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THE PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPING AGRICULTURE IN THE SMALL COMMON-WEALTH CARIBBEAN TERRITORIES – THE ROLE OF THE SMALL-SCALE FARMER

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Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Dr. Edwards, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely happy to be here this morning in Dominica, since this is my first visit to one of the less-developed countries in CARIFTA since I assumed office of Secretary-General and since Dominica is the largest of the so-called less-developed countries of CARIFTA. I therefore consider that I have made a fitting start in my contact with the less-developed countries of the Free Trade Area.

Relevance of Topic

I would like to start by observing that this Annual Conference of Agricultural Economics in the Caribbean seems well on the way to becoming institutionalized as perhaps one of the major instruments of economic integration in the region. This is all to the good when we consider the very important role that Agriculture has to play both in the economic development of the individual units of CARIFTA and in the regional integration process. Moreover, the subjects for discussion at these Conferences of Agricultural Economists have always been chosen with the needs of the region very much in mind. For example, the papers presented at the First Conference reflected the immediate pre-occupation of the authors with various aspects of agricultural development and agricultural marketing. The Second Conference was concerned with the economics of root crops and bananas and with two important aspects of agricultural development: - land-use planning and social aspects of agricultural development. The theme of the Third Conference namely, Agricultural Development Planning - was chosen in anticipation of the early preparation of development plans by many of the countries of the region. With the movement towards regional economic integration, the Fourth Conference appropriately dealt with agricultural diversification, import substitution and agricultural integration. This Conference as we all know is dealing with the most important economic problem of, I will go so far as to say, all the CARIFTA Countries.

*Feature address at the opening of the Fifth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference at Goodwill Parish Hall, Roseau, Dominica on Monday 6th April, 1970.

Importance of Agriculture to Countries of the Region

I think that, perhaps because of a certain amount of disillusionment with the post-war efforts made in transforming the agricultural sectors of our economies, we are probably running the risk of minimising the importance of Agriculture and relegating it to a low priority in our development plans and even our development aspirations. Today, it is fashionable in many parts of the region to exalt tourism and to deify industry while debating agriculture. Such attitudes are to my mind profoundly disturbing.

I do not wish to be misunderstood, I am not seeking to relegate the less-developed countries of CARIFTA to the role of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the so-called more-developed countries of CARIFTA. The remarks I am making apply no less to the so-called more-developed countries of CARIFTA than to the less-developed countries. It is of general application to all the units of CARIFTA. What I am asserting is that, if we in the Caribbean wish to develop strong economies and help these societies, Agriculture must, for a long time that is, as far as we can see and as far as it is possible to visualise, continue to be the basis of our economies.

The Place of Tourism and Industry

There are limitations on both the kind of industry and the kind of tourism which are being developed in the Caribbean today. This, of course, applies to the so-called more-developed countries just as much as to the less-developed countries. The industries established in the larger territories where most of them have gone have for the most part not brought the anticipated benefits, whether we view such benefits of industrial development in terms of employment (the most important need of the region), in terms of local value added or in terms of foreign exchange earned or saved. Employment has been minimal and the industries established have been highly capital-intensive, incorporating technologies not suitable for the labour-surplus Caribbean economies. Local value added has been minimal because of the need to import a large proportion of the raw materials used. Many of the younger economists of the region have referred to this kind of industrial development as "finishing-touch" industries and I think it is an apt characterisation.

Further, when we consider that the big international companies abroad are in a position to manipulate prices of components, it is quite conceivable that countries setting up assembly industries and finishing-stage industries can experience a decline in real income. In other words, far from improving the balance of payments, this kind of so-called import substitution can worsen the balance of payments.

Finally, there has been little foreign exchange earned or saved by the establishment of these industries not only for the reason mentioned above, namely the high import content of the industries, but also because a large part of the value produced by these industries has been remitted abroad in the form of tax-exempt profits and dividends, and other payments which are just as important such as management charges, royalties, licence fees and so forth. This deceptive state of affairs, where you have large apparent increases in the gross value of production of the industrial sector with very little benefit to the economy, is likely to continue until such time as industrial development is based to a much greater extent than at present on the use of local and regional raw materials and agricultural products.

