



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search  
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>  
[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

# THE EMERGENCE AND RESILIENCE OF THE JAMAICAN PEASANTRY<sup>1</sup>

GEORGE E. BUCKMIRE

Postgraduate Student, Department of Economics, U.W.I., Mona

## INTRODUCTION

Government policy under the plantation system, particularly in the British colonies, had always been designed to promote and protect the interests of the plantocracy. In the period preceding emancipation, the administration of political and economic policies enabled the plantations to dominate completely all economic activities. Peasant farming was effectively suppressed.

During the one hundred years following emancipation political power continued to be exercised by, or for, the planter class and very little recognition was given to the emerging peasantry. In spite of the imbalance in the control and exercise of political and economic power, the West Indian peasantry evolved into a forceful and resilient sector in the community.

The peasantry has made significant contributions to income redistribution and economic growth, and it is the bosom from which have sprung a growing West Indian middle-class and some of our most stable institutions. Nevertheless, three hundred years of exclusion and one hundred years of neglect have frustrated the efforts of peasant cultivators and have not permitted this sector to achieve greater success and independence. Furthermore, although the peasants have been removed from the direct umbrage of the sugar plantation, the latter institution continues to influence farming conditions.

The aim of this paper is to examine some of the important relationships between the sugar plantation and the peasant sector and to show how these have influenced and/or impeded the development of an independent peasantry in Jamaica.

## Exclusion of the Peasantry

The development of the sugar plantation in the colonial setting was the antithesis to the development

The writer wishes to express his sincere thanks to Dr. I.E. Johnson and Dr. Andrew MacMillan of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Mr. Vaughn Lewis of Department of Government, University of the West Indies, Mona, for reading this paper and offering their criticisms and suggestions, but takes responsibility for the opinions expressed.

Many thanks are also due to Mrs. Desiree Tucker for taking time off from her pressing duties and for her patience in typing this paper.

of an independent peasantry. With the development and spread of the sugar latifundia throughout the Caribbean, the nucleating system of small-scale landholders or minifundia was suppressed and destroyed. During the period of slavery a type of emasculated peasantry developed, referred to by Mintz as "proto-peasants".<sup>1</sup> Best describes the cultivators outside the plantation system as "a few nomadic native survivors, runaway slaves, and small settlers from the metropolis, who resist the hegemony of the plantation."<sup>2</sup> The proto-peasants were slaves who were given small plots of land, "polinks", on which to cultivate food crops on a subsistence basis in order to relieve the food burden of the plantation.<sup>3</sup> This system of land allocation was provided for under the slave laws and, in this particular case, met with the approval of the planters since it was cheaper to allow slaves land on which to grow food crops than to continue to import food-stuffs for them.

Subsisting outside the plantation system was the smaller group of former slaves and "free people of colour" who had acquired small landholdings for farming. Altogether these groups constituted an insignificant small-farming class and for all practical purposes a peasantry did not exist.

## Emergence of the Peasantry<sup>4</sup>

The peasant class in Jamaica, as in the rest of the Caribbean, had its conception in the immediate

<sup>1</sup>S.W. Mintz, "The Question of Caribbean peasantries: A Comment", *Caribbean Studies*, October 1961, pp. 31-34.

<sup>2</sup>L. Best, "Outlines of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy", *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 September 1963.

<sup>3</sup>D.G. Hall, *Free Jamaica*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1959, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup>In much of the literature small farmers in the pre-emancipation period are referred to as 'yeoman' farmers, e.g. in Barbados. In Jamaica the term 'small settlers' as distinct from 'large settlers' was popularly used. 'Settlers', as Hall points out, seems a more appropriate term as the early colonists were actually settled on land granted by the Crown. The term 'peasant', used for small farmers in Europe, has never been popular in the Caribbean and North America. In the Caribbean, because this sector did not evolve over a long historical period from villenage or serfdom as in Europe; in North America, because the characteristics normally associated with European peasants were not supposed to be found among North American small farmers.

years following emancipation. The emergence of this 'reconstituted' peasantry, to use another term coined by Mintz,<sup>1</sup> heralded a virtual agrarian revolution. The agrarian reforms, involving the acquisition of land by the ex-slaves, were carried out with no assistance from the government and indeed, often against the combined opposition of the planters and government.

