

St. Lucia: people and development

This summer, Susan Monas, a social work student at McMaster University in Hamilton, worked as a volunteer worker in St. Lucia with Canadian Crossroads International. As a volunteer worker in this country she was exposed to the social pros and cons of third world development as envisioned by the developed nations. She gives us her impressions and feelings on the matter.

An integral part of the Canadian Crossroads International program is the selection of volunteers across Canada to participate in projects in developing countries. I was one of the volunteers chosen for the summer of 1975. My destination was St. Lucia, one of those "last truly unspoiled Caribbean Is-

lands". My goal was to promote mutual inter-cultural understanding between the local inhabitants and myself. Whether this goal was achieved is debatable.

St. Lucia is a small, undeveloped country situated in the Eastern Caribbean. Lush tropical rain forests, stretches of banana plantations and coconut trees make up the vegetation of the island. The travel brochures justifiably call St. Lucia "Paradise Found". At the other extreme, life in St. Lucia provides a sharp contrast. Enthusiasm with the natural bounty and beauty of the island quickly dissipates when one is confronted with the blatant realities: an excessively high unemployment rate; widespread malnutrition and illiteracy; subtle signs of racial prejudice; grumbings of discontent against corrupt government practices and an over

abundance of white volunteer workers in all sectors of the economy. As one angry St. Lucian friend described it to me, "white capitalist, the white and black opportunists are draining the life blood of the economy, exploiting every conceivable facet of the labor force cheaply and defraudingly."

Unaware of St. Lucia's particular internal problems, I arrived on the island full of all the optimism and energy one would expect of a new and fairly naive volunteer. I was immediately placed, with one other Crossroader, in a school for mentally retarded children. Our initial reception by the four local teachers was cool, to say the least. The presence of an elderly Peace Corps worker as supervisor of the school certainly had its influence over the teachers' reaction. They identified us as being merely white "experts", imported to teach techniques that were quite removed from any understanding of West Indian values and culture.

My expectations of a warm welcome soon disappeared. Days and weeks of frustration and depression went by before I could more objectively perceive the source of the problem. Our presence was resented. Any awareness of the extent and degree of exploitation of the country's resources and people by white investments and development, explains the hostility.

Relationship—building with the local St. Lucians appeared futile. Our alienation left us extremely

vulnerable to accepting social invitations by other overseas volunteers and-or expatriates. The ease with which we could integrate with these cliques posed serious dangers. Membership in exclusive groups activated segregation and reinforced myths of white superiority and wealth.

We accepted invitations with these groups in order to experience one facet of St. Lucian life. However, we were cautious to avoid any active participation with either of the two groups and tried to appear as unimposing and inconspicuous as possible.

Over a month and a half went by before the barriers began to breakdown between the teachers and ourselves. During our first month, we participated in daily activities of St. Lucian life: using our feet as transportation; shopping at the market; traveling on the local buses in the countryside; learning and using the local idioms and 'patois' spoken by the 'honkeys', 'bitch blancs', and 'sallopes white' - stereotyped 'honkeys', 'bitch blancs', and 'sallopes whites' - stereotyped phrases that were frequently used against us. Relationship began to blossom and the goal of mutual understanding and respect had its moments of realization. The development of trusting relationships, promoted the exchange of differing ideas, beliefs and values. I see this accomplishment as fulfilling one of the most important objectives of the crosscultural experience.

There are other considerations

one must take into account. We must seriously examine the impact of our presence in developing countries. Does this presence in such significant fields as education, industry and agriculture not carry with it certain biases, prejudices and values favoring Western ways? How can one truly dispel the myths of Canadian wealth and opportunity when most volunteers hold professional degrees, or, as in my case, return to their own country to complete a university degree - a symbol of status and prestige? How can we justify our presence in the West Indies particularly, when feelings of hostility from low paid blacks and the growing number of unemployed are vented towards whites? How can we most effectively promote the achievement of self-determination amongst the people themselves? Once, when asked what we could do for his people, Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife in Brazil replied instantly, "Go home".

Although the Crossroads experience offers the opportunity to gain insight and awareness into the struggles of peoples in developing countries, it is the returning home that is most significant; it is there that we can relate experience and educate people in the hope that change can be effected in the systems and processes that oppress people.

What we must question is whether or not it is necessary to go abroad in order to effect these changes.

Atlantic studies offered this summer

The fourth annual summer school in Atlantic studies will take place at the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, from July 5 to 23 inclusive.

This program is offered by the Atlantic Canada Institute and was announced March 3 by William Prouty, ACI president and English professor at the Saint John campus of the University of New Brunswick.

"We're a modest, cheerful success story," said Prouty. "In our first three years the number of people enjoying our courses has expanded more than five times. Virtually without exception the students have had an absolutely wonderful time, and several of the lecturers have confessed to us that lecturing to our students is the most stimulating class-room experience they have ever had."

"We have been very fortunate in our students," he continued. "Our courses seem to have attracted some exceptionally interesting people from a very broad cross-section of this country, as well as from the United States."

"We offer, as lecturers, people who are experts in various facets of the life of the Atlantic provinces. In our first year, for example, we had Dr. Marguerite Michaud of Moncton talking on Acadian history, in our second Dr. Peter Paul on Micmac culture, and last year Dr. Eric Ross on historical geography and Dr. Stewart Smith on the historic architecture of the Maritimes. These people are all lively lecturers as well as learned authorities, and they were all very popular indeed with the students. And last year we had two people who came solely to hear Alex Lucas of McGill talk for a week on the novels of Hugh McLennan but they found some of the other classes equally stimulating.

Teachers in particular are finding the courses in Canadian literature, history and art history very helpful, Prouty added. He said ACI is beginning to see various ways in which it can be useful as well as bringing people

together for their mutual enjoyment.

The program includes informal classroom lectures and discussions in the mornings with the afternoons free.

Each year sees a variation in the courses, said Prouty. Last year the focus was on "Facets of Maritime Identity"; this year emphasis will be given to the Loyalist migration to the Maritimes from the United States, since 1976 is the bicentenary of the American Declaration of Independence. There will also be courses in Atlantic area literature, history and archeology, and a new course dealing with the history of transportation.

The session is divided into three one-week periods, each independent of the others; students may stay for one, two or three weeks, and everyone is welcome.

Prouty added that the fees will be only slightly higher this year. As usual there will be a \$5.00 advance registration fee, after which the tuition charge for a single person will be \$45.00 for a family \$50.00.

Charges for accommodation at the university residences had not yet been fixed, he said, but they will still be moderate, even if higher than last year. The 1975 charge was only \$20.00 a week for a single room, \$65.00 a week for a fully furnished apartment with two double bedrooms.

"This is the best bargain I know of in holidays," said Prouty, modest but very cheerful. "You can't do better than what will still be approximately \$115.00 a week for a family, which includes morning classes for everyone, as well as the apartment. What you spend on food of course depends on yourselves, but there's an excellent supermarket right across the highway from the university residence, and the strawberry fields are just a mile or so beyond the university. Come and join us, pick your own strawberries, your own classes, your own beaches. There's a wide choice of everything."

For further information, write to the Department of Extension, the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

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