

## Canadian interests

In Canadian eyes Jamaica has always stood in-between the few rich countries and the sea of poor countries as a country one could count on. Among Jamaicans, Canada has been perceived as being in between the US (and earlier Britain) and all those other countries (rich or poor) who, "don't speak our language or know anything about us". Almost American, with a dollar nearly as strong, accessible if chilly, Jamaicans could also count on Canada. "A decent people," a public health nurse told me. Even within the younger generation, raised on the fact of American predominance, the Canadian connection was deemed useful because it was "in-between". Over 80,000 Canadians visited Jamaica last year and 26,000 Jamaicans visited Canada along with 2,500 temporary agricultural workers to Ontario.

Two signs of the depth of Canadian-Jamaican relations will explain the extent to which these countries see each other in this way. The IMF talks tough and Canada would generally endorse its painful recipe for "structural adjustment", yet Canada has been formally representing Jamaica within the IMF's system of executive directors. So the Canadian voice must remain silent on the IMF's treatment of the island. And when Ottawa protested the Grenadan invasion and not having been informed about it, Seaga chose not to criticize Canada publicly and apologized privately for the embarrassment caused. During Trudeau's customary lunch at the Commonwealth Conference soon afterward, he asked CARICOM leaders about bilateral relations following the Canadian protest; the replies were predictably positive. On the surface nothing had changed.

## Questionable conclusions

Can Jamaica's economic decline be arrested — and at what point? Are there unseen sources of resilience and growth to which the government and people can turn? Where is the discipline required to achieve these goals? Can 'reliance' and 'sufficiency', buzz words of the 1970s, mobilize many Jamaicans now? Can the favourable agricultural factors be translated into abundance, feed most people and still be exported to Toronto? Can a sense of security be created in which a man can safely raise a dozen goats, a woman can leave her goods in the market to go to the health clinic, or the corner store operator can stop sleeping beside his fridge at night?

Is it not curious that Jamaica has been so much favoured by the most powerful nation on earth — only 11/2 hours flight to the north — yet experiences these difficulties and has a people who feel so utterly vulnerable? While some efforts have been made to achieve a balance of payments, Jamaica was living beyond its means. Its debt service ratio is now about 40%. At what point does the cost of structural inequality become decisively intolerable? Will those who believe in the inevitability and desirability of class conflict win the day? What role will the man with the machine gun play? Would flour and dumplings make a difference to him?

Alternative models of development are already present in the neighbourhood. It is not yet clear how changes in leadership and government in Washington, Ottawa or Kingston could make any one model a more likely future for Jamaica. □

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