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Discussion on Papers by A. Russel, M.G. White and P.I. Gomes

In leading off the discussion, Edward Comberbatch (Barbados) noted with pleasure the attitudes expressed by the Melville Hall farmers with respect to farm records, extension services and the future of farming. He sounded a note of caution however, with respect to the interpretation of these answers for, after all, the farmers are relatively well provided for with respect to land and services and it is therefore to be expected that they should be fairly satisfied. But, the question was posed, would there have been such a high degree of agreement with the selection procedure, for example, if the survey had been conducted among farmers who had not been selected? Similarly, if the farmers perceived that they or their children had an opportunity to enter a profession or high paying position would there have been such satisfaction expressed with the future of farming? A warning was also sounded that if further schemes attempted to emulate Melville Hall would they be able to command the same ratio of extension officers to farmers, and if not, could the success rate of the farmers be expected to be so high? The chronic problem of farm credit was again noted to be present even in this otherwise well-serviced project.

With respect to Castle Bruce, concern was expressed that farmers who wished to cultivate their own plots after working in the Cooperative were not allowed to do so. It was noted that this practice was allowed, for example, in USSR after farmers had finished work on the collective farm.

The general lack of objectives for the agricultural sector in relation to the rest of the economy throughout the Caribbean was deplored. A warning was also given of the problems which might arise with the development of Grand Bay if objectives for Dominica are not clearly enunciated, for example, the market for goods which might be produced at Grand Bay.

The projected farm size and the target income were seen to provide little flexibility for the future even if at the moment they are sufficient to supply the basic requirements of living. Without more flexibility there might soon be a return to the present dissatisfaction over the level of income which can be earned. In this respect, it was suggested that the emigration of people from Grand Bay to areas with lower population pressure be encouraged, in order to increase the area of land which might be allocated to those remaining.

A plea was made for a professional public relations effort in Grand Bay to inform the people of the community (and the country at large) about the project and to involve them in its operation. This effort should include both farmers and their families and not be confined merely to agricultural matters.

When the discussion was opened to delegates a very lively exchange of ideas ensued. The main points to be raised were as follows:

1. The categorisation of farmers in the survey of Melville Hall into young and old was stereotyped and the categories ignore the social relations of production. Rather, the category wage earners, unemployed, and marginal farmers is represented by *young*, and the category shop-keepers, and large farmers is represented by *old*.

2. The selection of Melville Hall and Castle Bruce as appropriate case studies for the development of Geneva/Grand Bay was criticised since the three areas have different backgrounds:

Melville Hall is surrounded by two highly progressive agricultural communities of Wesley and Marigot, where the people for the last 50 years have been engaged in vibrant agricultural projects. They have had a linkage with Portsmouth, their main export centre over the same period, and have had access to the Caribbean markets. This lends support to the view that their best future is in agriculture.

At Castle Bruce less than 50 years ago the people were hemmed in by the sea on one side and forests on the other and they had a life of relative ease. Then came the C.D.C. who recruited the working population and subsequently retrenched them. This led to a revolutionary situation.

The situation at Grand Bay is very dissimilar. The people had a colonial background, being the *serfs* of the Geneva Estate. Before the purchase of the estate by the last owner, they were allowed to do what they wished on the estate. Since then they have been trying to break their dependence on the estate. They are hucksters, trading with Guadeloupe and Martinique and emigrants to the Virgin Islands and elsewhere. They provide the labour force wherever there is a dearth of labour for the various estate throughout Dominica.

3. The analyses of Melville Hall and Castle Bruce were sociological rather than economic, since apparently no attempt was made to determine the income realised on these projects. Thus, there could be no assessment of the financial success of the projects, nor any comparison with the budgeted income for Geneva. The limitations of a merely financial criterion of success were, however, appreciated since it was accepted that contribution to household food supply alone could be an important benefit of a project in situations where land is limited (e.g. Grand Bay).

The lack of a thorough economic examination according to the consultants, was because both projects are too new to establish their future economic viability. Tremendous foreign assistance has been given to the Castle Bruce Cooperative, on the basis that the social objectives are desirable and need a chance to reach fruition. Similarly, it was felt that it was not possible to cost the contribution of the Land Management Authority at Melville Hall, and without the L.M.A.'s input, the units could be very depressed. Further, the validity of the figures available could not be ascertained, nor the extent to which they could throw light on the matter. At present, both projects seem to be in need of outside financial support.

4. The ability of leasehold farms (as at Melville Hall) to meet both social and nutritional objectives was questioned. It was asserted, in response, that whereas the objectives of leasehold farms are not so directed, farmers normally respond to price stimuli and in so far as these stimuli reflect national objectives the farmers will tend to meet them.

5. The consultants explained that the interview techniques at the two settlements differed because it was necessary, at Melville Hall, to dissociate management (L.M.A.) from the interview, while at Castle Bruce, because the workers themselves constitute the management this was not necessary.

6. The consultants explained that some record keeping at Melville Hall for the L.M.A. is mandatory. It was generally agreed that farmers should be encouraged to use the records for management purposes (cost of production, profit and loss, budgeting etc.) rather than merely as an accounting procedure for the L.M.A. This would maintain, and probably increase, the present interest in record-keeping.

7. Different attitudes to youth were noted at the two settlement schemes. Whereas at Melville Hall, persons under 24 (including youth camp graduates) were unable to apply for leasehold tenancies, at Castle Bruce every effort has been made to involve young people in the project.