Now let us examine what have been the consequences of the expansion of tourism in many of the Caribbean Countries in recent years.

Tourism can clearly offer great benefits in a relatively short space of time. It can bring in a certain amount of foreign exchange, but part of this foreign exchange immediately leaks out in the form of imports for the tourists, particularly food. It can, however, bring in a certain amount of net foreign exchange and provide employment fairly quickly. It therefore has some role to play.

On the other hand, the kind of tourist development we have had recently in the Caribbean has had certain less-desirable consequences, including inflated land prices where it is often impossible for a local resident to acquire land to build a house or for any other purpose in his own country. Apart from raising land prices, it has also led to the large-scale alienation of land, the basic resource of the country, to foreigners. It has fostered the development of undesirable social attitudes and an undermining of the dignity and self-confidence of the population. What availeth more material prosperity in the face of the loss of human dignity?

I am not saying that tourism has no part to play in the development of the region; it has a part to play but it must increasingly be tourism of quite a different kind from what we have had. It must be tourism more integrated into the local economy and the local society, the kind of tourism that one finds, for example, in such countries as Switzerland and Austria where the tourist does not go to some en-

clave reminiscent of his own country to admire the beach, but on the contrary to visit another country and accept such a country on its own terms. That is the kind of tourism which we have to develop in the Caribbean if we are to retain our self-respect.

If one accepts this line of thought, then the importance of a transformation of the agricultural sector becomes evident. This is so particularly in the less-developed countries where "development", if that is the word for it, of a certain kind can come about fairly quickly through the wrong kind of tourism.

Furthermore, if one is considering the relationship between, let us say, Agriculture and the one hand and Industry and Tourism on the other hand, it is not sufficient to say that Agriculture should be complementary to both tourism and industry. To a large extent, the pursuit of the two sets of activities tends to be in conflict, one with the other, for fairly obvious reasons. If, in small physical areas, as most of the West Indian Islands are, one gets large-scale luxury Miami-type tourism, it is extremely difficult for the people of the country to retain any kind of attachment to an agricultural way of life and to the kind of sustained, very prosaic kind of activity involved in Agriculture. In other words, while on the one hand the development of the tourist sector may increase the demand for locally-produced food and livestock products, on the other hand it can reduce the supply. The paradox of tourism in the West Indies is that it reduces the supply because labour loses a lot of its desire to remain in the agricultural sector when there are possibilities of earning what might be considered easy money in the tourist sector. This is an extremely important source of conflict between the two types of activities.

When one looks at industry, too, there are obviously conflicts. The new industries are capital-intensive, as has often been pointed out, and therefore can afford to pay relatively high wages. Very often they have to be encouraged to do so by the pressure of Trade Unions. This, of course, tends to raise the supply price of labour in other sectors (including Agriculture) and in turn tends to reduce the supply of labour available to the agricultural sector. You must not, therefore, think that Agriculture on the one hand and tourism and Tourism and Industry on the other hand are fully complementary one with another. To some extent they are complementary but at the same time, if one wishes to devise appropriate development strategies for the West Indies, one must take into account the fact that they are also to a large extent in conflict with each other.

The Need for Planning from Below

Now this Conference deals with the problems of small-scale economies and small-scale farmers.

It is therefore, as has been pointed out, of very great relevance to the less-developed countries in the region because they are small economies and because the small-scale farmer is of central importance in the transformation of Agriculture in all the West Indies.

The creation of a viable system of small and medium-size farming to replace the old degrading plantation agriculture is a task which seems to have eluded the West Indian peoples and Governments ever since the emancipation of the slaves one hundred and thirty-five years ago. Yet small and medium-size farming has unquestionable potential for the transformation of our economies. The plain fact is that the small-scale farmers of the West Indies, however deficient in capital, technical knowledge or organisational skills they may have been alleged to be, have been in the vanguard in an essential aspect of agricultural innovation. As many West Indian writers,¹ have pointed out, it is the peasants who have introduced the new crops, while sugar plantations have not even gone beyond the stage of sugar, rum and molasses in terms of doing further processing to the sugar-cane.