The planters charged high rents for the huts and provision grounds occupied by the ex-slaves. At the same time the government raised the import duties on food and clothing<sup>2</sup> and indentured labourers were imported with the "avowed object of keeping down the wages of the native labourers".<sup>3</sup> These measures were designed to frustrate the ambitions of the emancipated labourers and to keep them in a situation of dependence on the plantation. The results were the direct opposite for which the measures were designed. The freed men left the plantations in large numbers and sought to acquire their independent cultivations and money with which to acquire clothing and imported goods.

The planters had the full support of the British parliament. In response to a petition for land by the freed workers of Jamaica, Queen Victoria made it clear that "the prosperity of the labouring classes, as well as of all other classes, depends, in Jamaica, and in other countries upon their working for wages, not uncertainly or capriciously, but steadily and continuously, at the times when their labour is wanted and for so long as it is wanted".<sup>4</sup> This partisan declaration added to the sparks which set off the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865.

#### THE HISTORICAL PATTERN OF LAND SETTLEMENT

From 1838 to the present time, the single most important problem plaguing the plantation owners has been the shortage of labour. On the other hand, the greatest ambition of the "reconstituted" peasantry has been to acquire and own farm lands. These two goals have always been and, still are, in conflict.

Efforts to acquire property by the landless ex-slaves were limited by many factors. According to Beachey, there were in Jamaica at the time of emancipation 600 sugar estates.<sup>5</sup> These were scattered in all parishes with the exception of Manchester and urban Kingston<sup>6</sup> and collectively occupied thousands

of acres leaving very little cultivable land for peasant occupation. The demand for the limited land space was tremendous. In 1838, it was estimated that 218,500 slaves were emancipated in Jamaica. The majority of these freed men had acquired the techniques of estate cane farming and food crop production. Many of the slaves had developed considerable competence in the cultivation and marketing of food crops; few had non-farm skills which would prepare them for independent non-farm work. Freed from slavery, therefore, the majority of these workers had no alternative occupational opportunities but farming.

In spite of the many obstacles and the opposition by the planter class within a very short time a new peasant class had emerged.<sup>1</sup> According to Eisner, there were 7,919 small holdings three years after emancipation (including 2,114 established prior to emancipation) and by 1845 there were 19,387 holdings of less than 10 acres each.<sup>2</sup>

In the immediate post-emancipation period the plantation, therefore, determined the settlement pattern of small-scale farming. Because the plantations occupied all the cultivable agricultural lands, peasants were forced into the hills and inaccessible interior regions of the island. The excessive demand for land and the scarcity of land space resulted in the distribution of small and generally non-viable farms.

The historical pattern of land settlement has an enduring influence on the distribution and size of farms, as is evidenced by the 1961-62 Agricultural Census figures. There were 158,941 farms in Jamaica in 1961-62. Of these 113,239 or 71.2 per cent were under 5 acres, 25.7 per cent were between 5 and 25 acres and only .2 per cent or 351 were 500 acres and over. To put this another way, 12 per cent of the farms occupied 45 per cent of all agricultural land and 71.2 per cent occupied only 11.6 per cent of the total acreage.

#### Peasant Values

Not only was a new class of peasant farmers established, but simultaneously the "Free Village System" came into being. These villages sprung up throughout the island and by 1842, with the assistance of a few Baptist missionaries, there were between 150-200 comprising a total acreage of about 100,000 acres for which about £70,000 were paid.<sup>3</sup> In some of these villages, particularly those adjacent to the estates, large numbers of wage-earners and tradesmen found employment. These wage-earners constituted a rural proletariat. According to Eisner:

<sup>1</sup>A useful account of peasant development in the West Indies is provided by Woodville K. Marshall in *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1968, pp. 252-263.

<sup>2</sup>Eisner Gisela, *Jamaica, 1860-1930*, Manchester Univ. Press, Manchester, 1961.

