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Non-Economic Factors Influencing Rural Development Planning

By

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In a recent article, Mr. H. P. Jacobs gives an interesting and suggestive sketch of the history of agricultural policy in Jamaica since the 1930's.¹ I have been struck by a contrast implicit in his account between the earlier "period of optimism" (say, 1935-50) and the present. The leaders in the period, as Mr. Jacobs says, "looked forward to complete rural reconstruction"; it would be hard to say whether a phenomenon like the co-operative movement was looked on as primarily economic or primarily social, since it was expected to contribute to development on both fronts. By contrast, the agricultural policies now being put forward by government technicians, university economists and agricultural spokesmen stress the technical and economic aspects to the virtual exclusion of others.²

It seems worth while exploring why this narrowing of the nature of agricultural development policies has taken place, since it may throw light both on the particular problems of rural Jamaica and on the general relation between economic and other factors in rural development in the West Indies. We can evidently dismiss immediately the first possibility which offers itself — that rural social problems can be ignored because they do not exist. On the contrary, of all the "problems" which disturbed Jamaicans in the 1930's it would be hard to name one which is not still with us, and most have hardly diminished in prevalence or acuteness.

A second possibility which presents itself is that a satisfactory and self-contained social policy has been developed which, without yet having achieved success, offers such promise that we can concentrate on the economic aspects of policy. This appears equally untenable. There are, it is true, a large number of programmes in the field of rural welfare. Some of these are specific in function but universal in coverage, or at least limited only by functional needs, like education, literacy, or probation. Some are general in function and limited in coverage only by resources, like community development. Some with more or less specific functions are limited in coverage to certain

¹See "Introduction" to R. Kirkwood, *A Farm Production Policy for Jamaica*, Sugar Manufacturers' Association of Jamaica, 1968.

²This is true of the programme put forward in the pamphlet cited above, with its emphasis on a "commercial" approach to farming. It is equally true, surprisingly, of much of the writing under the aegis of *New World* and by the "integration" economists, who are evidently aware of social problems but pay little attention to the micro-structure of social relations as a limitation on the feasibility of social policies, or to social goals as distinct from economic ones.

industrial groups, like the Jamaica Agricultural Society or the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Board. It would be hard to maintain that these constitute a rural social policy, with defined aims and co-ordinated means for attaining them.

A third possibility is that we have accepted tacitly that no progress is possible in the non-economic spheres without successful economic development — that the latter is either a sufficient, or at least a necessary condition for social progress. If we believe that economic development in agriculture guarantees social progress we are surely showing great historical naivete, comparable to that of the philanthropists who saw the problem of emancipation in the 1830's as solved simply by making the slave a wage earner and the slaveowner a capitalist employer. We may of course define economic development in such a way as to include social development; but in this case we must not rest content with general criteria based on income distribution, local ownership or land tenure, but must be prepared to envisage the total set of social relationships to be created by our economic policies and the social as well as the economic means of transition.

A more tenable proposition, and one for which it would be easier to find evidence in official statements of policy, is that while economic development does not guarantee progress in other ways it sets a limit to social policy. Successful economic development creates a general surplus of resources with which to generate and facilitate change, and in particular it should in theory ease the financial burden on the government sector which we have accepted as the agency mainly responsible for promoting social development. But this argument holds only if we consider social problems to be independent of the rate of economic development; if the latter changes the form of the non-economic problems and increases the diversion of resources required to deal with them, it is not sensible to postpone the solution of social problems until we have reached some minimum level of national income.

I

If we accept, then, that there is no satisfactory logical justification for the shift in viewpoint on Jamaican agricultural development since the "period of optimism", we should perhaps examine the situation in historical terms. I have said that the distinguishing feature of the earlier period was the widespread assumption that there were available means of change which promoted the values of all groups and were retrograde in respect to none. The breakdown of the assumption can be seen in terms of three phenomena: the failure of specific means of change, the growing differentiation of interests and values within the society, and the inadequacy of the technical knowledge on which new programmes could be based.

The failures (or unexpectedly limited successes) of specific means of change are no doubt partly to be blamed on lack of technical knowledge and lack of resources. But a more general factor was the too easy assumption

that leaders and led shared the same interests and values; or that any divergencies could be overcome by education and persuasion. This assumption was no doubt justified in part by the importance given to the aim of national political independence. There are many precedents for an alliance of divergent groups in the immediate cause of independence, but my impression is that in the Jamaican case the alliance was peculiarly easy. Part of the explanation is perhaps that the colonial educational system (for all its faults) had created a set of values shared widely which not only helped unite leaders and led, but also channelled change in a direction acceptable to the colonial authorities. There is a good deal of common ground between the Inns of Court, the Royal Reader and the Moyne Commission Report. Another factor was the importance of clientage relationships in Jamaican society, which not only went along with a weak differentiation of classes and interest groups but also meant that when the patron became a more or less progressive nationalist his clients tended to accept his leadership. Whatever its origins, the assumption of common interests produced a conception of development which ignored the fact that successful programmes of change make a substantial number of people (not merely a minority of "exploiters") objectively or subjectively worse off.

