



Environment vs job, economic development

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By Ronald Mason

The Portland Bight Protected Area (PBRA), established in 1999, is in the South Coastal region of Jamaica. It covers 520 sq km of land and 1356 sq km of ocean. This massive protected space, in relation to Jamaica, is home to some birds, iguanas, crocodiles, manatees, sea turtles. It also is home to 50,000-plus persons, two ports, [sugar estates](#), bauxite-alumina plant, electric plants, and on the commercial units.

The PBRA is now under consideration to be the host for a new port. This would seem to be purely an economic activity subject to feasibility, technical and market study. This is especially so since the area is not all virgin. The Caribbean Coastal Area Management (C-Cam) foundation is the body charged with conserving PBRA. The group in 2012 agreed on a final draft management plan for review and ratification. A recent report made reference to the PBRA as having commerce value beyond the immediate economic returns. All these definitions, though only a year in the public domain, are about to come under immense scrutiny.

The immediate prospect is in placing a value on iguana, thunder snake, blue-tailed galliwasp, coney and an

endemic frog found only in PBRA. The continued sole occupation by these creatures is likely to be threatened by the creation of a US\$1.5 billion investment in the marine industry to be built in the PBRA.

IMPACT ON ECONOMY

The magnitude of the proposed marine investment must be viewed within the likely impact on the economic fortunes of our country. Here are some food for thought. Three thousand jobs for the duration of the construction and 15,000 permanent comparable well-paying jobs directly and in the supporting sectors. Jobs, jobs and more jobs coupled with economic growth and revenue. All these are most desperately needed in a country facing continued decline and growing unemployment. You may very well hear about saving or heritage.

Let us have eco-friendly [sustainable tourism](#). At some point, national priorities should be placed front and centre. I join the call to environmentalists Ingrid Parchment and Diana McCaulay and others to let the dialogue begin, but without the holding of hard ends. The country needs your help. All of this development has a tie-in to the expanded Panama Canal due to open in April 2015, and also the intended Nicaraguan Canal. Time is of the essence and hot air earns very little.

JLP in the present state

The Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) is an honourable institution. It has played a constructive role in the 70 years of its existence and should be setting the stage for a contributory future. But, alas, one is again hearing reports of internal fractions and machinations. The history of the party has been lettered with the aftermath of the contending for leadership. This in and of itself is not a bad thing. One does not enter partisan politics in Jamaica without a healthy ego, a strong belief in your leadership qualities and the demand for adulation from your peers. How one brings this to the table is the test. The JLP has tended to treat it with either petulance or 'one donship'. Remember Robert Lightbourne, Ken Jones, Edward Seaga and Bruce Golding. Here we are again. No numerical figure has yet been attached to the 'gang'. Will it be five or 11? The desire to lead will be manifested. I have no bankable information, but a belief that a [leadership challenge](#) may well be on for the conference set for November, 2013.

The contenders, undeclared as they are, report the desire for the JLP to be both an election machinery and a think tank. The street smarts, hustings in your face, confrontational style as contrasted to the cerebral, button-down wizardry and staid delivery of facts and thought. Should the contest be held, the outcome will not only declare a winner, but speaks volumes as to the future of the party. A loss, the resulting recrimination and follow-on healing take time. Time, which could provide the PNP to call an early election.

GENERAL CONSENSUS

At this time, the country needs a general consensus, my personal view is for a coalition, to face the future. The JLP should spend their energies in fine-tuning their opposition and offer constructive, tangible support, where practical, but on the road in the application of my way or the highway would not be in the best interest of us all.

The current state of the JLP leads to thoughts on core values. The socialism of the People's National Party is in contrast to an indefinable core value of the JLP. I am a bit confused when the leader Holness is reported to have labelled "progressive" some thoughts of JLP. Progressive, in the Jamaican context? What if the JLP were to state unequivocally that they support the least intrusive Government? The job creation would be dominated by the private sector, whose business decision would be influenced by tax policy, enabling business climate and the profit motive.

Would the JLP be prepared to set the direction for health, education, criminal justice and infrastructure development? Reduce government demand on the capital markets to allow interest rates to be determined by demand and supply. Come on, JLP, provide a reason to be different. Have an internal debate on the path forward, then this leadership will rise. That's what the JLP can be. However, if you insist, we will enjoy the

sideshow.

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