<sup>3</sup>Eisner, *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>1</sup>Mintz, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>2</sup>Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Oliver, *Jamaica the Blessed Island*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1936. p. 261.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted by Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery*, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1944, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>R.W. Beachey, *The British West Indies Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century*, Ditchling Press Ltd., Sussex, 1957, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup>Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

"These villages had to be serviced and many freed men who did not farm went into independent business such as shopkeepers, shoe-making, carpentry, and such other activities. There were also a large number of villagers who merely acquired a house spot outside the boundaries of the estate and who worked for wages on the estate."<sup>1</sup>

The presence of such a large group of wage earners had a significant impact on the value system of the rural society. The early proletarianization of the rural, non-farm society accelerated the adoption of European cultural values and an early acceptance of a monetary economy based on export trade. Furthermore, the presence of a large number of wage-earners had direct implications for the rural farm society, so much so that, in the words of Braithwaite, "the peasant cultivator never developed an independent cultural life of his own".<sup>2</sup>

#### RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AN INDEPENDENT PEASANTRY

The hundred years following emancipation were impressive insofar as the achievements of the new class of peasant farmers were concerned. The rapid transition from a state of bondage and all that it implied to independent cultivators; the ready adjustments from a non-monetary subsistence activity to a relatively efficient trading activity; the reallocation of resources from domestic food production to a more profitable export market;<sup>3</sup> all of these highly economic decisions were made and successes achieved with a minimum of government assistance. Throughout the period the principal concern of the colonial government was "to restore and maintain the prosperity of the Colonies",<sup>4</sup> meaning essentially the prosperity of the plantocracy.

Between 1838 and the close of the century peasant activities developed independently of the plantation. Indeed, according to Mintz, the peasantry represented "a reaction to the plantation economy, a negative reflex to enslavement, mass production, monocrop dependence and metropolitan control".<sup>5</sup> Up until the turn of the century, peasant cultivation concentrated on food crops for both the local and export markets. According to Eisner, 23 per cent of peasant production went into the export trade. The crops included coffee, bananas, arrowroot and

ginger. Coffee and bananas became important crops from about 1850's and 1860's respectively. Crude sugar was produced by peasant farmers, but largely for home consumption and the domestic market where it was quite profitable.<sup>1</sup> The mutual antagonism between peasant and planter, and the high capital requirement for sugar production were factors contributing to the indifference displayed by peasant farmers towards cane production.

The banana industry which started in the second half of the 19th century was also essentially a peasant activity.<sup>2</sup> The Planters, at first, regarded the growing of bananas as "backwoods, nigger business". A reference made by Hall, quoted the Governor as writing:

"The old planting regime would never have developed that cultivation. When I first knew Jamaica, banana growing was still despised as a backwoods 'nigger business', which any old-time sugar planter would have disdained to handle, or, if tempted by undeniable prospects of profit, would have thought an apology was required."<sup>3</sup>

It was not until the closing decade of the 19th century when the sugar industry was again facing ruin that the planters began to devote some of their resources to banana production.

Among other achievements of the peasantry was the development of a relatively efficient internal marketing system in Jamaica and a cooperative banking system. The marketing system had its roots during slavery and has continued as an effective system of marketing farm produce up to the present time. The internal marketing system involved large sectors of the community, including higglers, market vendors, farmers and consumers. In rural areas, particularly among the estate wage earners, the rural proletariat constituted a fairly significant consumers' market.

#### The Challenge to Peasant Independence

The irony of this historical dualism between peasant and plantation is remarkable. As long as peasants continued to develop their agricultural and economic activities outside of the plantation and with the minimum of government assistance they were relatively successful. Peasants tended to allocate their resources in response to the uncontrolled market forces and the welfare of the entire society was improved. As soon as the relationship became one of dependence, peasants tended to respond to

<sup>1</sup>Eisner, *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>L.E. Braithwaite, "Social and Political Aspects of Rural Development", *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1968, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup>According to Eisner the peasant share of exports in Jamaica increased fourfold between 1850 and 1890.

<sup>4</sup>Royal Commission Report 1897, Cmd. 8655, 1897.

<sup>5</sup>See Mintz in "Foreword" to Ramiro Guerra Y. Sanchez, *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean*, Yale Univ. Press., New Haven & London, 1964.

