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II. THE APPROPRIATE TYPE OF LAND REFORM FOR THE CARIBBEAN

The Problem Defined

Economic organisation in the Caribbean is such that power resides in the hands of a *small* group made up mainly of large landowners, businessmen and industrialists. Frequently, there is a coincidence of these three - that is to say the large landowner, businessman and industrialist may well be one and the same.

The present distribution of land between the plantation and peasant sectors is grossly unequal. The majority of all farms are small in size, but these occupy a very tiny share of the total farmland and the worst quality land at that.

The bulk of the rural populations in all the islands is concentrated in the peasant sector. This sector supports a greater number of people than any other single sector of the economy. Consequently any improvement in the welfare of people in the peasant sector will have important significance for the societies as a whole.

The existing situation obviously demands an urgent change - a change which would result in the removal of the monopolization of power in the hands of a few and a spread on distribution of economic social and political rights. Given the land distribution pattern in the area the group recognized that Land Reform in its broadest sense offers scope for achieving at one and the same time, income redistribution, increased employment and expanded output thereby spreading social, economic and political rights and maximizing participation in the political and democratic system.

The group therefore defines Land Reform as a movement which involves redistribution of ownership along with changes in all the institutional factors that govern the mobilization of rural resources with the objective of spreading economic, social and political rights.

Constraint to Land Reform

The group identified a complex of external and internal forces operating as constraints on a programme of Land Reform for the Caribbean islands:

- (a) Substantial land resources owned and controlled by foreigners.
- (b) Shewed distribution of land resources in respect of quantity as well as quality - the bulk of land, the land owned and the good quality land at that owned by a few.
- (c) Large areas of unutilized and underutilized lands owned by Governments.
- (d) The lack of inadequacy of such infrastructural facilities like credit, marketing, research extension etc. vital for agricultural development.
- (e) The presence of an archaic legal system in so far as land matters are concerned.

The Programme for Land Reform

Any programme for effective land reform in the area must therefore include the following:

- (a) The conduct of soil survey and land capability studies leading to
- (b) A comprehensive physical development plan for each territory identifying areas for farming, housing, commerce, industry and recreation.
- (c) The establishment of a Town and Country Planning Act.
- (d) The institution and operation of an Alien Land Holding Act.
- (e) The modernization of the legal system to speed up and facilitate conveyance of land and for rectifying titles.

Legal reform should aim at the fundamental shift for provision of legal rights in the long run.

Immediately, it should aim at removing certain bottlenecks and raising present difficulties like land conveyances, title etc.

In particular, there should be an absolute prohibition of ownership of lands by aliens. Foreign investors requiring land for their operations in the area should be given certain legal safeguards, leases etc. under which they could operate as effectively as if they owned the lands.

There should be compulsory acquisition of lands presently owned by aliens with payment made in land bonds. Development enclaves should be discouraged as they tend to exert pressure on land values in the Agricultural Sector.

Redistribution of Land

The group considered the following two alternatives in respect of the redistribution of land resources but reached no general consensus.

- (a) The acquisition and subdivision of large estates by respective Governments and their redistribution on a leasehold tenancy basis.
- (b) Ownership of large estates extended to the workers by way of share capital.

While the group deplored the present tendency to subdivide agricultural land into very small "mini" farms no agreement was reached on any specific size of unit as this would depend to a large extent upon the type of agricultural enterprise and the economic expectations of the farmer involved.

The group concluded that phase one of land reform in the area should be concerned with all arable state-owned lands which are now unutilized or underutilized and that all infrastructural facilities necessary for the development and operation of viable economic units should be provided to prospective farmers including marketing facilities, credit, research, extension. It was emphasized that the provision of land without this range of inputs was nothing but an exercise in futility.