

MEMORANDUM ON THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

OF

BRITISH GUIANA

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(Submitted to the Venn Commission in 1948)

The sugar industry in the colony of British Guiana has a long and checkered history. Not only was it associated with slave labour in the days of slavery, but also in more recent times with immigrant "indentured" labourers. Some time ago, one Governor referred to it as the "sheet anchor" industry. It was the only major industry until the relatively recent advent of the timber and mining industries and is still making the greatest contribution to the national income. It is responsible for the employment of about 30,000 persons per year, a large percentage of the adult population of the colony.

Within recent times however, and particularly during the last 15 years, there has been a growing discontent. This was culminated in the recent strike and shooting of workers on the East Coast of Demerara.

LAND UTILISATION, TENURE AND REFORM

A paradox of British Guiana is that in such a large country of 83,000 square miles, there is a definite land hunger. This is due to the fact that land is either not properly drained and irrigated or not easily accessible. 86% of the area is forest, 10.5% savannah, and the remainder lies mainly on the coastal belt. A very large proportion of the available land on the coastal belt is held in large estates, much of which is in the form of sugar.

Sugar estates in 1943 varied in size from 934 acres to 24,112 acres. "Their combined area is 154,689 English acres .....at 31st December, 1943 this total area was utilised as follows - 61,386 acres were under cane, 18,395 acres were under rice, ground provisions, rubber, coconuts and other crops; 28,115 acres were used for grazing; 5,094 acres were occupied by buildings, pens, etc.; 20,963 acres were under fallow; the remaining 20,736 acres consisted of swamp, bush, foreshore, dams, canals, etc." \*

The figures quoted above show that an area of 18,395 acres plus 28,115 acres, making a total of 46,510 acres or about 30% of land was not in any way associated with the cultivation of sugar cane. Of the 20,736 acres, much of which is known as swamp, bush and foreshore, can be readily utilised by farmers as rice and provision land. Much of the area included under grazing is merely so reported but not utilised as such. Acreage Tax Returns for the first six months of 1948 indicate that for the Le Ressenouvir Estates, comprising a total area of 8667.1 acres,

/2395.26 acres....

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\*(1) Legislative Council Paper No. 11 of 1945. Report by Dr. F.C. Benham on the Economic Position of the Sugar Industry of British Guiana, Page 3.

2395.26 acres or approximately 36% were returned as waste land, dams and trenches. Much of this area can be utilised if made available to the workers residing in the estates and adjoining villages. Ogle Estates Ltd., consisting of 6,500 acres, have 2,132 acres or approximately 31% returned as grazing. A great portion of this area can be utilised more profitably by the residents for provision and rice cultivation.

Of the total area occupied by the sugar estates, only a small portion is owned and held under freehold. The rest is occupied under leases for which a yearly rental of about 3 cents to 5 cents per acre is charged.

Not included in the above total acreage is the area of land comprising of Campbellville, Bel Air, Sophia, Blygezigt, Liliendal, Pattison and Turkeyen, which are situated on the East Coast of Demerara and owned by the Corentyne Sugar Company, Ltd. This area, with the exception of Campbellville, totals approximately 2,000 acres, most of which is leased as house lots, rice, provision and pasture land. A very small section is utilised for cane cultivation.

Sugar estates are not only engaged in sugar production. In 1944, they also cultivated a total of 5,717 acres in peas, beans and ground provisions.\* Besides, other acres were held under rubber, limes and other "minor industries".

Regular workers are usually allotted small areas of land for growing rice and ground provisions. Cattle is also agisted. The figures for 1943, 1946 and 1947 are as follows -

	<u>RICE</u>		<u>PROVISIONS</u>		<u>CATTLE</u>	
	<u>Acreage allotted</u>	<u>No. of persons</u>	<u>Acreage allotted</u>	<u>No. of persons</u>	<u>Acreage allotted</u>	<u>No. of persons</u>
1943	11,430	13,053	3,445	9,262	11,848	3,493
1946	10,696.25	11,219	2,601.5	5,952	12,999	3,914
1947	9,381.5	10,263	2,546	6,016	12,389	3,641

From the above, a comparison of the 1943 figures with the 1946 and 1947 figures would reveal that for rice and provision farming, not only was there a decrease in the total area allotted, but also a reduction in the total number of persons to whom land was allotted. In 1943, 0.87 acre was allotted per person for rice cultivation and .37 for ground provisions. 3.5 heads of cattle were agisted per person.