<sup>1</sup>Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>See G.L. Beckford, "Aspects of the Present Conflict Between the Plantation and the Peasantry in the West Indies", a paper presented to the Fourth West Indian Agricultural Economics Conference, University of the West Indies, 1969, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Hall, *op. cit.*,

imposed market forces and the economic welfare of the country, if not that of the peasants, was challenged or impaired. The challenge to the independence of peasant activity started with the 1897 Royal Commission's Report. The Report of the Royal Commission appointed in 1897 encouraged the vertical integration between peasants and central factories. This Commission was appointed to enquire into the conditions and prospects of the sugar-growing Colonies in the West Indies and "to suggest means calculated to restore and maintain the prosperity of these Colonies".<sup>1</sup> The Commission dismissed any suggestion that the new class of farmers was incapable of independent economic activity. According to the Commission, "the position of the peasantry compares favourably with that of the peasantry of most countries of the world".<sup>2</sup> The Commission, nevertheless, was more concerned with the conditions of the sugar industry. Its recommendations reflected this concern, but it was also significant because, for the first time, official recognition was given to the peasantry. Among its recommendations were the following:

- i) the development of a programme of land settlement;
- ii) the replacement of estates by peasant cultivators;
- iii) the substitution of other tropical products for sugar cane.

Although the recommendations of the Commission were largely ignored, they served to remove much of the antagonism between the peasants and the plantations. Moreover, the Commission, through its recommendations prepared the way for a new period of co-operative activity between the two sectors. The Commission also focussed attention on the peasant sector and its potential for development. This new awareness resulted in a spate of token policy measures. Government land settlement schemes were started for the first time and also some rudimentary research work was started in some of the botanical gardens on selected crops.<sup>3</sup>

Interest in the settlement of tenants, however, was still only secondary to the interests of the sugar industry. Redistribution of agricultural land was actively pursued in periods of distress, but when prosperity in the sugar industry ensued, interest in the settlement of small farmers waned. During the first two decades of the 20th century sugar prices were good, stimulated by conditions arising out of World War I. Land settlement activity during this period declined; following the late 1920's, when the sugar industry found itself in another

period of depression, interest in land settlement was again aroused by another Royal Commission, in 1929.

### From Peasants to Cane Farmers

In their continuing efforts to solve the labour problems, the planters in the Eastern Caribbean had adopted an arrangement known as metayage. Under this system, according to Beachey, "labourers cut the cane, did all cultivation and provided all manual work involved in manufacturing. The sugar proprietor under the system provided all equipment, stock and the manufactory. The sugar made was usually divided in halves, the planter generally purchasing the metayer's share of sugar."<sup>1</sup> The system of metayage, however, never became popular and when it eventually failed, cane farming by peasants was introduced in Trinidad and St. Lucia at the close of the 19th century.

The new system of small-scale cane farming initiated a new era of co-operative dualism between peasant farmers and the plantations. Peasants were encouraged to grow cane on their own property and the estate factory provided an assured market. The system of cane farming proved quite successful and became a new phenomenon throughout the Caribbean.

In Jamaica the sugar estates started purchasing cane from peasant farmers at the turn of the century. The new arrangement provided some mutual benefits to the plantation and peasant farmers. Apart from the easy access to a market for cane, peasants found the crop a relatively easy one to cultivate and within a short time peasants were employing increasing quantities of their resources to sugar cane cultivation. On the other hand, the estate found a partial solution to its labour problems. Instead of experiencing the difficulty of getting labour, this problem was transferred to cane farmers. The estate's business was now to purchase cane as cheaply as possible.

The widespread cultivation of sugar cane by peasant farmers at first came about slowly. At the end of the 19th century the sugar industry was undergoing another period of crisis. During the next few years, in fact, many estates adopted the 'backward nigger business' of growing bananas and many factories were forced out of production. In 1920 when sugar prices were good there were 59 sugar factories in operation. These were reduced to 40 by 1929 and to 34 by 1937.

A series of circumstances in the 1930's, however, resulted in the large scale transformation of large areas of peasant and plantation cultivations from bananas back to "king sugar". Commencing with the depression of the 1930's and a succession of hurricanes, the banana cultivations were seriously

<sup>1</sup>Report of Royal Commission, 1897, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Lord Oliver, *op. cit.*, pp. 316-320.

