

THE BRAIN DRAIN

Dimensions of the Flow



MIGRANTS

On a train



A Medical Check

The 'Brain Drain' has caused increasing concern to many countries of the Third World in recent years. This phenomenon by which the most educated and skilled of one country emigrate to another, has continued to engage the attention of various authorities in this country as well. In Sri Lanka's case the brain drain is applied to the situation where many of our highly trained personnel are being drawn into employment in the rich countries of the West. The resulting loss to the country is considerable. Some developing countries, especially where such skills and abilities are rare and urgently needed have adopted possible counter measures to minimise this flight of talent. Many developing countries see the emigration on a substantial scale of high level personnel not merely as affecting the welfare of the home country and its possibility of retarding development but also the possibilities of such a trend frustrating international efforts to narrow the gap between the richer and poorer countries.

There have been attempts to quantify the loss to Sri Lanka as a result of this outflow. Some estimates contrasting what we have lost from their reverse flow of aid as against what we have received in foreign

aid show Rs. 128 million per year as the loss incurred by Sri Lanka whilst the aid given to the rich countries by this outflow is approximately Rs. 110 million per year. This is to be contrasted with the figure of Rs. 88 million per year for the total technical aid received by the country. The reverse flow of aid by Sri Lanka to the rich countries is thus seen to be considerably higher than the flow of aid to us.

On the more concrete level this means that for example compared with the 128 doctors emigrating to Australia and New Zealand the reverse flow of medical and technical aid is small. This contrasts strongly with the early 1950's when for example New Zealand's contribution in setting up a school dental service was considerably of a higher order than the reverse flow then.

Recently the reasons and dimensions for the accelerated reverse flow which is a worldwide phenomenon are beginning to emerge. Baldwin estimated in 1970 that the total scientists, engineers and doctors lost per year from the entire Latin American continent as 600. (This is to be contrasted with the figure for Sri Lanka for the year May 71 to April 72 which is 379 for all professionals leaving this small country, a large

percentage of which were doctors scientists and engineers). The figures for the Arab world given by Zahlan in 1968 are also very interesting. For instance according to him between one-half and two-thirds of Arab Ph.D. scientists and two-thirds of the engineers live outside the Arab world. In fact according to calculations by Zahlan in 1972 of Arab Ph.D. scientists engaged in research of any kind only about 6% are now in an Arab country.

There are so many parallels in the brain-drain from Third World countries that it is to be seen as a single world phenomenon. This special issue is therefore devoted to these common factors that govern this phenomenon and we look in depth at these processes.

.....this attitude that explains the shameful fact, among others, that so many young people from underdeveloped countries, whose studies have been paid for directly or indirectly by the sacrifices of their most underprivileged compatriots, go to live in rich countries, especially the United States, as doctors, instead of serving their own people.

"Now They are Talking"
by Jean Schwoebel
Development Forum Jan.-Feb. 1976

The obvious attractions for emigrants for jobs in the West are the high salaries paid and in some cases the relatively higher professional satisfaction. The high salaries are to be seen in perspective of the fact that the Western countries taken as a whole enjoy a high standard of living with even wages of workers in the West being higher than those of professionals in Sri Lanka. The contrast of salaries being a reflection of this contrast of national economic well-being is but a result of the unequal economic relationship between two sets of countries.

The reasons for migration are built into this international economic structure and those push and pull factors that contribute to the brain drain are but reflections of these wider forces. Nikolinakos's article on the reasons for migration identify these issues principally for the case of migration of labour to the European Economic Community. However his conclusions are valid for the general migration of workers—both hand and brain—to the centres of affluence.

The person who migrates does so with feelings of expectation and promise from the adopted land. But in the adopted land he is an outsider, subjected to feelings of alienation and insecurity arising from the present racialism and the past colonial heritage of the adopted country. In the article on the role of the Third World intellectual Sivanandan the Director of the Institute of Race Relations in Britain describes perceptively the subjective impact of the adopted country. In the article by Sunanda Mahendra (who recently wrote a novel on these aspects) the author explores the ambivalent feelings of joy and disappointment in the migrant.

The rest of the coverage on the brain drain we devote to comments arising from the article by Balasuriya on the same subject. The first by Karunaratne questions some aspects of the calculation used and this is replied by Nath Amarakone on whose original calculations Balasuriya's work rests. The second is by Jones from Fiji who questions some aspects of Balasuriya's prescriptions and this is replied by the former.