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CONSTRAINTS TO IMPLEMENTATION AND PROPOSALS

(from the Case Study Report)

From the socio-economic evaluations of the land settlement schemes at Melville Hall and Castle Bruce, and of the Grand Bay area, given in the previous section, certain constraints which would affect any particular strategy finally selected for the development of Geneva can be identified. Some of these constraints have been mentioned in passing, in previous sections, but it is necessary to discuss them in full since their removal or reduction is a prerequisite to the implementation of a given strategy.

Rental of Land

The Leasehold system introduces the thorny problem of rental and rental values which, as demonstrated by the Castle Bruce experience, might be difficult to resolve. Rental is still a sore point with the Castle Bruce Cooperative, two years after its formation, and this contributes to the attitude of hostility which the Cooperative harbours to the Land Management Authority. There are many issues to be considered in this matter, which can only be summarily treated here.

In the first place, in establishing the rental, if any, to be paid for use of the Geneva Estate, comparisons will have to be made with rentals paid by tenants in other areas. At Melville Hall, the rentals paid by individual tenants range from \$40 to \$70 per acre, which is considered high. There is every reason to believe that farmers at Grand Bay would strongly resist payment of high rentals, and, indeed, it is believed that this is the principal reason why all the holdings have not yet been taken at Geneva. On the other hand, there is an obvious difficulty in the same Authority charging different rentals in different areas, unless on the basis of the assessed value of existing production and other similar factors. Farmers who have to pay the higher rental would hardly accept such a justification. It is very important not to set a pattern or precedent in one area, which could not be repeated elsewhere.

The underlying reasons for farmers' reluctance to pay high rents, or any rental at all, suggest that they would be more willing to pay rents to a body like the Land Management Authority, if they were satisfied that rentals collected were being channeled into projects related to the development of their own community. In fact, a rental is charged by the Authority in order to enable repayment of the capital and interest costs of purchasing the land.

In determining whether any rental should be paid, it should be realised that the land is a basic resource of a country, and farmers should, therefore, be required to pay for its use. But, it is not simply a matter of Government basing the rental to be paid by farmers on the amount for which the land was purchased. The Government, as a landlord, is expected to act somewhat differently from the private landowner in establishing rentals. National objectives have to be considered. If one objective is the stimulation of agricultural development, through land settlement projects, then it is necessary to avoid a situation in which, for instance, the rental is set so high that it operates as a burden on the farmer, and a disincentive to maximum productivity. Theoretically, a high rental could have the effect of increasing productivity, by forcing the farmer to work

harder, to meet the rental, but this assumes that larger production would automatically result in greater net revenue.

Considering the fundamental importance attached to agricultural expansion and development, the apparently more favourable concessions given to industry is subject to question, not only in Dominica, but in other developing agricultural economies. Under such arrangements as aid to pioneer industries and development enterprises, industry is granted various tax and duty exemptions, protection from imports, and in some cases factory shells and other supporting facilities are leased at token rentals. These, and other concessions, are given to infant industries, even when the risks of production, and the investment required, are less than in agricultural projects, and they are continued far beyond the establishment phase of the industry. There is at present no comparable package of direct incentives for a specific agricultural project, such as a cooperative. One way of compensating for this might be to subsidize the rental for the use of the land, or, simply stated, to charge a *peppercorn* rental. Apart from the financial support which this implies, it perhaps would meet the problem of the psychological resistance which exists to the payment of rent for land.

There is far greater justification for charging rent when the landlord or administrative authority is responsible for providing the infrastructure on the land, which permits efficient production, such as farm buildings, equipment and water supplies. The tenants, whether individually or as a cooperative, can then use their revenue from production to meet the recurrent operational expenses.

If the intention is to pass on the Geneva Estate, or a section of it, to the villagers, with no further input coming from the Authority, the determination of rental becomes more crucial. Government might find it less costly to sacrifice the rental, and to pass the responsibility for maintaining the farm unit to the tenants, on the assumption that accumulated capital will be invested by the tenants at least as efficiently as by the Authority.