As regards future housing policy of sugar estates, it appears that only the essential "nucleus" population will be

/housed.

\*(2) Legislative Council Paper No. 22 of 1945. Report on Local Food Production in 1944, the Activities of District Food Committees and on Sugar Estates, Page 19.



housed. This was calculated in 1946 to be 5,262 families. The occasional part-time and non-essential workers will comprise 6,555 families, giving a total of 11,817 families with an average of about 6 persons per family, the total estate population being 71,480 persons in 1946.\* If the same areas of land distributed in 1947 are available for distribution in the future to all the families, each family will receive about .87 acre for rice cultivation and .22 acre for ground provision. About 1 head cattle will be agisted per family. On the other hand, if the same areas of land are distributed only to the occasional, part-time and non-essential families, each family will receive about 1.8 acres for rice cultivation and .5 acre for provision. About 2.3 cattle will be agisted. Even if all the land in 1943 under rice, ground provisions, rubber, coconut, etc., amounting to 18,395 acres, and under pasture amounting to 28.115 acres, were distributed to all the families, it would amount to 1.5 acres for rice, etc., and .5 acre for pasture per family. The above areas of land which are at the disposal of workers are not adequate. In view of the high cost of living and low wages, workers have to augment their wages by getting and cultivating an adequate acreage of land.

The King Committee reported "that the reason why available work is not fully taken up is because resident workers find it more profitable to work on their own rice fields and farms, and some non-residents have left working on the fields on the estates for more profitable occupations!".\*\* This statement is made in spite of the fact that at the same time, and selling at guaranteed Government minimum prices, sugar estates showed, in 1943, an operating loss of \$190,000 on "minor industries" - food crops, coconuts, etc., and in 1944, an operating loss of \$75,000 on food crops and a profit of \$13,000 on rubber, limes and other "minor industries". \*\*\*

From figures given in the Report by Dr. F.C. Benham on the Economic Position of the Sugar Industry of British Guiana with particular reference to Table IX relating to the field costs of growing cane and delivering to factory, the rate of surplus value created by field workers is about 50% calculated as follows -

Constant capital	-	\$16.64	per acre	
Variable Capital	-	\$81.49	" "	
Value of sugar cane product per acre	-	\$138.31	" "	
Surplus value created	-	\$40.18	" "	
Rate of surplus value	-	$\frac{40.18 \times 100}{81.49}$	=	50%
Constant Capital	-	Cost of fertilizers (\$8.34) plus cost of drainage and irrigation (\$4.56) plus cost of mules, oxen, etc., punts, stock feed (\$3.74); Total - \$16.64 per acre.		
		/Variable Capital		

\*(3) Legislative Council Paper No. 11 of 1948 relating to Development Planning. Appendix to Part 10.

\*\* (4) Legislative Council Paper No. 2 of 1944. The Report of the Committee appointed to Enquire into Certain Questions in Connection with Piece Work on Sugar Estates, Page 4.

\*\*\* Reference No. 1 cited - Pages 14 and 15.

Variable Capital	-	Cost of planting, reaping and transporting (\$73.31) plus cost of supervision (\$8.18)		
		Total - \$81.49 per acre.		
Cost of Fertilizers	-	$\frac{\$512,000}{61.386 \text{ acres}}$	=	8.34 per acre
Drainage and Irrigation	-	$\frac{\$459,000 + \$246,000}{154689}$	=	
		$\frac{\$705,000}{154689}$	=	\$4.56 per acre
Supervision	-	$\frac{\$502,000}{61,386 \text{ acres}}$	=	\$8.18 per acre
Cost of mules, oxen, etc.	-	\$35,000		
Cost of cane punts	-	\$67,000		
Cost of stock feed	-	\$118,000		
Cost of mules, punts, stock feed	-	$\frac{\$220,000}{61.386 \text{ acres}}$	=	\$3.74 per acre
Cost of planting, reaping and transporting (About 20% of crop equal to plant cane)	-	Cost of 4 ratoons + Cost of 1 plant cane =		
		$\frac{\$4 \times 58.41 + \$132.93}{5}$	=	
		\$73.31 per acre		
Yield per acre	-	$\frac{4 \times 3.05 + 4.76}{5}$	=	
		3.39 tons of sugar	=	
		3.39 x 12 (12 tons of sugar cane equal 1 ton of sugar)	=	
		40.68 tons of sugar cane		
Value of 1 acre of sugar cane	-	40.68 x \$3.40	=	\$138.31

The rate of surplus value of 50% calculated above is under-estimated for the following reasons -

- (1) All supplies, renewals, spares, etc., are purchased through associated agents at about 30% above cost.
- (2) Foundary is controlled by associated company.
- (3) The amount spent as Variable Capital in 1943 is over-estimated. Compare figures given below for 1948 for planting, reaping and transporting.