<sup>1</sup>Beachey, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

reduced. A more persistent problem arose with the infestation of the crop by Panama and leaf spot diseases. Peasant farmers were without the resources to rehabilitate their crops. The estates, on the other hand, were encouraged once again by an upswing of sugar prices (resulting from World War II which affected the European beet industry), to abandon banana production for cane. Accompanying these 'push' and 'pull' forces<sup>1</sup> were some institutional changes which helped to determine the direction of the industry and peasant-plantation relationship.

### The Role of the Institutions

Following the signing of the International Sugar Agreement which was designed to stabilise the international sugar market, the Jamaican Government passed a new law which for the first time institutionalised the vertical integration between peasant producers and central sugar factories. The Sugar Industry Control Law, passed in 1937, required any cane farmer selling or delivering cane to a manufacturer, to be registered at the factory to which he intends to supply cane. At the same time the factories were obliged to purchase farmers' cane, thus effectively integrating the two sectors.

The relationship between peasant and plantation was further institutionalised by the formation in 1941 of the Cane Farmers' Association. This body was formed to assist small farmers in their demands for higher prices for their cane and to promote and protect generally the interests of cane farmers. To achieve their goals the organisation set about to recruit cane farmers, and in this it was very successful. Membership in the Association (AJCFA) increased from 10,094 in 1942 to 28,742 in 1966.

There is no doubt that the AJCFA provides farmers with a strong and disciplined bargaining organisation. By providing cane farmers with certain services and a sense of unity and power, the AJCFA has encouraged more farmers to go into cane production. Whether or not the AJCFA performs its original functions and satisfies the goals of cane farmers would bear question. Suffice it to say at this point that the organization has been instrumental and continues to be instrumental in encouraging large numbers of small farmers to produce cane and to be influenced by plantation production.

Finally, the credit institutions by exercising lending policies which discriminate between cane and non-cane farmers have encouraged farmers to devote more of their resources to cane production. The outstanding credit institution in this respect is the People's Co-operative Bank (P. C. Bank).

<sup>1</sup>The natural disasters such as hurricanes and plant diseases may be considered 'push' forces whilst the attractions of favourable prices may be considered 'pull' forces.

The P. C. Bank was started in 1905 with the main objectives of providing small farmers with financial assistance and of encouraging diversification. By 1939,<sup>1</sup> there were some 60 Branches in operation, and the number increased to 115 by 1967. Until World War II the banks had achieved much success in encouraging farmers to diversify their production and by providing them with small sources of credit generally. In the immediate post-war period, however, the banks were encouraged by government to provide, for the first time, credit specifically for the production of cane. This, unfortunately, resulted in discriminatory credit practices. In carrying out their lending policy, the banks tended to favour cane farmers over non-cane farmers. In the plantation communities the P. C. Banks operate closely with the estates and a large number of farmers have been caught in a vicious circle with the bank and the central factory. Many farmers grow cane in order to obtain easy credit and continue to grow cane as it is the least risky crop and offers the most assured way of meeting repayments.

### THE PEASANTS IN THE CHANGING COMMUNITY

From the foregoing it is evident that a number of factors have conspired to induce peasants away from independent farming activities into a sort of symbiotic relationship with the sugar estates. The important marketing, credit and farmers' institutions have been powerful influences encouraging small farmers to reallocate much of their resources to cane production. The change in the pattern of production may be judged from the fact that five years after World War II farmer production of cane had almost doubled the level achieved at the end of World War II. By the end of the next five years it had trebled. Farmers during the 1950's were contributing 40 per cent of total cane production in the Island. By the 1960's they were producing 50 per cent.

At the apex of the farming and institutional activities is the sugar plantation, without which these institutions possibly could not survive or at least would have functioned differently as they do in non-plantation communities, e.g. Christiana. It seems, therefore, that the plantation has been the greatest obstacle to the development of an independent peasantry.

In the early years of colonisation prior to slavery when the yeoman farmers were striving to establish some economic independence, the introduction of the plantation effectively destroyed their aspirations. Three hundred years later when the working class, largely rural, was reaching out for economic and political emancipation, the plantation was there again, like some nemesis, thwarting their efforts.

<sup>1</sup>From C.G. Peters, "The History of People's Co-operative Banks", (mimeo, report), Ministry of Agriculture, July, 1960.



