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SOME COMPARISONS OF MELVILLE HALL, CASTLE BRUCE AND GRAND BAY

(from the Case Study Report)

In regard to the Melville Hall settlement, any generalisation should be made very cautiously, since the respondents present a particular subset of the population, and do not necessarily represent the population of farmers in Dominica. However, the leasehold farmers at Melville Hall are the largest group of leasehold farmers in the country and agricultural planners can certainly be guided by their experience.

The distinctions in the origins of Castle Bruce and Melville Hall projects which have a bearing on their evaluation in relation to Geneva Estate must be identified. The Melville Hall Land Settlement Scheme was designed and initiated by the Land Management Authority, a *quasi*-governmental body, and the members were selected by the Authority for the settlement by reference to criteria related to the development of farming *per se*, and not as part of an existing group sharing common interests beyond their interest in farming. In the case of the Castle Bruce Cooperative, members came together as a body with the background of a common struggle against an existing authority, in order to advance their collective goals for self-development and self-management of an estate. To the extent that there were external pressures operating here, these were bent more on frustrating the group, than advancing it. Because of the terms of selection of tenants on the Melville Hall Estate, they could have been expected, from the outset, to demonstrate a close bond or relationship with the Authority, and to agree to be subject to its policy and programmes. In the case of the Castle Bruce Cooperative, the opposite tendency, of resistance to a super authority, would be more in evidence and understandable. Further, the situation which characterises the problems of Geneva/Grand Bay and Castle Bruce, namely a community virtually hemmed in by a large, dominant estate, on which most of the residents depend for employment and sustenance, is not very much in evidence at Melville Hall. The villages closest to Melville Hall - Marigot and Wesley - had access to surrounding lands other than the Melville Hall Estate, and more opportunities for employment and for engagement in farming and related activities in general. This entire area has a tradition of supporting a large number of small scale, independent farmers, operating their own holdings. There was, however, not the pressure for the use of land in the Melville Hall area, that undoubtedly exists in the other study areas and the successes of the Melville Hall settlement project might be difficult to duplicate.

Thus, although the experiences of the Melville Hall Settlement, and some of the attitudes of the farmers, as reflected in the responses to the questionnaire, do offer a guide to the manner of approach and the policies for development of Geneva, the more relevant experience is that shared by the Castle Bruce Project. This is not meant to indicate that there are no weaknesses in the Castle Bruce project which should be avoided at Grand Bay, if a successful cooperative project is to be established.

The survey of Melville Hall indicated that the farmers on the settlement had a strong preference for the freehold system of tenure, although

a significant number of them like the leasehold system. The cooperative system of tenure comes very low down in the scale of preferences. On the other hand, the sociological survey of Grand Bay indicates that, particularly among the youth, there is strong preference for the cooperative system of tenure. However, the consultants feel that the attitude of the Melville Hall farmers to the cooperative system of tenure could reflect their limited experience and lack of knowledge of the full implications and advantages of the cooperative system. On the other hand, it is true that older farmers, as represented on the Melville Hall estate, would be naturally more attracted to a system which allows them greater independence, as well as greater security for their children.

Any comparison of the two patterns of land settlement at Melville Hall and Castle Bruce must emphasise the functions and responsibilities of the Land Management Authority in the former. Having settled qualified farmers on the land, the Authority's responsibility narrows down somewhat to ensuring productivity and providing ancillary or support services, such as transportation, marketing and technical assistance in one form or the other. If crops are already established on the estate, the Authority would not be inclined, except as dictated by the need to maintain the economic viability of the whole settlement, to alter the cropping pattern, as has been done in the case of Castle Bruce, from extensive to intensive farming, as a means to a social objective of increasing community benefits. The pattern of production at Melville Hall remains fundamentally the same as it was under the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

In attempting to restructure the estate, the Castle Bruce Cooperative has taken over all the functions which the Authority provides at Melville Hall, including marketing and transportation, and in addition has assumed a large number of other functions, which are not only unrelated to increased farm productivity, but positively detract from it, at least in the short run. The basic philosophy of the Cooperative would necessitate viewing the activities of a Land Management Authority as some form of interference, while, in contrast, the Melville Hall settlers acknowledge the Authority's services as essential. Quite clearly, the disparate goals of the two projects are brought into sharp focus by this fact.

One could go further, and assume that, were the Authority to withdraw from its role in the Melville Hall Settlement, the void in management would lead to the collapse of the project, unless the same level of management could either be provided from within the group, or brought in from outside.

The discussion on management has important implications for Geneva. While the indications are that, at least, a very vocal group is against any dominant role in the use of development of the estate by an outside authority, there is no clear alternative in the existing situation. It needs to be recalled that, although the workers of Castle Bruce manage this land themselves, by their own admission, they could not have done so without the intensive educational programme in self-management, which the delay of two years in actually taking possession of the land by the Cooperative allowed. If an immediate decision were taken by Government to transfer control of Geneva to the people of Grand Bay, questions such as who should assume control, who should be settled, and on what terms, what system of tenancy should be adopted, etc., might easily set the stage for a long drawn out struggle between different factions, to the detriment of the community as a whole. The suspicions being harboured by one group against another at Grand Bay do not suggest an easy solution to this problem.

On the other hand, there are equally strong pressures against administration of the project by the Land Management Authority, and it is instructive that these are based on the conviction, of some important elements in the community, that they know best what needs to be done. A situation of such inherent complexity does not lend itself to rash solutions.

So far, no reference has been made to the fact that there are two models operating side by side at Castle Bruce. In addition to the lease arrangement with the Cooperative, the Land Management Authority had also demarcated an area of the estate for settlement of individual leasehold tenants, and four such tenants have already been settled, on the Melville Hall pattern.

In view of the pressing demand by the Cooperative for a larger acreage to enable it to serve more members (the average holding by the four farmers is approximately 18 acres, while the average for the Cooperative is about 1.5 acres) one point that is not clear is the reason for the Authority's decision to settle individual farmers on lots adjacent to the Cooperative's land. Whatever the reason, it does offer an opportunity to assess the workings of the Cooperative-cum-Settlement model described in the next section. One can assume that the individual farmers settled are not in favour of the cooperative system, and thus there is some parallel with the situation in the Grand Bay area. The experiment is, however, too short to justify an early application to Geneva.

An additional consideration is one to which frequent reference has been made in this report, namely that the land/labour ratio at Grand Bay does not permit dividing the land into lots as large as 19 acres (Melville Hall) or 18 acres (Castle Bruce Settlement) and over. The juxtaposition of two patterns of settlement would offer a constant opportunity for the two groups to assess each other's relative economic progress, and too great a disparity (particularly if it is felt to arise from the differences in *average* acreages held) would, inevitably, lead to great dissatisfaction on the part of the group holding less land on average.