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22 The encouragement of rural-based industry at the local level

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The object of this paper is to help identify the characteristics and trends of rural-based industry in upland Britain and to set out how these are encouraged, with a view to helping to devise alternative strategies for these areas.

The move of population from agriculture and the countryside to manufacturing industry and the towns has been the most important continuing trend in British society for more than two hundred years. However, while agriculture has always been and will remain the predominant industry in country areas, it has never been the only means of livelihood for country people. Today, when economies of large scale production seem to yield much smaller dividends, and more sophisticated agriculture calls for more ancillary service provision, there are greater opportunities for manufacturing and service industries to expand in country areas than at any time since the 18th century.

Before more industry moves to rural locations, the deep seated tradition of an urban base for manufacture, the glamorous attraction which towns have always had for country people, and the environmental problems of the planners must be overcome. There is none the less a consensus of both government and people that a larger proportion of the population should live and work in country areas. The Development Commission was established as a result of the Development and Road Improvement Funds Act of 1909/10 with the object of combating rural depopulation, and there is no less need for its work today, but there are reasons to hope that after sixty years the tide is slowly beginning to turn in its favour.

The problems of creating a broader industrial base in upland areas of Britain do not differ in kind from the problems in all rural areas but there are differences in emphasis, some of which should be noted:

- (i) A decline in the number of people employed on the land balanced to some extent by a notable increase in the energy per caput required by farm workers in the form of tractors, land rovers, power saws, grass dryers etc., needing sophisticated maintenance services.
- (ii) The traditional outward migration of the indigenous population stimulated to some extent by better educational opportunities and the media, balanced by an immigration of second home owners, retired people, and an increasing number who prefer the life style and accept the lower standard of living which a sparsely populated area offers, creating, however, an unbalanced age structure.
- (iii) The progressive rundown of 19th century industries which came to upland areas to exploit water power and relatively low grade mineral deposits which may in due course be balanced by renewed industrial interest in unpolluted air and water, and even the possibility of small scale hydro-electricity.
- (iv) Major improvements of communications of all sorts which reduce the disadvantages of remoteness from markets, centres of innovation, and sources of components and raw materials, and improvements in the personal mobility of the lowland and urban population which allows the tourist trade to extend over the greater part of the year and helps to break down the psychological barrier which inhibits industrial managers and their wives from contemplating a move to a comparatively remote area.
- (v) Finally, one cannot overlook the modern preoccupation, particularly by the urban population, with the sun, preferably semi-tropical, leading to rejection of the winter cold and mists of upland areas as places to live and work.

In 1921 the Development Commission set up the Rural Industries Intelligence Bureau (later the Rural Industries Bureau) and from this, and pioneer work by Rural Community Councils, the organisation now known as the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA) has grown up, with Organisers in each county of England, and until recently Wales; an experienced staff of advisers, instructors and accountants, and, again until recently, organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Most small country based servicing and manufacturing businesses which request CoSIRA services can receive the continuing advice of an Organiser who, after five, ten or even twenty years experience of businesses employing less than twenty skilled men, will have acquired a considerable degree of expertise. Through the Organiser the firm may obtain either free, or on a fee basis, technical instruction in both basic industrial skills such as welding, wood and metal machining, agricultural machinery, etc., and in traditional rural skills such as farriery, wrought iron work, thatching and saddlery. Among the most valuable services are the advice of management accountants who have considerable experience of small businesses, whilst other experts in workshop layout, production

management, adaption of buildings, marketing and publicity are available on CoSIRA's staff. Loans are available for buildings on a twenty year term, and for equipment and working capital on shorter terms up to a total of £30 000, at current interest rates, and on rather less security than commercial banks sometimes require. CoSIRA do, however, insist that before a loan is offered, the firm makes a careful feasibility study, in itself a valuable discipline. In addition to these special services, CoSIRA provides support for small trade groups, assists participation in exhibitions at home and overseas, and organises a variety of weekend business courses, study tours and training courses. However, perhaps the most valuable service of all which CoSIRA provides may be the interest and advice of an independent friend on a continuing basis over many years, in the huge variety of problems from planning applications, safety regulations, tax and accounting to the more direct industrial problems of the right product, the right means of production and the right method of selling.

CoSIRA keeps in close touch with the parallel organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and there are regular exchanges of ideas on new ways of helping small industries in country areas. Recently, the Development Commission has instituted a policy of focal point approach and throughout England areas of special need have been identified. In a number of these areas the Development Commission has financed the construction of advance factories of a size which will allow small businesses to start up and expand to create local employment. An increasing amount of Organisers' time and advisory services are now being concentrated in the areas around these advance factories, seeking out any way in which the local economy as a whole can be stimulated.

Cumbria has a number of sites in small country towns which have been approved by the Development Commission for the building of these small advance factories which the District and County Councils, in making their case to the Development Commission through the medium of a County Action Plan for the regeneration of the rural part of the County, expect to provide a focus for total regeneration. CoSIRA, Rural Community Councils/Councils of Voluntary Service and local (or parish) Councils are concerned with the selection of these sites and after approval the County Small Industries Committee, working through its attached Organiser/s defines an 'Area of Pull' in which the Development Commission, CoSIRA and the Rural Community Council will make maximum effort to increase and broaden the range of employment, and prevent further deterioration.

The allocation of the advance factories in the Assisted Areas is the responsibility of the Regional Director of the Department of Industry and the Development Commission, who seek mainly to encourage the expansion and development of indigenous firms, especially those with particular links to the rural community,

but not those simply needing to rehouse without expansion and the creation of a reasonable number of new jobs. In the Assisted Areas applications from firms wishing to come into the area are welcomed.

The mix of CoSIRA services in any one area of England varies with local needs but throughout there is an undoubted element of 'horse to the water'. The vital and essential element in rural industries is the individual with enterprise, skills, management ability and drive and ideas. At best advisory and credit services can only act as a catalyst. There are some reasons to believe that in the remoter country districts the process of emigration to the towns, the Commonwealth and to the professions, generation after generation by the more enterprising and possibly more intelligent members of country families, has reduced the spark of enterprise among indigenous country men. Equally, modern society has undoubtedly reduced the rewards and increased the difficulties of individual initiative. How far an official organisation can and should attempt to stimulate enterprise and individual initiative is a subject which this symposium might well debate. It must be noted, however, that though there is a strong tradition that upland areas breed men of rugged individualism, one of the most deep rooted problems of these areas may well be a shortage of local men who are ready to go it alone in some new enterprise, at least in their own country. This shortage, real or apparent, makes it all the more important to give every possible assistance and encouragement to the individual with an idea and the drive to carry it through.

It must always be remembered that upland areas in England and in almost all parts of Britain are only relatively remote in comparison to one of the most thickly populated countries in the world. The barriers to economic and industrial development are more often psychological than real.