An article in the *Gleaner* of July 10, 1936 was ominous. The article stated as follows: "the biggest sugar deal in Jamaica's history is now in process of negotiation, involving the sale of the James Charley group of estates in Westmoreland, the largest group in the Island."<sup>1</sup> The architect of this intended transaction was Tate & Lyle. Two years later the company had acquired the estates of Monymusk and Frome, in Jamaica. It had also purchased large estates in Trinidad. Tate & Lyle have been involved in the sugar business for a long time and the acquisition of West Indian sugar estates introduced a new era of foreign corporate ownership. The result of this take-over was to repeat the 18th century domination of the rural economy by the plantation. It meant foreign ownership, consolidation of scarce land resources and the colonisation of small farmers within the sugar cane belt of the estates.

Widespread uprising during the late 1930's led to the appointment of the Moyne Commission of Enquiry in 1938-39. The Commission reiterated many of the distressing social and economic conditions reported by previous Commissions. On this occasion, however, the Commission was forced to take into consideration a united working class which had shifted from previously peaceful disunited protests to a form of organised protests which were unmistakably violent. The Commission emphasised the need for urgent radical reforms. It recommended, among other things, a new economic programme based upon an agricultural policy of development away from dependence on the traditional export crops. It was not unlikely that, following the historical pattern, these recommendations would have fallen on barren ground, since another World War and another period of sugar prosperity ensued during the 1940's. On this occasion, however, the workers had organised themselves into a powerful bargaining force. A new era has been ushered in with the organisation of trade unions and political parties in the early 1940's. More than this, however, the British Government as well as the colonial government had witnessed the vulnerability of the colonial economy during the War years. The islands were threatened by virtual starvation with their emphasis on export crops and dependence on imported food stuff. Emergency programmes and reliefs were temporary measures and lacked proper long-term economic planning. The West Indian Welfare Fund, recommended by the Moyne Commission, Hurricane Relief Funds at the close of the 1930's; the 'Grow More Food' programmes to relieve shortages during the War years, were all inadequate to improve the long-term social and economic conditions. During the period 1940 and 1948 a series of development and welfare acts were passed by the British Parliament. Through these acts the West Indian government were provided with funds for development and welfare projects. These acts also emphasised the

need for long-term economic planning and diversification. The new concept of economic planning was made more realistic through the initiative of the Puerto Rican government of Munoz Marin. Popularly referred to as 'bootstrap' development planning, this programme had considerable impact on the Jamaican and other Caribbean governments. Munoz Marin introduced a 'new deal' for farmers and other workers, which included land settlement projects. In the last two decades, the various West Indian governments have become very conscious of development planning and they have all instituted five-year development programmes. In these programmes agriculture is always highlighted as a major area for improvement. Structurally, however, the agricultural sector shows little change from what it was in the period 1838-1938. The basic relationship is still the dualism between a low-productive peasant sector and large-scale plantation activity.

### Dichotomy of the Peasantry

At this point it is important to distinguish two sub-sectors of peasant farming. Firstly, there is a large group of cane farmers who are completely dependent on the plantation and whose farming activities are directly influenced by the plantation. Secondly, there is a larger group of peasant farmers who have, so to speak, been decolonised from the direct influence of the plantation. The centralisation and closing down of factories have contributed in the main to the liberation of these farmers. It is quite likely that if these factories had not gone out of production the satellite farmers would still be concentrating their resources in cane production.

In 1965 it was estimated that there were approximately 31,000 registered cane farmers<sup>1</sup> directly dependent on the plantations.<sup>2</sup> It is particularly among this group of farmers that the plantation continues to wield considerable influence. The industry with its historically protected markets creates a sense of relative stability thus encouraging the production of cane among peasant farmers.

The plantation not only influences the production pattern of a large number of small farmers, but continues to control a disproportionate amount of agricultural resources. For example, the 1960-61 Agricultural Census reported that the 18 sugar estates on the island controlled over 200,000 acres of land; much of this land is cultivable lowlands. On the other hand 71 per cent of the peasants in Jamaica operate approximately 198,000 acres or 12 per cent of the arable land.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The All Island-Jamaica Cane Farmers' Association, Twenty-fourth Annual Report, 1965, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>The number of dependent cane farmers is greater since there are significant numbers of small unregistered cane farmers who are engaged in cane cultivation and marketing.

