

Interview with a "Drainee"

The previous contributions have indicated the objective dimensions of the immigration pattern as well as the response of immigrants to the host country. In an interview below we ask some pertinent questions from a person immigrating to an African Country as part of the brain drain. This University teacher is immigrating to an African country to set up a post-graduate department in a social science.

Q. What are the broad reasons for your emigrating?

A. The reasons are twofold, personal and professional. On the personal side I feel that firstly the education aspirations of my children are not being fulfilled. The switch-over of the medium of instruction to the national language was an issue necessary in the country but it has meant a paucity of reading material for our children because of insufficient literature in the national languages. This denies them a full Secondary and University education. Also professional people in this country are comparatively underpaid, when one considers the rates of pay in the West and also other developing countries. The recent rise in the cost of living has eroded most of what a professional earns. Real living standards and inflation have eaten into savings such as the Provident Fund.

Professionally the personal satisfaction of University teaching is far less than it used to be. Because of the lack of literature, the importance of the information that the teacher imparts has become unrealistically exaggerated. This gives an aura of omniscience to the teacher because he becomes the sole source of information and this is detrimental for both the student and the teacher. The main task of University education is to impart knowledge and to make students think clearly and creatively

to solve problems. It is very difficult today to get research journals which are absolutely essential for any University education. Further the environment and facilities for research specially for University personnel are insufficient in comparison with other developing countries.

Q. How would you think you would find life in the country of adoption?

A. The country I am going to, I believe in terms of education is in a state that Ceylon was in the 1930's. This country however has seen it rewarding to provide correct research facilities for vital areas like Land Use. This is a subject which in a country like Sri Lanka, with its new Land Reforms, should be strongly pursued.

Q. Yet, it could be said that you have been educated at the expense of the country and you are now leaving for a rich country.

A. I agree with the sentiments behind the question, but it is an ideal situation and one has to weigh one's personal factors too. My decision to leave was not easy and was taken with mixed feelings. I am going to a Third World country so that the charge of going to the West cannot be made against me. Further, countries as different as Japan and China have built up academic and professional traditions which place the academic and professional community in a correct atmosphere. I think if we have to prevent the 'Brain Drain' we will have to develop a suitable climate heretoo. For example, we have to decide whether we are going to give more opportunities to those engaged in speculative activities or to our professional men to carry out their legitimate duties; and also whether the objective assessments of our professionals will be given due weightage in this country.

The outflow of trained personnel from developing countries to the developed countries has reached massive proportions in recent years. Scientists, engineers, doctors, surgeons and other skilled people from Asia, Africa and Latin America seem to be leaving the countries of their birth in very large numbers to settle in the United States of America, Canada and Europe. For the developing countries this implies a significant loss of human capital and a substantial diminution of their technological capability. For the receiving countries, on the other hand, such an inflow has helped to increase their numbers of technically qualified people.

Brain drain of this kind is essentially a reverse transfer of technology. Through this process technologically backward poorer countries pass on a substantial part of their technological assets each year to richer countries...

"The Reverse Transfer of Technology" study by the UNCTAD Secretariat, 1975.