The differentiation of values and interests which could be ignored in 1938 has become more and more evident in the intervening years. At one level, it can be seen in the recognition that the political, social and economic objectives as they were envisaged in 1938 are not necessarily coincident or even mutually supporting. At another level, it has become clearer that in each of these three fields there may be a choice of objectives. Jamaican nationalism may conflict with West Indian political identification; maximizing the growth of the national income may conflict with the objective of fuller employment; allocation of roles on the grounds of individual competence may conflict with the desire to destroy the correlation between colour and class. At a third level the differentiation of economic groups, and of the roles associated with them has proceeded much further. This has affected the relation between wage worker and employer, between wage worker and smallholder, between smallholder and planter, between agricultural and industrial worker and between commercial and industrial employer, to name only some of the points where obvious conflicts of interest can be shown.

A specially important aspect of differentiation is that associated with the political changes since 1938. Before that time, the legislative role was fulfilled by persons who were officials or business or professional men primarily and to whom the securing of votes as such was less important than retaining the support of limited interest groups. The development of the parliamentary system has created the role of the politician whose prime concern is securing the mass vote, either through a party or a party-affiliated union, and whose interest lies therefore in expressing, rather than changing, the existing desires of the electorate over a short-time horizon. This group is therefore differ-

entiated from the officials, whose interest is in maintaining the viability of the government machine over a longer time span. The officials are differentiated in turn from the academics, with whom they have much in common, by the fact that their interest is territorial (in the Jamaican case) and they must necessarily look with caution on a widening of their group beyond territorial limits, whereas the academics group is more likely to take up a regional or even international point of view. This is neatly illustrated in the field of agricultural policy, where the politician has tended to sponsor measures like traditional land settlement, the official longer-term technical and economic changes, and the academic, measures of inter-territorial co-ordination.

The third of the three historical factors cited above, the inadequacy of technical knowledge on which to base new programmes of agricultural change, is perhaps the most relevant to this seminar, and I shall concentrate on those aspects of it which fall outside the boundaries of conventional economics; further, in view of the inclusion of a separate paper on demography, I shall not try to deal exhaustively with that aspect. However, I cannot really isolate a "non-economic" area for study since it is part of my argument that all other variables react on the economic possibilities.

The planners of change in the "period of optimism" were not professional social scientists, but lawyers, journalists and technicians taking their ideas from wherever they could find them. If one looks at the scope of the social sciences at that time one sees that much of what these had to offer was of little relevance to the problems in hand. General economics was firmly set in the individualistic, laissez faire mould of the nineteenth century; the most exciting intellectual development was the "Keynesian revolution", which was irrelevant to agricultural transformation in Jamaica. Even the heresies — socialism, social credit, Veblenism — took as their starting point an individualistic, industrial society. The co-operative movement was perhaps the least irrelevant model that economics had to offer, but even here experience taken from European farms or industrial workers was a poor guide to the problems co-operatives would meet in Jamaica.

Sociology and anthropology had little more to offer. That part of sociology which was capable of providing recipes for change was heavily urban in its orientation. Rural questions were the province of anthropology, but they were studied still in a spirit which attached more importance to the timeless institutions of pre-commercial societies than to the nature of change in societies already commercialized though poor. The applied anthropology which had developed as an adjunct to colonial administration in India and Africa was an exception, but here the cast of anthropological thought which was developed in a different context tended to become a hindrance when transferred to the West Indies.

Political science, like economics, offered an orthodoxy — parliamentary or congressional government — which was particularly likely to go unquestioned

in the "period of optimism" because so many of the then leaders were lawyers for whom the parliamentary model was part not only of their political, but also of their professional thinking. Its heresies — anarchism, syndicalism, the corporate state, even Marxist-Leninism — were equally European and industrial in background. In other colonial settings it had interbred with anthropology to produce novelties such as indirect rule and the village council, but these were too specific to particular cultural and historical settings to have much relevance for the West Indies.