If a rental is to be charged it should be based on a flexible system, and not represent a fixed charge, payable irrespective of fluctuating prices and yields from year to year. The objective should be:

*to keep the tenant's burden constant in real terms, that is, as a proportion of his total receipts. In France, to take one example, the rent, although it may be payable in cash, must be expressed in terms of a certain quantity of farm products, so that it rises and falls with their market price.*¹

Criteria for Selection of Farmers

In any strategy adopted, the system and method of selecting farmers for settlement on Geneva can present great difficulty. While it is not a great task to get concerted action in the acquisition by villagers of a property that is important to their survival, it is a different matter, once this objective has been realized, to obtain consensus of thought as to who should benefit directly from its use. The criteria for selection of farmers for settlement must be almost impeccable, and, must have the endorsement of all concerned. In

¹ Anne Martin, (1958). *Economics and Agriculture*. London, Routledge.

the case of Melville Hall, educational standards, number of dependents and farming experience appear to be paramount. The acceptability of these criteria among the residents of Grand Bay is doubtful. In the case of Castle Bruce, it was basically a question of retaining all those who had previously worked on the estate as employees. The farmers at Melville Hall were quite satisfied with the system of allotment on that estate, and the members of the Castle Bruce Cooperative were themselves responsible for devising the system of settlement. On the contrary, the people of Grand Bay have very strong feelings about who should be settled on Geneva, and the setting of criteria, whatever system is adopted, and whoever is responsible for making the decision, is not nearly as straight-forward. It is in this, more than any other area, that the ingenuity, the integrity and the goodwill of the residents will be demonstrated.

Involvement of the Whole Community

The task of initiating and sustaining development, in accordance with the goals and aspirations of the Grand Bay community, is a formidable one. This task is further complicated by the urgency with which it must be undertaken, if the destruction of the community is to be avoided. Fortunately, the Government of the country is aware of the need for action in this area, and it can be expected that, if sufficiently well-designed plans can be laid down, early action will be taken. But how are these plans to be implemented?

Like other rural communities in Dominica, Grand Bay already has a basic network of rural agencies, societies and services, on which the necessary organisational arrangements for developing a full-scale programme of development for the village could be based. These include the Village Council, the school administration, and Church and youth groups.

The importance of these organisations in the new arrangements to be devised must not be overrated. Most of the youth doubt the credibility of the existing institutions, which are seen by them as part of the façade which bolsters the existing system. The difficulties of initiating a programme of development acceptable to the entire community are accentuated by the existence within the community of ideologies which, at some points, might be fundamentally at odds with the immediate developmental objectives which can be set. Thus, considerable effort will have to be given to convincing the youth of the need for a cooperative approach to development, and to working hand-in-hand with other interests and groups which may appear to have goals and objectives diametrically opposed to their own. Equally, many adults in the community will have to be persuaded of the wisdom and necessity for acceptance of some of the ideals of the youth, and to relax their rigidity against all proposals advanced by youth and their leaders.

In essence, what, then, is required is high-calibre leadership, capable of attracting widespread support, as the basis for coordinated action. The role of leadership would have to be redefined in the community, within the context of new social and economic ideals, and of the need to combine somewhat conflicting ideals.

To achieve the developmental goals, it is necessary to find the villagers who are honest, most trusted, and in whom the majority

of people have the greatest confidence. Programmes to be undertaken are to be outside of political differences, and must be built on unity among the people and on a strong community spirit. The first task would, therefore, be to identify some of the people, young and old alike, who the villagers themselves would like to see on a Steering or Action Committee.

Whoever the leaders are, their prime policy must be to meet the real needs and aspirations of all the people, and they must be conscious of the importance of ensuring full participation of the people in any programme of activities. The tendency to gerontocracy, or rule by elders dispensing solutions from above, and opposing innovative suggestions by youth, must be avoided at all costs. Consultation and cooperation must go beyond the narrow confines of the techniques conventionally described by such expressions as community development and mobilisation of human resources.