- (4) The amount of \$8.18 per acre allowed for supervision takes into consideration only the 61,386 acres under cane but not the 20,963 acres under fallow. Besides, supervision may include work outside of direct cane cultivation.
- (5) Filter press cake is used as fertilizer
- (6) Profit is rum which is not shared by cane-farmers
- (7) The value per yield acre is calculated at 53.40 per ton of sugar cane which was the average price paid for farmers' cane in 1943. This amount is under-estimated because in the calculation of the latter as much as 1/3 is deducted as processing costs from the net price paid for sugar after certain deductions are made (see below, method by which price to be paid for farmers' cane is calculated).
- (8) Molasses given to farmers is not calculated in yield income per acre.

The following figures are submitted by Mr. Jagan, Headman at Pln. Port Mourant.

FIRST YEAR (PLANT CANE) - COST PER ACRE

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>MINIMUM COST</u>	<u>MAXIMUM COST</u>
1. Weeding Done on 3 occasions at cost of \$2 to \$2.50	\$6.00	\$7.50
2. Weeding dams	4.00	5.00
3. Cane tops - supplying	3.00	3.00
4. Throwing lime	.28	.28
5. Half-banking and planting	12.00	(most estimates do chop & plant @ \$4-\$5 per acre) 14.00
6. Extra half-banking	1.80	1.80
7. Supplying blanks	2.40	(not always done) 2.40
8. Digging drains	5.00	6.90
9. Forking Done on 2 occasions at cost of \$5.75 to \$6 per acre.	11.50	12.00
10. Carrying water for drinking	.12	.16
11. Manuring	.36	.48



FIRST YEAR (PLANT CANE) - COST PER ACRE (Contd.)

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>MINIMUM COST</u>	<u>MAXIMUM COST</u>
12. Moulding Done on 2 occasions at \$4.48 per acre each time	\$ 8.96 (Not	\$ 8.96 done on the East Coast)
13. Cut and Load canes at 67½¢ per ton of sugar cane	27.00	30.38
14. Burning cane and Watching fire	.19	.20
15. Cross canal cow-boys	.40	.40
16. Water cane	.24	.24
17. Bailing punts	.35	.45
18. Cleaning cross canal	1.00	1.00
19. Mule boys	1.35	1.76
Minimum Cost per acre -	\$85.95	
Maximum Cost per acre -	\$96.91	
Mean Cost per acre -	\$91.43	

FIRST RATOON

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>MINIMUM COST</u>	<u>MAXIMUM COST</u>
1. Moulding, once only	\$ 4.48	\$ 4.48
2. Cleaning drains	1.50	1.50
3. Forking, once only, usually fork-moulding	6.00	6.00
4. Cleaning canal	.72	.72
5. Weeding, 3 occasions	6.00	7.50
6. Weeding dams	4.00	5.00
7. Manuring	.72	.96
8. Burning cane and watching fire	.19	.20
9. Cut and load	27.00	32.74
10. Bailing punts	.35	.45
11. Carrying water for drinking	.12	.16
12. Cow boys	.40	.40
13. Mule boys	1.35	1.80
14. Water cane	.24	.24

/Minimum cost..

