

# Jamaica's development

by Robert S. Anderson

An aging orange Volkswagen rolled into the shadows beside Montego Bay's most popular jerk pork and chicken joint. The early night crowd in July 1984 paid it no attention. After all, a full moon was rising over the main tourist strip. Nursing a broken shoe, the skinny driver walked back and forth nervously to talk to the dark shape inside the car. Eventually the shape disentangled itself from the shadows and lumbered toward the barbeque pits. Dressed in mufti green pants, white T-shirt and huge black glasses, he leaned his powerful bulk upon the desk. A glinting machine gun, nonchalantly slung across his back, clunked against the wood. Having ordered his pork, he asked for "Festival", a dumpling Jamaicans prefer to accompany the hot spicy meat. "No flour in town now," was the reply. The machine gun shifted irritably. "Ah maan, no Festival? No dyan flour?" The running shoes scuffed the stones. Some eyes flicked towards him. "Just what de hell is this country coming to?"

Prophecy is thick on the Jamaican ground. A strong biblical consciousness, matched by armies of outside experts make visions of the future blossom in the heat. But what is left when metaphors for the country's development are stripped away, and when the cunning humour about the uncertain future of the people has chilled on the lips? Other models are concealed in these prophecies. The Haitianization of Jamaica, sending boat people sailing precariously to America, clutching pieces of gold. The Colombianization of Jamaica, resulting in a pernicious integration of government and narcotics. The Puerto Ricanization of Jamaica, with an off-shore quasi-state economic arrangement, and of course the Cubanization of Jamaica, where the political party now out of power would integrate the country with a Soviet-guided system while pursuing radical domestic alternatives. Dramatic though they sound, such visions are becoming commonplace perceptions. Each is simply borrowed, after all, from Jamaica's turbulent neighbourhood.

While this speculation is intriguing, it is the recent past which turns out to be extraordinary. What has occurred in Jamaica and its neighbourhood since 1980 is having a profound and contradictory effect in the country. Has the economy performed well under new management? What has become of democracy since the last serious election in 1980? Is there a sea-change in social relations? What happened to Jamaicans' desire to migrate and their decision to return?

The answers to all these questions have vitally affected Canadian relations with Jamaica, and thus indirectly with the Caribbean.

There can be few poor countries where the historic depth and the current range of Canadian interests are so great as in Jamaica. Thousands of Canadians have contact with the country. Jamaica has enjoyed the attention of two recent Prime Ministers; Trudeau appreciated Manley's wit and respected his politics, and Turner, when trying to decide whether to contest the Liberal leadership was playing tennis on the north coast. The Canadian establishment is quite old. Scotiabank opened its first office in Kingston a hundred years ago, and Canadian banks controlled 50% of the country's assets in 1983. Canadian companies have had thousands on their payrolls in Jamaica, although this has not grown much during Seaga's government. Air Canada is the oldest continuous carrier to the island, starting in 1948. The red bauxite soils have yielded millions to Alcan, who are now as heavily in the dairy business as they are in mining. Toronto's Weston family built an exquisite resort on the north coast. The feet of three generations of Jamaicans trudged their paths in Bata's shoes until factories closed suddenly in 1983, defeated by currency exchange regulations and the higglers. Salt fish from Canada's eastern shore fishery has been a staple food for over a hundred years, followed by Canadian flour.

There is now a well-developed trade with Jamaica, overshadowed only by bauxite and alumina imports, which are, after all, an intra-company transfer. In the three years from 1981 to 1983 exports to Jamaica were valued C\$213.5 m; C\$70.0 m in food, C\$16.6 m in paper, and C\$26.7 m in machinery. Jamaica sold C\$41.4 m worth of goods in Canada in this period, apart from the C\$291.0 m worth of bauxite/alumina shipped by Alcan. Some of the exports to Jamaica were financed by CIDA grants and credits, for example \$10 m worth of fish in 1984. Canadian fertilizer through CIDA enjoyed 80% of all sales in Jamaica in 1983 and 1984, and Canadian veterinary drugs through a line of credit have displaced competitors. Bridges around the island have been built by the Canadian program of assistance, and more important, Canadian training programs were conducted for both the police and military forces.

Jamaica is definitely in-between. It is in an economic decline which could lower its per capita income from US

---

*Robert S. Anderson teaches communication at Simon Fraser University. He acknowledges the collaboration of Lloyd Baron, also of SFU, in the research on which this article is based.*