, 2005, Planning Institute of Jamaica

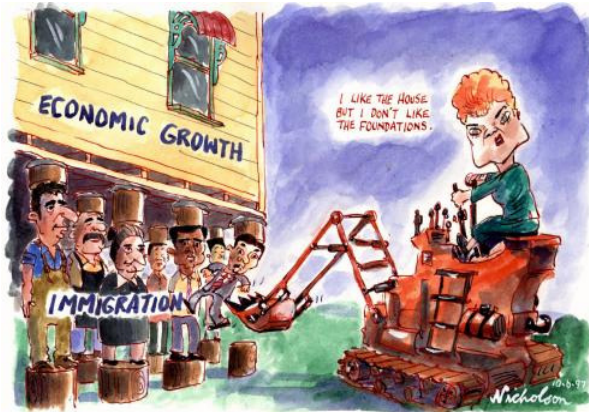
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Migrant Workers

Written by: Sandria Tennant, Research Assistant, H.L.S.T.U.E.I

The working conditions and social treatment meted out to expatriates in other countries are important issues in migration often overlooked in the Jamaica industrial relations discourse. Several ILO studies have highlighted that immigrant workers are among one of the most vulnerable groups in a society. They face racial discrimination, are underpaid, exploited, and are the first to be fired in times of crisis. Often times they gain employment where working conditions are, either, dirty, degrading or dangerous. Wyss (2004)



notes that Jamaican nurses and teachers are subject to such treatment but there is yet to be a systematic study documenting the issues that face migrant workers from Jamaica.

Of even greater importance is the need to determine the level of representation migrant workers have once they leave the country's borders. Much of their fate is dependent on their access to unions that are able to advocate on their behalf, such as,

unions whose purview extend beyond national borders, and who see their roles as more than securing economic benefits for workers, but as well, resolving social issues such as racial and gender discrimination, occupational safety and health, and employees pensionable benefits. Such matters beg the questions; where do Jamaican unions stand in defending workers' rights in this current diverse and complex business environment? Have they been seeking to make themselves relevant, or are past methods being used to resolve current issues?

Wyss, Brenda (2004), 'Global Poaching : Jamaica Brain Drain,' Econ-Atrocity Bulletin, The Ultimate Guide to the U.S Economy. <http://www.fguide.org/Bulletin/BrainDrain.htm>

Guide to the U.S Economy. <http://www.fguide.org/Bulletin/BrainDrain.htm>
http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/cartoon_169.html

*Articles organised by Sainia Davis , Secretary, H.L.S.T.U.E.I

Interesting Statistics—'Brain Drain'

According to ILO's Labour Overview for the Latin America and the Caribbean 2005, as at 1990:

- Total immigrant labour force from Jamaica to the USA – 212,993
- Total professionals & Technicians from Jamaica to the USA – 28,020 Professional and technicians for every 1000 employed immigrant – 131.6 are Jamaicans

- Professional and technicians for every 1000 employed immigrant—131.6 are Jamaicans

Source:

ILO, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.2005. Labour Overview, Latin America and the Caribbean, First Semester Advance Report. <http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/news/labover.pdf>

Trade Unionism in the 21st Century

The International Confederation of the Free Trade Union in its report argued that trade unions that will survive in the 21st century will be those which:

1. 'Have a younger and more diversified membership, more women as members, ecologically aware and that stand firmly in the progressive, democratic camp.
2. Keep in step with the changes in

the labour world, making roads into the informal sector, reaching out to home workers and turning the internet into a mobilizing tool.

3. Impact public opinion, negotiate with the multinationals and world organizations, and speak with one voice at the international level.
4. Remain true to their specific role

in the negotiating process, while forging new alliances with partners in civil society.

Source:

ICFTU (2000), 'Trade Unionism in the 21st Century', *Trade Union World*, April, No.4