If the small-scale farmers have failed to become complete specialists in a particular crop, this is because, given the short-term institutionally and socially defined choices open to them, they have acted rationally, as Dr. David Edwards¹ observed in his study of the small-scale farmer in Jamaica. The moral of all this is that Governments and planners must not lose their patience in dealing with the small producer. If they are to guide the process of transformation of small-scale Agriculture in the West Indies, they must enter sympathetically into the frame of reference of the small-scale farmer and seek to modify by institutional and social changes in order to make for different behaviour patterns on the part of the small-scale farmer. In the last analysis the perceptions of the small-scale farmer must be altered. He must view himself and his environment in totally different terms from those in which he views them now. He must see his entire social, economic and institutional environment not as something alien and hostile to him, but as something offering hope and the opportunities of upward social and economic mobility. These reflections have important implications for agricultural planning and policy-making in the Caribbean. The principal one is that the small-scale farmer must himself be involved in the formulation of agricultural development plans.

¹See Marshall, W.K., "Notes on Peasant Development in the West Indies since 1838" in selected papers from the Third West Indian Agricultural Economic Conference, U.W.I., Trinidad, pp. 252-263. 1968.

²Edwards, D.T., *An economic Study of Small Farming in Jamaica*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, U.W.I., 1961.

I think we will all admit, even those of us who have been engaged in planning in the region, that agricultural planning has not reached a high degree of sophistication in the Caribbean, whether viewed in terms of conception or in terms of implementation. For all practical purposes most plans are abandoned before their terminal dates. Sometimes they are abandoned after only a few months of their formulation, but this is a rather pathological situation which does not occur so frequently.

There are several reasons for this. The basic reason however, is the lack of involvement or of sufficient involvement of the farmer in the preparation and execution of these plans. It is true that there might be some consultations, but these are done on an ad hoc basis rather than through some established institutional machinery at the local level to ensure continuity. The Government can make many decisions that affect agricultural production. The Government can, for example, construct irrigation works, breed new high-yielding varieties and spread this new knowledge among some farmers. The Government may, through an appropriate price policy, affect the relative profitability of different crops. Ultimately, however, and this is so obvious that I do not like to say so, it is the farmer who decides how much irrigation water to use, which cultural practices to follow and which crops to grow.

The Role of the State

What can the State then do in these cases where the ultimate decisions rest with the farmer? The State can, of course, engage in the usual trinity of operations required to transform small-scale agriculture. It can establish more and improved credit facilities. The State must play a very important role in providing marketing services. It also has to seek to educate the farmer and improve his performance as a farmer. And, of course, it has to lay down infrastructure - physical infrastructure required to help increase agricultural production and productivity.

Many West Indian Governments have been doing these, some better than others, but the result so far has been meagre. Unless the farmer's motivation is harnessed, the result in terms of output of these Governments' inputs will continue to be zero or very near zero.

Re-structuring of Regional Agriculture

I shall return later to this question of eliciting the commitment of farmers and increasing motivation. So far I have been talking about agricultural policy and planning at the level of each national unit in the West Indies. But, of course, the issue of regional integration arises. So I shall turn to a brief discussion of some of the issues of regional agricultural planning.

It is now almost axiomatic that the agricultural problem like all other aspects of general economic problems of the Caribbean, cannot be solved within the framework of national boundaries. This is so for two reasons.

First, we have over the long term to shift production from traditional agricultural crops facing market uncertainties abroad, whether because of the possible entry of the United Kingdom into the European Economic Community or because of competition from lower cost suppliers such as Cuba coming to dominate the World Sugar Market. It seems to me that this shift away from the traditional export crops to other agricultural activities whether for their export market or for the home market can best be organised, planned and executed on a regional basis.

The second reason is that even if in the long run we succeed in reducing the present degree of dependence on traditional agricultural exports such as sugar, bananas and citrus, the small size of each national unit in the Caribbean would still demand a considerable degree of specialization in agriculture to a point where the local market would be insufficient. In this situation, again the reorganisation of West Indian agriculture will have to be conceived and effected on a regional basis.

