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DISCUSSION REPORT

(Discussion of paper presented by Mr. B. Carter and Mr. I. Telfer)

Discussant: L.B. Rankine

In opening the discussions on the paper *The Philosophy and Experience in Maximizing Food Supplies in Guyana*, first let me congratulate the authors of the paper for doing a splendid job of "putting all the ideas of the Ministry of Agriculture" in such a concise and coherent manner. I, myself, know too well how difficult it is to obtain data on the Agricultural Sector in the Caribbean. Both Ken Leslie and I were severely handicapped by data limitations in our paper on Food Supplies in Jamaica. I guess that the authors must have undergone a similar experience. But I do hope that when Basil Springer will have completed his project on developing an efficient system of data collection there will be significant improvements in our data bank.

Yesterday there was some question on the wisdom of starting a regional conference on maximizing food supplies in the Caribbean with a discussion of the Jamaican Case. I am wondering whether or not the same question will arise as we begin to discuss the Guyana experience. It is my biased feeling that Guyana and Jamaica and perhaps St. Vincent to a lesser extent, are the only two countries in the Region who are tackling the whole question of food supply through full mobilization of the agricultural sector. Mistakes might be made but we all learn by our mistakes and we have to press forward with the full knowledge that the agricultural sector is fighting against tremendous odds.

Moving directly into the paper, I think the authors summarize very well the ideology and philosophy behind the whole movement towards self-sufficiency in food supplies. The philosophy seems to be within a framework of complete mobilization of three important factors:

- (i) social factor;
- (ii) economic factor; and
- (iii) political factor.

The social factor in the model presented features one of the basic resources - *people* and their differences in a very complex situation due to differences in background and no doubt aspirations and beliefs. The paper refers to the vast reservoir of individuals interested, willing and capable and this resource is being exploited to the fullest. With regard to the economic factor it is clear that a certain amount of capital must be mobilized to bring about the transformation required to improve the quality of life. The development plans must be financed. The paper refers to the commitments of the political leaders which as we all know are not very clear but they indicated that this is not likely to be the case in Guyana. But there is another kind of political variable - and this is the politics of the people. How does the politics at the farm level differ from the politics at the national level? Are they really different, because if they are, then they must conflict. How will this affect the performance of the agricultural sector? The political variable is very unstable and can do more harm than good as we attempt to maximise the objective function. On top of the above factors we find that a great deal of concern in the paper for improvements in the quality of the human life is a positive step

in the right direction.

The paper disregards the theory of complete import displacement/replacement largely because of the problem of transforming these concepts into operational models. I have no quarrel with this because to totally ban all imports would be very unwise and illogical. After all we are a part of a bigger family of nations and we depend on each other and this dependency is increasing every day. Yesterday, Lewis Campbell spoke about a Caribbean Food Corporation. I am sure that this demonstrates the recognition of the need of interdependency among nations particularly developing nations as well as the need for a new approach to the strategy of achieving self-sufficiency in food supplies. Currently, there is a great deal of attention being given to increased production of food because the experiences of the past two years taught us a lesson. *Oil shortages* triggered off a chain reaction of shortages worldwide - fuel, fertilizer, food, etc. - every single country was affected either directly or indirectly. Several countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean had to give assistance to others within the community. On the other hand we still rely heavily on foreign markets to buy our produce. How then can we totally ban all imported commodities? International or even interregional trade is a reciprocal arrangement. A level of acceptable balance must be achieved.

The philosophy and ideology then manifest themselves in the traditional Five-Year Development Programme. I ask whether or not this period has been identified as a sufficient time-horizon in which all the constraints will be removed and the drive toward self-sufficiency in food supplies will be maximized. But, we say, that even with the best intentions, there were problems. Problems brought about by external forces - increased fertilizer prices, scarcity of several raw materials, general inflation and so on. I think these experiences are telling us or emphasizing the importance of defining an appropriate variable to accommodate these situations as we develop our model to achieve self-sufficiency in food supplies. In other words we should make room for these situations in our development strategy/programme planning.

We find that Guyana's Development Plan sets targets - targets for the livestock sector, the crop sector, creates employment, develops agro-industries and so on. We also find programmes similar to those developed in Jamaica. We find that the programmes include incentives to stimulate production - through subsidies and loans; provisions for research inputs as well as provision for regional collaboration. Several programmes are geared specifically for the small farm sector - not so much to change the traditional system but to develop the existing system; how it could be integrated into the overall development framework.

But while there was general satisfaction with the paper there were one or two points that I am concerned about. I might be wrong here but if I am, this is largely because of the limited time in which I had to review the paper. The paper indicates substantial increases in acreage planted to particular crops but very little mention is made of increased productivity. Is this not relevant at this point in time? Perhaps not, because Guyana apparently has unlimited supplies of land and so land is not now a serious constraint. Another point of concern is the impact of the programme on the nutrition levels of the peoples. This was not reflected explicitly in the paper. I cannot recall whether there were references to specific income targets as was done in the Jamaican programme.

If there were, were these levels reasonable and operational? In the early programmes in Jamaica we saw emphasis on Grants and Subsidies rather than on loans and there was very little impact on food production. But with the subsequent shift towards loans things began to happen. I don't know whether this point is relevant here. It was gratifying to hear that Guyanese farmers are still price-responsive. I think this confirms a study done by Compton Bourne on price response among rice farmers in Guyana.

Finally, I did not detect a great deal of concern for the farmer himself such as provisions for improvements in his level of management. Because if the farmer has to fight the Chambers of Commerce, he has to develop sound business principles. Has the programme really succeeded so far? And if it didn't, why not? If it failed what are the factors responsible for the failure? What are the important lessons to be learnt from the Guyanese experience?

I see Guyana's approach to the problem of self-sufficiency in food supplies as follows:

Determination of an appropriate objective function - being improvement in the nutritional levels and overall quality of life which they hope to achieve through complete mobilization and monopolization of the resources with a socio-economic and political framework.

I think I will stop here and allow other participants to address themselves to these and other issues.