Minimum cost per acre	-	\$53.07
Maximum cost per acre	-	\$62.15
Mean Cost per acre	-	\$57.61

SECOND RATOON

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>MINIMUM COST</u>	<u>MAXIMUM COST</u>
1. Weeding, 3 times	\$ 6.00	\$ 7.50
2. Cleaning canal	.72	.72
3. Fork mould	6.00	6.00
4. Weeding dams	4.00	5.00
5. Cut and load canes	21.60	27.00
6. Bailing punts	.30	.35
7. Manuring	.72	.96
8. Burning cane and watching fire	.19	.20
9. Water cane and water carrier	.36	.40
10. Mule and cow boys	1.46	1.78
Minimum cost per acre	-	\$41.35
Maximum cost per acre	-	49.91
Mean cost per acre	-	45.63

THIRD RATOON

<u>OPERATION</u>	<u>MINIMUM COST</u>	<u>MAXIMUM COST</u>
1. Weeding, 3 times	\$ 6.00	\$ 7.50
2. Cleaning cross canal	.72	.72
3. Manuring	.72	.96
4. Weeding dams	4.00	5.00
5. Cut and load canes	16.88	23.63
6. Burning cane and watching fire	.19	.20
7. Bailing Punts	.24	.30
8. Water cane and water carrier	.36	.40
9. Mule and cow boys	1.30	1.50

(Some E.C. estates do no weeding, no forking, etc., only cleaning drains at \$1 - \$1.50 per acre)

Minimum cost per acre	-	\$30.41
Maximum cost per acre	-	\$40.21
Mean cost per acre	-	\$35.31

/Average....

Average cost per acre of Plant Cane and 3 Ratoons	-	\$91.43 + \$57.61 + \$45.63 + <u>\$35.31</u>	=
		4	
		\$57.495 (add war bonus of	=
		33 1/3% (\$19.165))	
		\$76.66 per acre	

Yield per acre of sugaris approximately as follows -

<u>Operation</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
Plant Cane	40 tons	45 tons
First Ratoon	40 "	48.5 "
Second Ratoon	32 "	40 "
Third Ratoon	27.5"	35 "
Average Minimum yield per acre	- $\frac{139.5}{4}$	= 34.9 tons of sugar cane
Average Maximum yield per acre	- $\frac{168.5}{4}$	= 42.1 tons of sugar cane
Average Mean yield per acre	-	38.5 tons of sugar cane

On the basis of the above figures and at a price of \$6.32 per ton of sugar cane paid this year (see below) to Beterverwagting Cane Farmers, the value of 1 acre of sugar cane will be \$6.32 x 38.5 tons or \$243.32. Assuming a 100% rise on the 1943 prices for fertilizers, mules, oxen, punts, stock-feed, etc., the amount for constant capital will be \$33.28 per acre. Assuming a rise of 25% on the cost of supervision, the amount spent in 1948 will be \$10.23 per acre. The rate of surplus value will therefore be 142% calculated as follows -

Constant Capital	-	\$33.28	
Variable Capital	-	\$76.66 + \$10.23 =	\$86.89
Value of 1 acre sugar cane	-	\$243.32	
Surplus Value created-		\$123.15	
Rate of Surplus Value-		$\frac{123.15 \times 100}{86.89}$	= 142%

Accepting the rate of surplus value of 50%, it is therefore assumed that estate field workers worked each day in 1943 about 2/3 of the working day for themselves and 1.3 of the working day for the creation of surplus value for the sugar estate proprietors. On the other hand, if the rate of surplus value of 142% is accepted, then for each working day in 1948, the estate workers worked about 4/10 of the day as the equivalent for the wages they received and about 6/10 of the day to produce surplus value and profit for their employers.

This is the reason why workers prefer to do their own provision, rice and cane farming - no surplus value is created for any employer except for the fact that in many cases the value created has unfortunately to be shared with money-lenders and landlords. Consequently, more land, properly drained and irrigated,

/must....



must be made available to the workers and farmers. And land reform must be vigorously pursued.

It may be of value to point out the experience with land reform in Puerto Rico. In 1900, Congress of the U.S.A. enacted the first Organic Act, the statute commonly known as the "500-acre law". This law, in effect, stated that every corporation shall be restricted to the ownership and control of not more than 500 acres of land. At that time, "there were 39,021 farmers with an average area of only 45 acres and an average cultivated area of but 12 acres. Ownership of farms was almost universal, not less than 93% of the farms and 91% of the area being owned by their occupants. Starvation was unknown. Then, as witnessed by an official commission, while there was great poverty in many cases, there was no real starvation. 'After a complete survey of the islands,' said the commissioners, 'we can state, unhesitatingly, that no starvation exists, nor is it at all likely to exist in Puerto Rico.'"\* For 36 years, from 1900 to 1936, the 500-acre law was conveniently forgotten. Some corporations grew to 20,000 acres. "A President, a Secretary of War, several Governors of the island, the Old Executive, and even the Lower House of the Legislature of 1910 had tried to repeal the 500 acre law." \*\* By 1936 however, the "people are malcontent. They look for social justice. Unemployment and poverty have reached horrible depths. The population of the island was 1,723,534. Over 67% of the population lived in the rural areas .....a total of 4,838 farms with a total acreage of 121,352 as against 66 sugar cane farms of over 1000 acres each with a total acreage of 436,945. Such was the picture when suits to break up the large landholdings commenced".\*\*\*

