

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 75

Immigration and work – implications for the Caribbean

By Nadine Bushell 19.11.06

Member of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice

With talks of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), we hear many Trinbagonians voicing concerns of persons from other islands coming to take job opportunities away from locals as well as the possibility of these additional persons placing a strain on the country's social infrastructure. Are these fears justified?

Many of us see immigrants as an obstacle to the country's development. The compendium however tells us that "immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it. In the modern world, where there are still grave inequalities between rich countries and poor countries, and where advances in communications quickly reduce distances, the immigration of people looking for a better life is on the increase.

These people come from less privileged areas of the earth and their arrival in developed countries is often perceived as a threat to the high levels of well-being achieved thanks to decades of economic growth. In most cases, however, immigrants fill a labour need which would otherwise remain unfilled in sectors and territories where the local workforce is insufficient or unwilling to engage in the work in question."

Relating this to the Caribbean's case, the population of the region is largely a migrant one, starting with the Europeans, then slaves being brought from Africa, the East Indians from India, the Chinese, Syrians and Portuguese.

While it is true that the conditions of migration in the Caribbean have been very poor and immoral especially as it related to the slave trade and indentureship periods, there were other periods when migration especially to Trinidad and Tobago has ensured the development of the country's natural resources.

In the Post-emancipation period Trinidad faced severe labour shortages which were filled by the following groups

- 1834-1848 - West Indians
- 1834-1860 – Portuguese (mostly Maderians)
- 1836-1840 – Europeans including English, Irish, Scots, Germans, Swiss, and French
- 1841 – Americans from Pennsylvania and Baltimore
- 1844-1917 – East Indians
- 1849-1866 – Chinese

Additionally, the discovery of oil in Trinidad resulted in an economic boom. Many workers were needed for the industry and experienced oil men came from all over the world. Inexperienced labour came primarily from local sources, as well as other West Indian islands. Many of us have ancestors

from St Vincent, Barbados and Grenada and the other Caribbean islands. Other immigrants included Corsican, Lebanese and Syrian merchants (TriniGenweb, Caribgenweb Pages for Trinidad and Tobago <http://www.rootsweb.com/~ttowgw/comings/index.htm>).

“Institutions in host countries must keep careful watch to prevent the spread of the temptation to exploit foreign labourers, denying them the same rights enjoyed by nationals, rights that are to be guaranteed to all without discrimination. Regulation immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). In this context, the right of reuniting families should be respected and promoted (*Familiaris Consortio*). At the same time, conditions that foster increased work opportunities in people’s place of origin are to be promoted as much as possible (*Gaudium et Spes*).”

What does this mean for us as we now implement the CSME, which developed because of the need to deepen the integration process and strengthen the Caribbean Community in all of its dimensions to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by changes in the global economy such as liberalisation of trade, the deepening phenomenon of globalization and the emergence and expansion of regional economic blocs?

The movement of labour must therefore be regulated in a systematic manner, which ensures fairness and minimum disruption to the local community’s economic and social life as well as that of the lives of the countries that labour is coming from.

With CSME,

- Arrangements are being put into place to ensure that qualifications, certifications and skills are accredited regionally to ensure equivalency and common standards. This means however that all learning institutions must ensure that they meet minimum standards to ensure that all persons have the same opportunities to apply for jobs throughout the region and definitely in their home country.
- There must be proper systems for the issuing of work permits to ensure there is no discrimination or promotion of fraudulent activities.
- The free movement of labour must take place through measures such as removing all obstacles to intra-regional movement of skills, labour and travel, harmonising social services (education, health, etc.) and providing for the transfer of social security benefits.

Next week we look at the world of agriculture and the right to work.

Persons interested in purchasing the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, should contact the Justice Desk, Archbishop’s House at 622-6680.