But if measures of rural development conceived under the influence of the current orthodoxies of the 1930's — or at least without any firm basis in alternative theories — proved often to give unexpected and disappointing results (as in the case of trade unions, commodity associations and extension services), we should surely be able to hope that a generation later the social sciences would be able to give a much firmer basis for prescriptions for social change. This hope, I think, is only partially fulfilled. In all fields there is a lack of operational propositions at the level of the micro-structure, on which one can base policies of change. This is not to say that no progress has been made in the social sciences in the West Indies, but only that in different ways the developments have stopped short of operationally useful prescriptions of the kind needed for successful rural development.

In economics, for example, a substantial amount of work has been done at two levels. In the 1950's there was a certain amount of research into the micro-units of the West Indian economy — the peasant farm, the plantation, the household (but, surprisingly, hardly at all into the non-farm enterprise). More recently some impressive work has been done at the level of the whole economy and of the inter-industry table. But the work of the first period was too static, and that of the present is too aggregative, to give us a reliable basis on which to predict how the behaviour of the micro-units can be modified to put into effect a given macro-policy. (This may reflect a general weakness of current economic theory. Every macro-theory rests on assumptions about the micro-functioning of the economy, unless it is a mere tautology. Current macro-economics, particularly growth theory, tacitly assumes a competitive micro-economic analysis which would no longer be acceptable as an explicit framework for micro problems.) In the field of demography there seem to be certain parallels with economics; the bulk of the work done has taken place either at the aggregative level, or through a rather static analysis of the behaviour of the individual which does not provide us with the knowledge needed if this behaviour is to be influenced to produce a desired aggregative result. A weakness at the same level seems to me traceable in the other social sciences in the region.

II

If this weakness is to be remedied, we should perhaps shift our attention to a particular kind of applied research — not the kind which consists in the

preparation of a prescription for a pressing problem within the limits of existing theory, but the kind which uses current problems as a starting point for modifications of and extensions to that theory. It may be worth venturing some suggestions on the directions in which such research is likely to lead us. It must surely mean exploiting a field which has so far been surprisingly neglected — the spatial organization of social activity. No development plan can be meaningful without some amount of spatial analysis. But in Jamaica the institutional arrangements for incorporating such analysis have been weak and fragmented. Traffic analysis, land capability surveys, urban and agricultural zoning all obviously have a spatial element; but it appears that the co-ordination of such programmes has either gone by default or has devolved on the so-called Town Planning Department which in turn has been allowed a very small share in the main planning process. In rural development planning the spatial consequences of social and economic change will call for some very interesting and sophisticated research. How far would land-intensive development shift population away from the traditional hillside areas? How would the development of medium-sized farms affect the traditional dispersed settlement pattern? What shifts in population would be involved in a reorientation of agriculture from the export to the domestic and tourist markets? What increases in social capital in the rural areas would such shifts require? What change in the minimum distance between market centres would follow a rationalization of the distribution system for local food crops? Would a higher agricultural product from a smaller labour force favour migration to rural towns rather than to Kingston? These are spatial questions of a kind which must enter into any comprehensive planning, and whose answers have clear economic, social and even political implications.

Next, we must surely take up again more seriously the integrated application of the social sciences. It is true that we have long paid lip-service to the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to West Indian problems. But usually the concessions to disciplines other than our own have been purely nominal, or at least have consisted in a few borrowings so crude that they earn the derision of the specialists in other social sciences. Some progress will be possible here by an improvement in the training of social scientists and perhaps by the use of interdisciplinary teams in operational and research work (though it is notorious that in such teams the product tends to represent the highest common factor of the disciplines rather than their lowest common multiple). But the fundamental problem, not confined to the West Indies, is that the social sciences are related by a common subject matter rather than a common theory. Where disciplines operate in generally different fields but are linked by dependence on a common theoretical base (as, say, biochemistry and mechanical engineering depend on a common stock of ideas about molecular and atomic structure) the problem of joint application is much less than where the disciplines operate in the same problem field but with different intellectual bases (like, say, biochemistry and psychiatry).