A similar picture can be painted for the sugar estate workers. Non-availability of land has forced them to become wage-earners and to work, however unwillingly, for small wages. In the days of early Dutch and British colonization when population was small and large areas of land were readily available, the holdings of large estates might have been justifiable. Today, however, the picture is entirely changed. The coastal population is rapidly increasing. The Corentyne Coast has had an increase of 38% in the last 15 years, the increase for the aggregate estate population being 8.2% in 10 years. With the introduction of D.D.T. for the control of malaria, it is expected that in the next 15 years the present day estate population will increase to 100,000.\*\*\*\*

## HOUSING

Housing for sugar estate workers is perhaps the most depressing of all their privations. For the most part, they are low-lying, dilapidated ranges built without much plan, usually on an uneven compound. These compounds are usually badly drained and are in no way to be compared to those provided for the Staff - Managers, Overseers, etc. There are very few proper streets and consequently in rainy weather, communication is made very difficult. The common latrines, built over a drainage trench, are in many cases, in a state of disrepair offering very little privacy. "Communal" bathrooms in the sugar estates are very much needed.

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\*(5) Caribbean Land Tenure Symposium Caribbean Commission, Page 100.

\*\* Reference No. 5 cited - Page 115

\*\*\* Reference No. 5 cited - Page 113

\*\*\*\* Reference No. 3 cited - Page 309



The estate authorities have professed good intentions but these never seem to materialise. The intention is now to carry out a plan with the help of Government. It is felt by the estate authorities that they no longer have a responsibility to provide housing since slavery and immigration had long ago come to an end. While it may be argued that at the expiration of a contract no responsibility should be attached, nevertheless, that does not remove the moral responsibility in the case of ex-slave and ex-indentured low-wage earners.

The master plan is to house only the essential workers and to provide facilities in the form of house-lots and loans to the remaining occasional, part-time and non-essential workers. 9,334 house-lots of varying sizes are to be provided comprising an area of 368,427 sq. rods or approximately 1,228 acres.\* Assuming \$5.00 as the rental for 1 acre of land which is allowed by Government to farmers in the calculation of guaranteed minimum prices, 1,228 acres will yield a land revenue of \$6,140. The same area made up into 9,334 house-lots will yield a revenue of \$13,440.96 at a nominal rental of 24 cents per month, but may eventually yield a revenue of \$112,008 at a rental of \$1.00 per month per house-lot, which is the amount requested of non-workers in some estates.

"The general aim of policy should be towards the provision of an opportunity for workers to secure housing which is not 'tied' to any particular estate."\*\* The above plan will literally 'tie' workers because in the building of their own houses on estate land, not only will their savings, if any, be exhausted, but also loans will be required - loans which will be generously provided by the estates!

On the completion of the above housing plan, the workers will not only provide the sugar proprietors with a readily available 'reserve' army of unemployed, a source of competing cheap labour - especially with the ultimate advent of mechanisation - but will also make them a new breed of landlords in addition to increasing the value of their lands. "The second principle (against freehold tenure) which appears to be accepted is that accretions to land values due to the activities and general progress of the community 'unearned increments' are not a proper subject for private profit."\*\*\* Of this principle, the sugar 'kings' do not seem to be aware.

#### SECURITY OF TENURE

There is no security of tenure either in the occupancy of estate house or land. "In 1842, the labourers refused the reduced wages and were rejected from the free houses on sugar plantations."\*\*\*Much the same situation exists today. During the recent Demerara, East Coast Strike, many workers were given eviction and trespass notices because of participation in the strike. When they refused to give up the houses, they were summoned and brought before the Magistrate.

/Land....