Now, these considerations have, in turn, two further implications. First we have to examine seriously the possibility of turning to new non-traditional crops for export to countries outside the region. Tropical fruit is a good example. The market in Europe and North America for this kind of product is growing at a very rapid rate and, even though one must recognise all the difficulties of supplying adequate, regular freight services, (if necessary by air), we have to make quite a big effort in at least experimenting or rather intensifying our experiments with this kind of non-traditional export agriculture.

The second implication of the considerations mentioned above is that we have to do more trade in agricultural products amongst ourselves. In other words, we have to undertake a greater measure of regional import substitution. Clearly, the less-developed countries of CARIFTA have an important role to play in this process of regional import substitution in agriculture.

The Agricultural Marketing Protocol

This brings us to the Agricultural Marketing Protocol. No one is more aware than I am of the difficulties which have so far been faced in operating the Agricultural Marketing Protocol. Although in looking through the proceedings of last year's Conference held in Barbados I thought that the strictures passed on the Protocol were somewhat over-severe. I am not trying to defend the Protocol, but it is useful at this point to observe that the Agri-

cultural Marketing Protocol is an experiment, it is something novel in regional economic cooperation in Agriculture. In fact, several people from International Organisations such as the UNCTAD were very intrigued with it.

The moral of what I am saying is this that in the West Indies we should always be ready to experiment, to innovate institutionally as well as organisationally and technologically. The people who drafted the CARIFTA Agreement and Agricultural Marketing Protocol tried to innovate institutionally. Of course, when one is innovating one can never foretell precisely the results of one's innovation. This is almost self-evident. No one expected in drawing up this Protocol that it would be perfect, easy to operate, or that indeed it would be the last word in the organisation of agricultural trade and production in the Caribbean. It is only a Protocol. Those of you with legal training will be aware that it was not really part of the text of the Agreement although it has the same binding force as the text. In other words, the Agricultural Marketing Protocol, by being made a Protocol, was conceived of as something experimental and already quite a few modifications have been made. As we gain experience with it, it will I am sure be further modified by the Council of Ministers of CARIFTA. So I do not think that the bright young sparks in the West Indies should be too critical of the kinds of difficulties arising from the Agricultural Marketing Protocol because unless we in the West Indies are prepared to experiment and to innovate institutionally and socially we are doomed to remain dependent and under-developed.

I think it is well known that the Agricultural Marketing Protocol was drawn up primarily for the benefit of the less-developed countries. Moreover, most of the twenty-two commodities with which the Protocol is concerned are largely produced by small-scale farmers. What the Protocol really seeks to do is to reduce uncertainty since one of the perennial problems faced by small-scale farmers in the West Indies is uncertainty about markets in the large territories which accord market allocations to the former as a group. This modification has been recently made, so that market allocations are now made to the Associated States as a group and not individually as was originally the case. The minimum f.o.b. prices are fixed with the possibility for prices to be higher than the minimum, if market conditions so indicate. This is another area of flexibility introduced by the recent meeting of CARIFTA Council into the Operations of the Marketing Protocol. The prices are minimum prices and may be raised if market circumstances so indicate.

Finally, the arrangements which I have referred to, are due to be revised periodically so that the objectives of facilitating trade, especially

the trade of the less-developed countries in agricultural products, can be achieved. But we cannot stop with the Protocol. We have to go further.

Urgent Need for a Regional Agricultural Policy

One of the demerits of the Protocol is that it allows countries to maintain restrictions at the national level against products that can be produced in the region. The CARIFTA Agreement also permits the continuation of Government aids and subsidies to domestic agriculture until such time as a regional agricultural policy is evolved. This makes it all the more urgent to evolve such a regional policy. In other words, the only long-run answer to the agricultural problem - rather, the only long-run basis on which an answer can be sought to the agricultural problem in the Region - is through the formulation and execution of some kind of Regional Plan. Steps are now being taken to set in motion the machinery for drawing up such a long-term Agricultural Development Plan.

The FAO has been approached by the CARIFTA Countries to supply a group of experts who, it should be noted, will work in the closest possible collaboration with West Indian experts, people who are familiar with the region and with the problems involved in rationalising agricultural production in the region. I gather that the FAO has just approved the sending down of a Preliminary Mission for the purpose of talking to all the experts in the West Indies about the problems involved and about the exact terms of reference, nature and composition of the subsequent Mission. So I hope that all of you here present will at some stage or other meet with this Preliminary Mission and give them your own expert views based on your experiences in the region.