It is probably too much to ask that we postpone applying what social science we know until a common intellectual basis has been worked out. But in the present situation we should at least be conscious that some of the expedients to which we resort in order to avoid the problems of inter disciplinary work are shoddy and even dangerous. These expedients should be fairly familiar by now. To take the economist as the example; the crudest, though in some ways the most honest, is the . . . "as economists, we must confine ourselves . . ." approach, by which we explicitly ignore the interaction of economic with non-economic factors in the problem under discussion. This, however, can easily become sleight of hand if the whole tenor of our treatment of a problem implies that the non-economic can be ignored not only by us but by the policy maker as well. A second approach is to borrow some simplified notions from the non-economist and operate with these as though they told us all we need to know about the non-economic factors; some popular textbooks on economic development are guilty of this. A third approach we may label "government, by suitable measures . . ." Here the government is assumed to be capable of manipulating the non-economic factors so that they do not obstruct the economist's policy; or, in a vaguer form, "an extensive educational campaign will be necessary . . ." Lastly, we have the . . . "it is for government to consider . . ." approach, which leaves to the government the assessment of the interaction of economic and other variables — legitimate enough in theory, but also verging on sleight of hand if the economist's prescription is the only one which is fully presented to the policy maker.

There is, after all, a good deal of scope for refining our prescriptions and analyses even within the limits of our present technical equipment if we consistently apply this equipment without stopping at disciplinary barriers. To revert to the example used earlier, a shift toward medium-sized farms and a commercialized distribution system for agricultural products would imply a whole series of non-economic changes — in family structure and the specialization of roles, in the structure of commodity associations, in the J.A.S., in the pattern of political party affiliation, in the type of social services demanded — in addition to the spatial changes already suggested. I am not aware that any attempt has been made to explore these matters comprehensively. The first stage of such an exploration would no doubt remain largely qualitative; but it would emphasize those relationships where quantitative data were needed, and so lay the basis for really precise work.

A seriously interdisciplinary approach would throw into relief the increasingly important problem of how to formulate rational policy procedures in the presence of multiple objectives. The very existence of the problem marks a radical change in the atmosphere of social science since the nineteenth century. Formerly, economists, for example, clung to the idea that the same intellectual apparatus which was appropriate to the instrumental aspect of economics could also satisfy the normative aspect — that economic situations could be ranked as better or best on grounds derivable from within economic

theory. Only on these grounds can one understand the obstinate clinging to general equilibrium models couched in terms of perfect competition. Similar tendencies can be traced in political science, and even in anthropology. The abandonment of this (now untenable) position leads logically to a distinction between the specification of feasible economic and social situations — i.e. social science simply acts to reject from consideration those possibilities which are internally inconsistent — and the ranking of feasible situations according to a value judgment. So long as the value judgment relates to a unidimensional scale — e.g. national income per head is greater or less — this makes little practical difference. Even within economics, however, the objectives in practice are clearly multiple — income per head, employment, equality of income distribution, to name only a few. On an interdisciplinary basis we must introduce other dimensions — the quality of social relations, the degree of democracy and so on. If these objectives represented substitutable goods — if a 1 per cent fall in the unemployment rate could compensate for a 5 per cent fall in the national income — there would be at least a promise that the choice between them could be rationalized on the model of the consumer's choice between substitutable goods, though the problem of *whose* preference was involved in such social choices would remain.

But there seems little ground for assuming that substitutability between goals exists at this level. The problem is perhaps most dramatic in the field of health and population planning; at what rate should one trade off a reduction in death rates against a reduction in chronic disease, or an increase in population against an increase in income per head? The same ambiguity arises in rural development; can a reduction in the inequality of distribution of land be substituted for an increase in income per head or in foreign exchange earnings? If we are considering two "goods" which are unambiguously accepted as objectives and which are promoted by the same policies, there is of course no problem. But more often, particularly in the short run, objectives conflict for all or a part of the population. So if, for example, a government chooses to use land settlement to create minifundia, we can say that this is contrary to the objectives we ourselves hold, and even contrary to the government's own declared objectives. We can furthermore point out inconsistency between this policy and others but we cannot declare, purely from within our role as social scientists, that it is wrong.

Having reached this very negative conclusion, I must immediately qualify it. There is another course open to the social scientist, and it is perhaps the one which we all in practice take if we have any interest in policy matters. We can make our own evaluation of the one out of the range of feasible situations which is most in accordance with the values of the society, and put that forward as the most desirable. If we do this, we must be clear that we are applying our knowledge of social science at two levels — not only at the instrumental level of how to bring about the preferred situation, but at the prior level of an analysis of the values of the society. At the latter level we

must apply as much intellectual rigour as at the former; and the intellectual equipment needed may be quite different. Further, we must recognize that at this level we are ourselves not only observers, but participants and our scrutiny must cover our own class position and allow for the probable distortions which our own role may produce in our evaluation of the objectives and values of the rest of the society. I would suggest that a reason for the early disappointments in Jamaican agricultural development was a failure to allow for the distortions which the role of the leaders produced in their perception of the values of the led; and that a similar distortion threatens the efforts of technicians, politicians and academics in the field of rural development now.