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\* Reference No. 3 cited - Page 315  
 \*\*(6) Housing in the West Indies  
 Colonial Development and Welfare Bulletin No. 13, Para. 85  
 \*\*\* Reference No. 5 cited - Page 61  
 \*\*\*\* Reference No. 5 cited - Page 360

Land rented to estate labourers is usually under the type of tenancy in which there is no written contract but the term of tenancy is for a period of one year usually expiring on the reaping of the crop and is subject to the terms and conditions laid down from time to time by the plantation owners. In certain cases, house-lots are rented on a month-to-month basis. What was disclosed about rice tenancy in general by a Special Committee to the effect that "the tenant, even though he is a good tenant, does not know, or at any rate is uncertain whether he will be permitted to occupy the land in a subsequent year",\* applies even with more force to sugar estate tenancy.

WAGES

<u>RESIDENT PIECE WORKERS</u>	<u>ESTATE FIELD WORKERS**</u>				<u>NO. OF DAYS WORKED PER WEEK</u>	
	<u>WEEKLY WAGES</u>		<u>DAILY WAGES</u>		<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>
	<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>	<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>		
Males	\$5.63	\$6.26	\$1.55	\$1.74	3.63	3.60
Females	2.80	3.02	.81	.88	3.46	3.43
<u>NON-RESIDENT PIECE WORKERS</u>						
Males	5.92	6.45	1.70	1.89	3.48	3.41
Females	3.09	3.15	.91	.96	3.40	3.28
<u>RESIDENT AND NON- RESIDENT TIME WORKERS</u>						
Males	3.78	4.23	.78	.86	4.85	4.92
Females	2.23	2.35	.48	.52	4.64	4.51
<u>YOUNG PERSONS</u>						
Males	2.31	2.58	.51	.57	4.53	4.52
Females	1.83	1.94	.43	.46	4.25	4.21

SUGAR FACTORY WORKERS\*\*

	<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>
Skilled Workers	\$7.87	\$8.61
Other Male Workers	4.96	6.16
Apprentices, Improvers	3.07	4.08
Women	2.57	3.03
Boys	2.93	3.47

\* Reference No. 5 cited - Page 363

\*\* (7) Report of the Department of Labour for the year 1946.  
Figures supplied by Labour Department for 1947.



It is sometimes argued from the above figures of the number of days worked per week by resident and non-resident piece-workers, that estate workers are lazy and unambitious and should they work more days per week, their incomes would be materially increased. The figures given are however, open to criticism. The number of days worked per week is obtained by dividing the average weekly total of days worked by the average weekly total of workers employed. The number obtained and given above may be incorrect for the reason that the number of days worked may be under-estimated. Piece-workers sometimes take a portion of another working day to complete a task which was undertaken on a previous day. These are sometimes overlooked and not recorded. Assuming the correctness of the above figures, male piece-workers who are regarded as 'unskilled' are paid less than skilled factory workers and higher than unskilled 'other male workers', even though piece workers worked on the average of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days per week as compared with  $5\frac{1}{2}$  days to 6 days per week for factory workers. It follows from the above and also from a comparison of the daily wages and the number of days worked per week by the piece-workers and the time-workers, that the piece-workers are actually putting in more than the official  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days per week. This can be explained by the fact that what is calculated to be one day is not the expenditure of one day of average social labour power but actually an intensified and a prolonged working day. Piece work tends to the expenditure of more intensified labour power; on the other hand, there is no legal limit to the working day.

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showthat

#### SEASONAL UN-EMPLOYMENT

From official figures of number of days worked per week, it is generally claimed by the employers that much more work is available than the workers are willing to undertake. The King Report, in fact, states "that piece-workers engage on work on sugar estates on an average of 2.3 days per week in the case of male resident labourers and 1.45 days per week in the case of female resident labourers. That the actual number of days worked per week by non-residents is not known, but that male non-residents worked roughly 2 days per week".\*The above figures are computed by dividing the average weekly total number of days worked per week by the average weekly number of workers available for work each week. The results obtained above would be incorrect for the following reasons -

- (a) Sickness, accident and vacation are not taken into consideration. Those falling into this category have to be taken out of the average total available for work each week.
- (b) The same persons may have worked at different estates during the same year either under the same names or under aliases.
- (c) Man-days may be lost because of the unsatisfactory pay offered aback and/or unsatisfactory working conditions.
- (d) Portion of man-days spent in completing task on a subsequent day may not be recorded.
- (e) Seasonal unemployment.

/The fact...