Possibilities for the Less-Developed Territories within CARIFTA

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words on the entire question of the less-developed countries in CARIFTA. I think it would be not inappropriate to deal with the subject, albeit very briefly, in the few minutes remaining to me.

The CARIFTA Agreement as well as the recommendation for the establishment of a Regional Development Bank held very much in mind this problem of the less-developed countries within CARIFTA. If one searches the CARIFTA Agreement carefully, one will see how much recognition of the problem on the less-developed countries there is and how much of an effort has been made to deal with the problem. Again, if one reads the Charter of the Caribbean Development Bank, one will see that the needs of the less-developed countries have been given paramount attention - particularly in relation to soft loans, that is loans made

on very generous terms, the kind of loans that an ordinary banker will not make. And yet so far there is a certain amount of discontent with the operations of the integration process in the less-developed countries.

Now the discontent is entirely understandable because, given the original gap between the less-developed countries and the so-called more-developed countries, it would take some time before the less developed countries can participate as much as the more-developed countries in the benefits of integration. I think that this outcome should have been and was anticipated.

Let me say this too, Even if there were no good cause for discontent among the LDC's with the operations of the integration process so far, I think it is incumbent upon the regional Governments and the Secretariat to keep the position under constant review, not only to ensure that the whole programme of integration as laid down in the Heads of Governments' resolution of 1967 is carried out, but also to devise new mechanisms, new institutional means for ensuring that the less-developed countries can benefit as much as the more-developed countries.

Let me mention here certain possibilities because, contrary to the feelings in many parts of the West Indies, the situation for the less-developed countries is not without hope in the context of CARIFTA and Caribbean Economic Integration. One obvious possibility, to my mind, and here I am not speaking on behalf of the Secretariat or the Council of Ministers, is to modify the Rules of Origin in favour of the less-developed countries. I think this is a fairly simple expedient and a pretty obvious one which will go some way towards making it possible for the less-developed countries to develop industries. It will not solve the problem automatically because I think there is one very important reason, which I will come to presently, why it is objectively difficult for the less-developed countries to have industries. One possibility then, something which is worth reflecting on in the region, is a modification of the Origin rules in favour of the less-developed countries.

Second, there is the possibility of the establishment of regional multi-national companies. In other words, one can have a company producing anything which is owned by nationals and Governments of more than one country or by all the countries of the region. In that way and to the extent that the activity is profitable and this is an important caveat - it would be possible for all of the countries taking part in the integration scheme to share in the profits of the industry. There are obviously problems of finance for the less-developed countries, but I think that this is a separate issue which it is not really essential to explore at this stage. In other words, even if the main producing activity of the

regional multi-national company is located outside of the less developed countries - I am not saying that this should be so, I am just postulating this hypothetical situation - then to the extent that part of the equity of the company is owned by nationals and Governments of the less-developed countries, to that extent they will share in the profits of the company and therefore there will be some compensation to the less-developed countries for opening up their markets to a product which is produced in one of the more-developed countries.

Again, in relation to regional multi-national companies there is a possibility of the undertaking of different aspects of production for a complex of activities in different parts of the region. Again, I am not here suggesting that the less-developed countries should play the role of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the more-developed countries, but it seems to me quite practicable and quite feasible to have a reasonable and sensible division of labour in a regional company based on the comparative advantage or, if you wish, on the endowment with different resources (both human and natural) of the different constituent units of a region.

I can think of several industries, including both agricultural and raw materials as well as strict secondary industries, which can have their different activities dispersed throughout the region. In other words different inputs for the final product can be supplied in different parts. It is not necessary, nor does it follow from this that those territories which produce the inputs will generate more or will generate less value-added than those territories which produce or that single territory which produced the output. I am saying that in a regional activity, where different aspects of the activity were dispersed, it is quite conceivable for an input aspect of activity to add more value than the finishing aspect which is the last stage of the industry. That is the third possibility in ensuring that the less-developed countries benefit from the integration process.