<sup>3</sup>Census of Agriculture, Jamaica, 1961.

<sup>1</sup>Daily Gleaner, July 10, 1936.

Those peasants outside the direct sphere of influence of the plantation, have developed greater diversity in farming. There is more concentration on production for the domestic market and the organisation of these farms reflect their independence from the plantations. It is only necessary to look at the farming conditions in such districts as Christiana and parts of St. Elizabeth to determine the difference. In spite of the independence enjoyed by these farmers many historical impediments remain which serve as constraints to economic betterment. The inadequacy of proper roads, lack of irrigation water such as in southern St. Elizabeth, the token attention given to research on peasant crops and production, are some of the outstanding impediments. That small farmers in the Yallahs Valley District and southern St. Elizabeth, for example, have been able to maintain a livelihood from farming can only be credited to their personal initiative and self-sacrifice.

In spite of the resilience of peasant farmers and their ability to survive the many adversities of their occupation, the hinterland presents a disturbing picture, both within and without the estate communities. The post World War II period witnessed a shift in rural resources away from domestic food production to production for export. Farmers producing for the export market have been exposed to the uncertainties of international markets as in the cases of sugar and banana. The domestic market has been even more uncertain and has been characterised by low and fluctuating prices. Furthermore, hundreds of rural families living in the shadows of the plantation are very little removed from the social and economic conditions their foreparents inherited one hundred years ago. Low farm incomes, low estate wages, poor housing and malnutrition, low levels of education, have all created impediments to social and economic mobility.

#### CONCLUSION

The Jamaican peasantry, as is true of the Caribbean peasantry, had its conception in the colonial plantation economy. The domination of agricultural land and other economic activity by the plantation system influenced the settlement pattern and attitudes of rural people, particularly the peasants. So important has been this influence that the historical land settlement pattern may be regarded as one of the major sources of many of the problems in agriculture today. The small size of farms, fragmentation, low productivity and the relatively high cost of rural services (e. g. irrigation, conservation practices and roads) may be attributed to the settlement pattern.

The plantation has also been a major influence on the cropping pattern and on the peasants' emphasis on production for the export market. This latter consideration is not by itself an undesirable development from the point of view that where agriculture

has the capacity to earn foreign exchange this should be exploited. The problem is, however, that because of the export emphasis, there has been a neglect of production for the domestic market. This pattern has also been encouraged by serious deficiencies in the distribution, production and marketing of domestic farm produce.

In spite of the historical handicaps and present problems, the peasant sector has been remarkably resilient. During the most difficult adjustment post-emancipation period, peasant farming achieved considerable independence and economic development. The number of farms increased rapidly and through diversification peasants supplied both the domestic and export markets. Such outstanding achievements as the development of the coffee and banana industries were due essentially to peasant activity. Later the organisation and success of the Jamaica internal marketing system, the People's Cooperative Bank and the All Island Jamaica Cane Farmers Association, were due largely to the initiative and support of the peasants.

The independent initiative and allocation of peasant resources based on response to the market forces did not continue indefinitely. In the early 1900's a sort of co-operative dualism was started between the peasants and plantations, which removed much of the independence of a large section of the peasant sector. Increasing dependence on the plantation was encouraged by the principal agricultural institutions, such as the P. C. Banks, Cane Farmers' Association and also by Government policy. These institutions, along with plantation activity, contributed to a relatively stable market situation which induced peasants to allocate more of their resources to cane production. Farmers are often responsive to stable market prices rather than the maximum market price. The sugar industry has offered a relatively stable market. On the other hand, the domestic market has been characterised by high risk and uncertainty. Under such market conditions peasants have opted for the relatively stable market, thereby improving their own economic welfare.

We must recognise at the same time another section of the peasant sector which produces outside of the plantation communities. Such peasants continue to select, and produce crops in response to the 'free' market forces and the household needs. The cane farmers numbering over 35,000 continue the traditions of plantation-peasant dualism whereas the non-cane farming peasants continue the tradition of the independent peasantry of the immediate post-emancipation period.

What clearly seems to be needed is a recognition of the different conditions under which these two sections operate. There is no reason why peasants who can produce and market sugar cane more efficiently should not do so, and this applies equally to the plantation. Furthermore, there is no denying