The fact is that there is a great deal of seasonal unemployment in the sugar estates. At some times of the year, piece-workers of a special category cannot find adequate employment. At other times, they are forced to accept work outside of their special category at piece-rates which work to their great disadvantage. With the exception of the factory workers, the recent Demerara East Coast strike became a general strike because of the estate authorities' refusal to give non-cut-and-loaders any other work except cut-and-loading of canes.

#### WAGES AND STANDARD OF LIVING

The average daily rate given above for resident and non-resident piece-workers might be over-estimated for the reason that more workers might have been employed per single task than are usually recorded in the records of the estates. The weekly wages paid to estate labourers are totally inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living and to meet the rising cost of living.

The survey of a sugar estate family budget taken from 106 East Indian families including 353 persons in 1938, was by no means as thorough as that of the Cost-of-Living Survey Committee\* which examined working class families in Georgetown. No statistics are available at the Labour Department of the amounts spent by the East Indian families on food-stuffs, clothing, fuel and light, etc. No worthwhile conclusions can be drawn from the cost-of-living index figures presented each month for the sugar estates.

A clearer idea of the standard of living of the sugar estates' workers can be obtained by comparing the wages of sugar estate workers with the wages and expenditure of working class families in Georgetown as presented in the Report referred to above, making the necessary adjustments and bringing them up-to-date.

The Report of the Cost-of-Living Committee\* stated inter alia, that in 1942, working class families of 4.6 persons in Georgetown spent \$8.23 per week as follows -

Food	-	\$4.58	Rent	-	\$1.07
Clothing	-	\$1.07	Fuel and light	-	.47
			Other items	-	1.04

At that time, the cost-of-living index figure was 160; today it is 200. This means an increase in expenditure of about 25% equivalent to \$10.30, to maintain the inadequate 1942 standard of living.

#### ABSENTEEISM

Most of the sugar estates are owned by companies registered and individuals living abroad. A large percentage of profits earned are presumably sent abroad. Dr. Benham reports that a total amount of \$3,502,000 represents the total net income paid abroad. A large percentage of this amount represents profits earned by the sugar industry. This amount represents a direct

/loss of...

\*(3) Legislative Council Paper No. 6 of 1943.  
Report of the Cost of Living Survey Committee.



loss of available capital for the development of the colony. Had the sugar production been done largely by cane farmers, much of the profits presumably sent abroad would have been left here as available capital for further investment.

#### INTERFERENCE IN CIVIC LIFE

The sugar estates are a Government within a Government. They have too much control over the lives of thousands of workers who live within their precincts. A more or less rigid Jim Crow system exists. The people do not actively participate in the administration of local affairs because every sugar estate is a rural district of which the Local Authority is the Local Government Board. Usually the latter does not, in any way, interfere with the administration by the sugar estate authorities.

The following conditions exist -

- (a) People can be given trespass notices at any time.
- (b) Trespass notice has been given to Dr. C. Jagan with the result that he cannot legally visit the sugar estates within his Central Demerara Constituency thereby denying the people the right to meet their elected representative.
- (c) No direct delivery of mails to individuals by the Post Office Department.
- (d) Fear of eviction, of unemployment, of insecurity, which helps to develop a warped personality.

#### INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

There are in the sugar industry, too many unions. Some have lost the confidence of the people; others are alleged to be more or less 'company' unions. One particular union, the G.I.W.U., in which the people have a great deal of confidence, is not recognised by the sugar authorities. The principle of the U.S. National Labour Relations Board (N.L.R.B.) of accepting for recognition, the majority union, should be made applicable to British Guiana. It does appear that the Commissioner of Labour is in favour of this principle. The adoption of this principle will not only help to create workers' confidence in their own unions but will also encourage the growth and development of democratic trade unionism.

For election to District Joint Committees, union members - workers and non-workers - should be permitted to stand for election. Only union members should be allowed to vote.

A more thorough system of factory inspection is necessary. Accidents are still too frequent.

#### CANE FARMERS

Cane farmers need more land. At the present time enough land is not available to them in the villages. They do not receive adequate quantities or the right kinds of fertilizers.



The amount of one-third charged by the estates for processing costs is too high. Processing costs ranged from \$6 to \$9 a ton before the war. In 1943, it amounted to \$11.84 per ton of sugar processed. The amount, today, deducted from the farmers' cane is \$33.33, an increase of nearly 300%.

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