Yet another possibility which is worth exploring is this. Where activity is being carried out in one of the more-developed countries and this activity needs and gets access to the whole regional market, it is quite possible for the Governments of the country where that industry is located to pass on part of the taxes derived from that industry to the Government of those less-developed countries which provide the market for the particular product.

These are just four examples of institutional expedients designed to deal with the problem of polarization and to ensure that the less-developed countries derive gains from integration. I am quite sure that, with a certain amount of imagination and ingenuity, several other possibilities can be developed and examined in terms of their feasibility.

In throwing out these suggestions I repeat that I am not making definitive or official statements of policy. I am just suggesting various possible avenues of approaching the problem and trying to show that the problem of the gap between the less-developed countries and the more-developed countries in CARIFTA is not an insoluble one if we in the West Indies are prepared to use our imagination. It has been said that every integration movement has its distinctive qualities and its distinctive flavour. In other words every integration movement is *sui generis*. I think the experience in CARIFTA has shown that this is quite true. If, therefore, our integration movement is *sui generis*, then I think we must use our wits and develop *sui generis* solutions to the problems which arise.

Finally, on this question of the less-developed countries within CARIFTA I would like to say this. I think it is most important for many reasons that the less-developed countries should try to act more as a block within CARIFTA. In this connection the proposal for an Eastern Caribbean Common Market becomes very relevant, and my personal view, which is based on technical considerations, is that the sooner the Eastern Caribbean Common Market becomes a reality, the better not only for the participants in that grouping, but also for the more-developed countries in CARIFTA. I think the reasoning behind my position is fairly obvious and I need not elaborate on it. One very simple reason which would, I think, command the assent of everyone is that as a tight cohesive group the less-developed countries will certainly have more bargaining power in all negotiations on regional integration than they now have as separate units.

Need for Appropriate Theory

I would like to end by discussing what I consider to be two important essentials for the success not only of agricultural policy in particular but of development policies generally in the Caribbean.

First of all, I see the need for an appropriate and relevant theory of development, including agricultural development, in the Caribbean. I certainly think that it is extremely important to have research, empirical research, taking place on the agricultural as well as on other economic activities in the Caribbean. But then I think it is obvious that the collection of facts, the collection of data, is something that is quite meaningless without an appropriate theoretical framework. In turn in order to have an appropriate theoretical framework one needs to base that on actual experience, on actual facts of the region. In other words, I am suggesting that the collection of data on the economics of the West Indies should proceed side by side with attempts to evolve an appropriate theoretical framework which would help us better to understand reality in the West Indies and better to formulate and execute development policies. Already some

start has been made in trying to evolve an appropriate theoretical framework for agriculture in the Caribbean as well as for other aspects of economic activity in the region. It is my hope that scholars in the region will persevere in these efforts to forge a new theoretical framework, which would guide the more empirical researchers in the collection of data.

Need for a Relevant Ideology

There is however, another and perhaps even more urgent requirement other than an appropriate theoretical framework for the success of development in the Caribbean. This is the development of a greater sense of commitment among the people - in both the rural and the urban areas of the Caribbean. It seems to me that it is absolutely essential for the various governments and for the region to develop some kind of developmental ideology of its own, an ideology which would be relevant to the historical experience and to the contemporary situation of the West Indies. If there is no ideology to inform the development process and to guide the development effort, it will in my view be impossible to secure the commitment of the people, the masses

of the people, to long-term goals and to the efforts and sacrifices required to fulfill these long term goals. If we in the West Indies continue basing our development strategies on seeking to "attract capital", whatever that may mean, from abroad and giving out unnecessary incentives and having all our institutions, economic and otherwise, subordinated to outside influences, it will be impossible to secure such a commitment from both the rural and the urban masses of the countries.

Now I recognise that it is not, strictly speaking, the business of agricultural economists to consider the need for development ideologies or even to attempt to formulate them; but I think you will agree with me from your own experience in the region that trying to have real development in the West Indies, development based on internal effort, on internal changes, internally motivated changes based on internally made decisions, is quite impossible unless this sense of commitment is developed. To my mind this sense of commitment can never be developed if one continues without some firm ideological basis. A nation cannot achieve anything if it resides in an intellectual and moral vacuum.